



VIVIAN JOHNSON/For The Columbian

Caleb Escobedo, a Hudson's Bay graduate, and the rest of the Clark College men's team has compiled a 9-2-4 record.

# Homegrown victories

## Penguins benefit from wealth of talent in the area

By PAUL DANZER  
Columbian staff writer

The game, they will tell you, is more demanding. The physical confrontations on the pitch, the intense three-hour practice sessions, managing time as a college student — all of those things challenge players who make the step from high school to college soccer.

But for many members of the Clark College men's soccer team, there also is a level of comfort that comes with being at home.

A half-dozen Clark players from Southwest Washington, four of them freshmen, have played significant roles for a team that has big goals.

The Penguins (9-2-4) have clinched a spot in the Northwest Association of Community Colleges playoffs and can finish first in the South Division with wins in their last two games — home matches to-

## Clark soccer facts

■ **This week:** home games at 4 p.m. today against Pierce College; 2 p.m. Saturday against Chemeketa.

■ **Local players:** Midfielder-forward Cody Camp (Evergreen), midfielder Caleb Escobedo (Hudson's Bay), midfielder Sean Chesebro (Skyview), defender Sean Melby (Camas), goalkeeper Carlos Mendoza (White Salmon), defender Daniel Tejada (Camas).

day against Pierce, and Saturday against rival Chemeketa.

One reason for the team's success, according to coach Biniam Afenegus, is the home-grown talent on his roster.

"This team reminds me a lot of our (2007) championship team, because we had so many local players who were really good players on that team," Afenegus said.

It is not all about local talent. The team's top goal scorers are Joshua Amoroso

from Hawai'i with eight goals, and Oscar Alvarez from Hillsboro, Ore., with seven.

Among the reasons the local players — who were top high school soccer players — say they chose Clark were financial considerations. Another common factor was the opportunity to advance their soccer careers while playing close to home in a junior-college program respected both for its soccer program and for the academic support for athletes.

Afenegus said recruiting local athletes is a priority, critical for fostering Clark's connection with the community. This season, the coach said, the bonus is having local players who can contribute as freshmen.

"We're fortunate. A lot of the kids we get here are good enough to go straight to a four-year school," Afenegus said. "They come to Clark so they can save money. They also develop as a player. If they go to a four-year school, they likely will sit on the bench the first year.

Caleb Escobedo, a Clark sophomore

# Clark soccer:

From Page B1

who graduated from Hudson's Bay, said he has learned plenty both on the field and off in his two seasons at Clark.

"You see all the different cultures come together, which I think is really special," said Escobedo. An attacking midfielder, Escobedo had a strong freshman season for Clark but only recently returned from injury this season.

Among the parts that have put the Penguins into the playoffs is a defense that has posted seven shutouts and surrendered more than one goal in only two of 15 matches.

Freshmen Sean Melby and Daniel Tejada from Camas, and Cody Camp from Evergreen have helped Clark build a formidable defense in front of goalkeeper Carlos Mendoza from White Salmon.

"(Mendoza) has been phenomenal all season," Escobedo said.

Melby and Tejada played side by side at Camas High for two seasons, which Melby said helped him make the transition to college soccer.

"It's pretty cool having my right back with me," he said.

Camp, on the other hand, was a high-scoring forward for Evergreen who has spent most of this fall as an aggressive defensive midfielder at Clark.

Freshman Sean Chesebro from Skyview has recently taken on a larger role in midfield.

Chesebro's late-season move into the starting lineup

is an example of how freshmen improve as they become more comfortable with the physical and mental demands of college soccer, Afenegus said.

"I learned I need to be loud and calling for the ball, and I need to be physical," Chesebro said. "If you're not loud, you'll never get the ball. And if you're not physical you'll be knocked off the ball when you get it."

The physical challenge is perhaps the most significant adjustment from high school to college soccer. Camp used his size and strength as an advantage at Evergreen High. At Clark, Camp said, he is just an average-sized guy on the field who relies on aggressiveness to earn playing time.

