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Christian Brothers will face Capital Athletic League rival Vista del Lago in the Sac-Joaquin Section Division III championship game after a penalty shootout win over Ponderosa.

Christian Brothers makes section final in prep girls soccer

BY CAMERON SALERNO
csalerno@sacbee.com

Rudy Ruvalcaba is a superstitious person.

The Christian Brothers High School girls' soccer coach sticks to the same routine every game. He tapes his fingers, a tradition he started when he was younger and wears the same socks, shoes, jacket and shirt to games.

Maybe it works.

On Friday night in Oak Park, second-seeded Christian Brothers beat No. 3 Ponderosa on penalty kicks, 5-4. The game was scoreless after 80 minutes of regulation and 20

minutes of overtime, but penalty kicks made by Brooklyn Horst, Devin Greer, Grace Cloete, Genevieve Muskopf and Dana Greer helped the Falcons advance.

"Baseball players (and other sports see people) do very superstitious things," Ruvalcaba said. "For me, it's the taping of the fingers, where I'm going and how I pack my bag every day, even where I sit down on the field (I keep track of). It's kind of crazy, but it's the things I'm going to do."

He isn't the only one that's superstitious. Cloete and Claire LaRocca stick to the same

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routine each game with a lucky handshake and chest bumps. LaRocca is one of four seniors on the young Christian Brothers team, but has been unable to play this season due to an ACL tear. She still suits up in uniform to support her team.

"She has been a big part of our program since she has been here," Ruvalcaba said of LaRocca. "She is unbelievable. (Even though she can't play) she is here to support us."

LaRocca could only watch the penalty kicks be taken. When Christian Brothers junior goalie Grace Bettencourt saved the final Ponderosa penalty kick to send Christian Brothers to the final, emo-

tions kicked in.

"It's incredible," LaRocca said of the ending. "I was crying tears of joy. That save by Grace Bettencourt was amazing. ... I was shaking the entire game. We were practicing these penalty kicks the entire time."

Horst, who was one of the penalty kick takers added, "The win feels so nice. I'm so excited. Watching your team take penalty kicks is beautiful but it makes (you) extremely anxious."

Ruvalcaba said the kind of work ethic Bettencourt had all season paid off in the final moments.

"Grace has been on fire all year," The coach said. "She's always the first one

being a small private school, kids come from all areas and backgrounds to attend the school. It's that type of bond the coach says keeps them together. It's a core of players that will be around for awhile.

"We have to bring these girls together from all over," Ruvalcaba said.

"They all play for these big clubs. We only have four seniors. ... Devin Greer is phenomenal. Bailey Rakela is unbelievable. I'm blessed to have all these players that are coming back next season."

The next test for Christian Brothers (16-2-4) is the Sac-Joaquin Section Division III final next week. The date, time and location have not been announced. The Falcons

in the champion

Christian Brothers seeking its fourth banner in school and first since 2001. Falcons lost in the final in 2020 to Vista del Mar 2-1. Most of the players, including Horst, was on the roster.

"They're our rivals," Horst said of Vista del Mar. "We are ready and prepared to face them this time (we played them last year) and could tell we did it. This time, we have more competition and good rivalry."

Ponderosa entered the season 16-4. The Foothill Valley I team has a 10-1 record.

Cameron Salerno
@cameronsalerno