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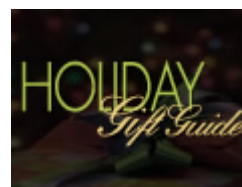
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LOS ANGELES TIMES

Nitros come up short

• Soccer: Glendale High girls' team shows improvement during season-opening 4-2 loss to La Cañada.

By Charles Rich

LA CAÑADA FLINTRIDGE — Over the course of a year, one could see the marked improvement of the Glendale High girls' soccer squad.

The Nitros opened last season with a humbling 10-0 nonleague loss to La Cañada en route to finishing the campaign at 5-11. Times have changed since then.

Glendale opened another season Wednesday with a 4-2 loss to host La Cañada.

The Nitros played more aggressively and with intelligence, forcing the talented Spartans (1-0) to earn a victory. Natalie Diaz and Sarah Mizuki each scored one goal for the Nitros, who got 13 saves from junior goalkeeper Layla Saad.

Second-year Glendale Coach Kristine Lowe noticed a difference in the two matches. "Last year, we only had two or three players who could stand out," Lowe said. "Now, our team has more of a soccer history and they understand the game better."

"We are not working on basics and our defense is improving. We are now working more on set plays and stepping to the ball better."

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Glendale High goalie Layla Saad blocks a shot on goal by Thalia Gochez of La Canada during Wednesday's nonleague match.

The Spartans, who will look to qualify for the CIF Southern Section playoffs for the first time since 2004, got two goals from standout junior forward Nancy Avesyan and one each from Thalia Gochez and Kathryn Chew. Gochez opened the scoring in the 25th minute on a low shot that skipped past Saad. Avesyan made it 2-0 with a goal early in the second half before Diaz scored on a penalty shot that struck off the left post in the 46th minute.

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Avesyan extended La Cañada's lead to 3-1 about three minutes later. Mizuki cut the lead to 3-2 in the 55th minute after digging out the ball during a scramble before Chew closed out the scoring in the 74th minute.

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