

Clark takes aim at men's soccer title

Penguins bring big offense into NWAACC playoffs

By **PAUL DANZER**
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Before they caught the eye of coach Biniam Afenigus, before they landed on the Clark College men's soccer team, Borce Atanasov and Bryanth Garcia-Junco were aiming high.

Atanasov had to put soccer aside because of a knee injury. So he started studying aviation after graduating from Aloha (Ore.) High School in 2009. He plans to become an airline pilot.

Garcia-Junco left his native Guatemala two years ago to chase a dream of playing professional soccer. He landed in Baltimore, where he believed a spot with the Real Maryland Monarchs of the United Soccer Leagues



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Clark College's Bryanth Garcia-Junco, left, and Sascha Pell, right, run drills during a recent practice.

was his until a knee injury set him adrift.

Both Garcia-Junco and Atanasov have relaunched their soccer dreams at Clark College, and have made significant contributions for a Penguins team that is taking aim at a Northwest Athletic

Association of Community Colleges championship.

On Saturday at McKenzie Stadium, Clark will take on Highline College of Burien in a quarter-final game. The winner advances to the NWAACC semifinals next week in Tukwila.

If you go

■ **What:** Clark vs. Highline, NWAACC men's soccer quarterfinal

■ **When:** 12:15 p.m. today

■ **Where:** McKenzie Stadium, 2205 NE 138th Ave.

■ **Cost:** Free.

■ **At stake:** The winner advances to the NWAACC final four on Nov. 17-18 at Tukwila.

"It's been a lot of fun. I feel like we're good enough to go all the way," said Sascha Pell, a freshman from Hudson's Bay who has scored six goals this season.

Afenigus led the Penguins to an NWAACC championship in 2007, his first in charge of the

Clark

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program. Afenegus' Clark teams have consistently ranked among the better defensive teams in NWAACC. He said this team is different because of the number of offensive-minded players on the roster.

"Offensively, I knew we'd be really good," Afenegus said.

Clark is 15-1-2 and has scored 78 goals and allowed 13 with nine shutouts. By contrast, the 2010 team that won the South Division title scored only 47 goals and allowed 16.

Atanasov leads the NWAACC with 26 goals. The striker also has 10 assists. Alicides Thomas, who plays on the left wing in Clark's 4-3-3 formation, is third in NWAACC with 18 goals. Pell, who is one of several players who has



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Clark College's Langdon Roscoe, left, battles with a teammate during practice at Luke Jensen Sports Park on Thursday as Clark prepared for its playoff match.

seen action on the right wing, has six goals.

The formation is new for Afenegus, who in the past has emphasized defense as

the route to success. But the attacking ability on this team, including several players who were teammates for Westside Metros

of Beaverton, called for something different.

Garcia-Junco, who plays in the center of the three-man midfield, said the

formation gives him and his teammates such as Eduardo Sanchez-Dominguez, Jesse DeLeon, Victor Garcia and Jerson Meji space to use their ball skills.

"It's simple soccer," Garcia-Junco said. "It's not about me in the center, but it gives us a chance to be more creative in midfield and to connect to the forwards."

Garcia-Junco connected with Afenegus after the coach watched him in a pickup game. Garcia-Junco came to Vancouver to live with a brother while recuperating from knee surgery two years ago.

"The first two months were hell for me. I was very down," Garcia-Junco said. "You almost make it pro and life tells you it's not going to happen right now."

Garcia-Junco started training with Clark players in June, and found something special.

"Right away, I told Borce that we have something special going on here," Garcia-Junco said.

The offense is special, but it's Afenegus' affinity for defense that has these Penguins poised for a championship push. After struggling early in the season to find a comfortable back four, Clark became tougher on defense after Langdon Roscoe and Jordan White — both converted forwards — settled in as central defenders flanked by converted forwards Cory Walker and Yahnphol Patino.

"We kind of had to settle in together," said Roscoe, a freshman who played an attacking role for Hockinson. "And the outside backs weren't really used to the center backs not knowing what to do."

By October, much of the confusion was gone. Clark has allowed only two goals in its last seven games, part of a 10-match win streak.

"We feel more fluid together. Now we can connect more," Roscoe said. "Chemistry is building and we're definitely ready for this playoff game."