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## Playoffs!

### **Sterling Heights Sentry boys soccer squads look to capitalize on regular season success**

By Jon Malavolti  
C & G Sports Writer

As the boys soccer regular season comes to a close, it gives way to another, more exciting, season: The win or go home postseason.

Records are thrown out the window and new life is given — yet easily taken — in the everybody's-in-but-lose-and-you're-out district playoffs scheduled to begin Oct. 13.

Utica Stevenson, Utica Ford II and Sterling Heights High have all been drawn into the same Division 1 district hosted by Fraser High.

Stevenson kicks things off with a 4:30 p.m. road game at Warren Cousino. At press time, the Titans were 8-6-3 overall, 4-3-2 in the Macomb Area Conference Red Division — good enough for either a third- or fourth-place finish, depending on the result of their final game.

Cousino, meanwhile, was 8-6-1 overall, 6-4-0 in the MAC Blue, likely finishing in a similar place as Stevenson.

“It’s going to be tough,” said Stevenson coach Bob Mondoux of advancing through the district.

The Titans were hoping to get past the Patriots for a possible crack at Clinton Township Chippewa Valley, which is scheduled to host Royal Oak at 5:30 p.m. Stevenson split games with the Big Reds in the division this season, yet Chippewa Valley won the most recent meeting 3-1 on Oct. 1.

Regardless of which teams advance, the semifinal would take place at 7:30 p.m. at Fraser Oct. 15, following the first semifinal at 5 p.m. The district final is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 16 at Fraser.

“It’s a district in which pretty much everyone has a good chance of winning,” Chippewa Valley coach Gerry Haggarty said.

On the other side of the bracket, Sterling Heights High is also scheduled to hit the road for its playoff opener, a 6 p.m. contest at Fraser High. The Stallions (14-1-0 overall, 9-1-0 division) were in good position to finish near or at the top of the MAC Blue standings, while the Ramblers (4-6-5 overall, 3-1-5 division) should end up in the middle of the MAC White.

The winner advances to face the winner of the Ford II and Troy Athens tilt. The Falcons, who have won two straight district titles, are scheduled to host Athens at 7 p.m. at Runkel Field.



Photo by Tracy Dreslinski  
Utica Ford II's Dario Folino (14) and Utica Stevenson's Bill Alfonsi battle for the ball during a game earlier this season. The Macomb Area Conference Red Division foes kick off the postseason Oct. 13.

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“It’s not going to be easy,” said Ford II coach Dave Crawford, referring to winning a third straight district title. “Sterling Heights is having a really good year. Every game is going to be good.”

Crawford was hoping his team’s experience gained through winning the past two districts and motivation garnered from last year’s season-ending loss to Birmingham Brother Rice will help give his team an edge this postseason.

But before focusing on a historic first-ever three-peat in the district round, the Falcons were hoping to close out their first MAC Red title since 2005.

“Our goal this year was to win the MAC Red, then to win districts. Whatever we can do after that, we’d be happy with,” Ford II senior Kastriot Grishaj said.

With one game remaining in MAC Red action at press time, the Falcons were in a first-place tie with Chippewa Valley, ensuring them a finish in either second place, as co-champs or outright division champions.

After breaking in several new players from the start of the season, the Falcons hit their stride toward the end of division play.

“We had 13 new players, so that was a big thing,” Grishaj said. “Now we’re all getting along. In the past couple years, that’s been the big thing. Our team chemistry is where it needs to be.

“We’re finally playing like the way we should have been all year.”

Playing in the competitive MAC Red, as well as facing a tough non-division schedule, could also help teams such as Stevenson and Ford II in the postseason.

“It prepares you for what you’re going to see,” Ford II senior Jimmy Lawson said. “It gets you ready.”

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