

CARSON, CALIF - With the first weekend of the Development Academy Finals Week in the books for both the U-16 and U-18 groups, the anxious fans and parents awaited the continuation of the national tournament. It was the U-18 boys' turn to shine today, specifically the boys of Colorado Rush who kicked off the week's games with their 11:00 AM match versus the Chicago Fire.

Both teams came out firing and Chicago midfielder Cody Culver intercepted the ball from a Rush defender and had an excellent shot on target. After a great save and deflection from Rush goalkeeper Brian Sherpe, Rush capitalized on the counter attack.

Forward Ben Soumah perfectly set up midfielder Morgan Sacco for the early 4th minute strike and just like that Rush were up 1-0. Although the game had just started, in hindsight, everything ended immediately after Sacco's shot hit the back of the net. Even after this first goal, Colorado made it evident that they were hungry for more.

Rush midfielder Paolo Delpiccolo was all over the field, chasing and winning every ball in his vicinity. Meanwhile, the Fire continued to fight, constantly keeping the ball in their attacking third of the field, but with a tight Colorado defense led by Lance Patterson would not let Fire forwards Evan Bartzis and Andy Huftlain get a shot off inside the box. Even with seemingly deadly curving crosses from Fire midfielder Brad Horton coming every couple minutes, Chicago simply couldn't finish.

Eventually Colorado pushed the ball up field and Rush forward Soumah was fortunate enough to put the ball in the back of the net in the 33rd minute after two consecutive blocks and deflections by Chicago goalie George Carson, making it 2-0. The Colorado Rush continued to dominate the half until the very last whistle, controlling the ball on all parts of the field and went into halftime on a definite high note, but not before bringing their lead up to three goals.

In the fifth minute of injury time in the first half, Rush midfielder Delpiccolo, who enjoyed a spectacular first half, put a pass perfectly down to forward Soumah's feet, who put the ball in the goal and enjoyed not only his team's newfound 3-0 lead, but his second score of the day. The halftime whistle rang less than a minute after the scores and both teams left the field on opposite sides and in opposite spirits.

Chicago came into the second half with some early chances and good looks, but were continually denied by Rush defender Andrew Mejia and team captain Sean O'Connor who held down the defense confidently. As Rush's defense continued to ward off the Fire attacks, Soumah and his forward teammate Zack Foxhoven had some beautiful runs down the line, both of them displaying their unbelievable speed and Soumah's undeniable quick step and ball handling skills. Things were just not going well for the Fire in the late morning match and as the afternoon sun was at its highest, it seemed as though it was setting on the boys in this match.

Just when it seemed that Colorado was getting comfortable with the lead, the 66th minute came around and with a beautiful set up from Delpiccolo, Rush forward Dan Whittle got his name on the board and put the nail in the coffin with the final goal of the match, lifting Colorado above the Chicago 4-0. Both teams fought hard during the entire game, but it was the Colorado Rush who looked like pros, involving every player on the field and working almost flawlessly as a well oiled machine of a team.