



Staff photo by Katina Zentz

Brunswick's Chris Vasquez Molina goes airborne while making a play as Liberty's goalkeeper Jaxon Vanderhoof reaches for the ball during the MPSSAA Class 1A boys soccer final at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, on Saturday. Vasquez Molina's kick sent the ball into the net in the last few minutes of the game, but officials ruled it to be offsides.

## BOYS SOCCER

# Railroaders drop title game to Lions again — after late equalizer erased by offsides call

■ **Class 1A state final:**  
Liberty 2, Brunswick 1

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CATONSVILLE — The crowd's voice rose as it saw what was about to happen.

Brunswick's Chris Vasquez Molina had broken free and had a one-on-one with Liberty goalkeeper Jaxon Vanderhoof, who charged out of the box to challenge the striker. Vasquez Molina, who rarely misses these opportunities, chipped the ball over Vanderhoof and into the net.

It appeared to be the senior's second goal in less than a minute, evening a match in the final seconds that moments earlier looked out of reach for the Railroaders. But as Vasquez Molina turned to celebrate, the crowd roaring, he saw the assistant referee's checkered flag raised.

The bang-bang play was ruled offsides. The goal came off the board.

And after the Lions killed the final minute off the clock, No. 5 seed Brunswick was left wondering what could have been in a 2-1 loss Saturday at UMBC Stadium. No. 7 seed Liberty (10-5-2) won the Class 1A boys soccer championship

for the second straight year. The Roaders were on the opposite end both times.

After the game, Vasquez Molina was adamant that he was onside.

"I was sitting in front of five defenders. Five defenders. I ran, I waited to run, I curved around and I came back this way," Vasquez Molina said, gesturing his right-to-left route with his arm. "He played me a perfect ball, and I was gone."

"We should've been in overtime right now."

Brunswick head coach Shawn Baker

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## Railroaders drop title game to Lions again

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declined to comment on the ruling but added, "I'm proud of these boys. I'm proud of the way they fought to the end, and it's just a little disappointing."

It's particularly heart-breaking given the circumstances. The Roaders fell on penalties to the Lions a season ago and again felt they were inches away from winning another title.

Brunswick (12-6-1) didn't appear to be in the same position Saturday until the final three minutes.

Vasquez Molina almost single-handedly willed the Roaders back into the match after the team conceded what appeared to be the backbreaking strike in the 71st minute to head down two goals. Brunswick began pushing in desperation, and it finally broke through as Vasquez Molina headed a long feed from junior Gabe Cabeza into the net.

That 78th-minute tally was the senior's 40th goal of the season. In lieu of celebrating, Vasquez Molina picked up the ball and ran back to midfield with his teammates, knowing their mission to notch a second.

"We were just trying to get numbers forward," Baker said.

"We were kind of sitting a little bit more deep than what we needed to [in the first half], and when we got the ball, we weren't able to release and get onto the ball like we wanted to.

"Second half, we were a little bit more on the front foot."

That was the Roaders' second shot on frame all afternoon, as they couldn't solve a Liberty defense that allowed less than a goal per game all season.

Vanderhoof stanchied most Brunswick chances before they started by running up and punching the ball away instead of allowing a shot. The Lions' back line of William Paucar, Zach Bauer and Brady Bergen kept a prolific Brunswick attack more out of rhythm than usual.

"The flow of the game really favored them," Baker said. "The balls out of bounds, the long throws, the time that they could take to get the throws in, the corners kind of killed the momentum for us."

One of those throw-ins led to Liberty's first goal. Bergen chucked the ball into the box in the 36th minute, and a Roder inadvertently redirected it into his own net. The Lions' Ryan Clapper then finished a cross from Caleb Sederquist in the 71st minute

to put his team ahead 2-0.

But Brunswick fought back.

"The beginning of the season, we would go down sometimes and it'd be more of a mental game than a physical game," Roaders senior midfielder Drew Thiede said. "As we rolled with the punches and the season progressed, you saw ... our energy rise."

That's the natural progression of a team that experienced significant turnover from last year's state finalist squad. Brunswick had four seniors — Vasquez Molina, Thiede, Gabe Paschalides and Sullivan Givens — to conduct the train, but the rest of the club was largely young and inexperienced.

After an up-and-down start, the Roaders coalesced and became a team that turned regional title aspirations into state championship ones. But for the second consecutive season, they came up just short.

"I'm super proud to be part of this team," Vasquez Molina said. "We came from nothing, really. Nobody expected us to get as far as we did, and we made it so far, almost happened, but some things just don't go your way."