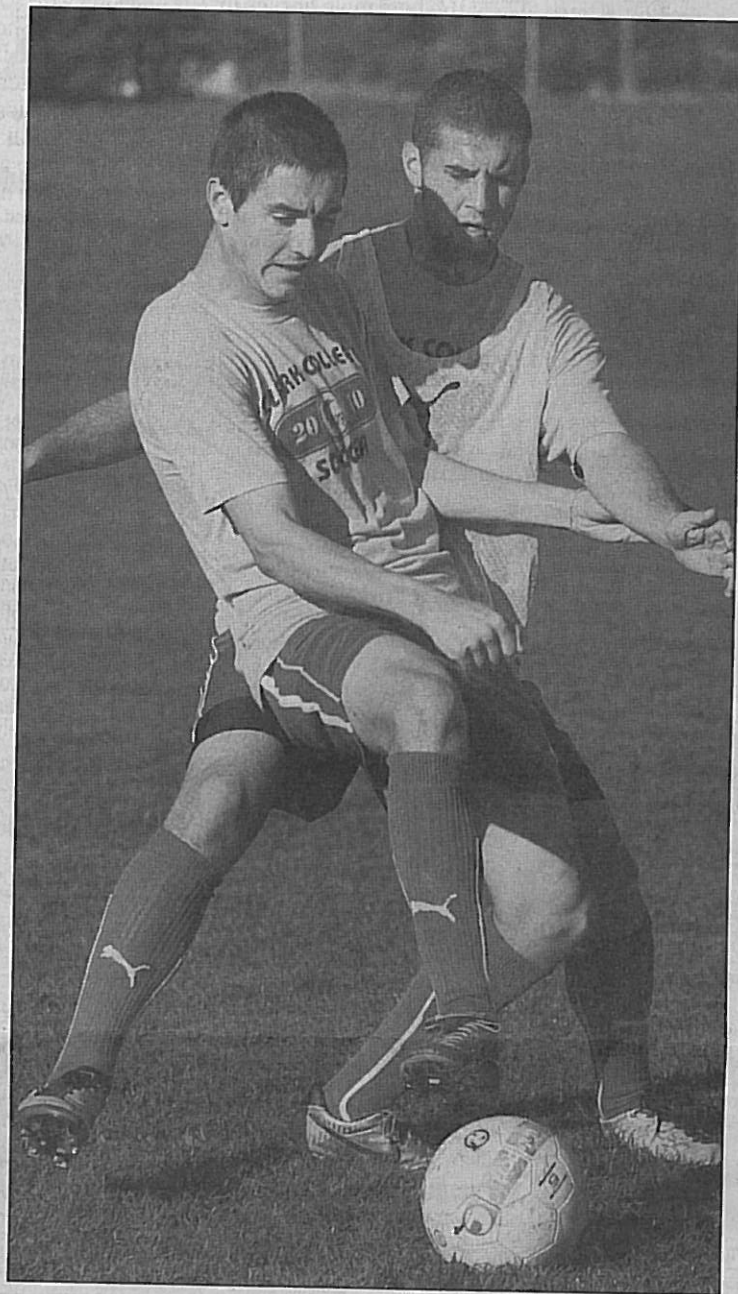
"It took a good month to get used to the physical play," said Melby, who was one of the more intimidating defenders around while at Camas High.

"We try to emulate in practice what is going to happen in games," Afenegus said. "It takes them a couple of weeks to adjust. Some players, it takes them that couple weeks and after that they blossom. Some, it takes them a month."

The growing pains behind them — along with a summer trip to the mountains and regular three-hour practices designed to be more gruelling than any match — the Penguins believe they are prepared for another long playoff run.

Despite having a team loaded with freshmen, the coach agrees. He said this team might be better than the 2007 NWAACC champions.

"As far as talent goes, way more talented. Just a matter putting it together," Afenegus said.



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Cody Camp, front, was a high-scoring forward at Evergreen High School, but now is an aggressive defensive midfielder at Clark.