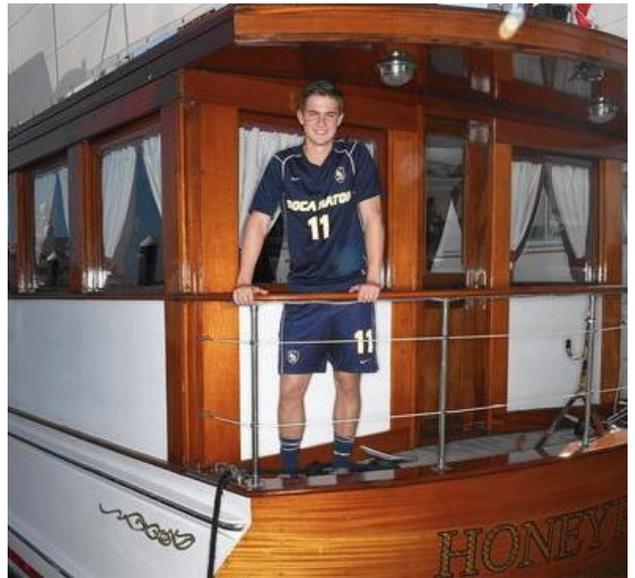


Boca Raton's Mark Faeth: 5A-4A Player of the Year

By Gary Curreri

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Boca Raton was lucky to keep Faeth this season.



Mark Faeth came back from a horrific injury to play 14 games and helped key a stunning postseason run for Boca, which advanced to the regional finals before falling to Haines City.

The junior midfielder scored as many goals this year (14) as he had in his first two years combined and added 12 assists. He also netted seven goals during the postseason.

But at the beginning of the season, Faeth didn't know if he would be able to play soccer again.

In October, Faeth was sucker-punched at a party by someone he didn't know and had to undergo emergency brain surgery.

"I was really fortunate to be alive," he said.

In surgery, Faeth needed 100 staples to close his skull. He plays now with a seven-inch, horseshoe-shaped scar.

Boca Raton coach Marcelo Castillo didn't think Faeth would return this season. The player was hospitalized for a week, out of school for another three.

Ye of little faith.

Once the staples came out and doctors gave the go-ahead, Faeth began workouts.

"Soccer has been a part of my life," Faeth said. "It definitely gave me a reason to work a lot harder."

A month later, sporting protective headgear, he was back on the pitch.

Faeth got limited minutes early on, but showed his value in his first game back when he scored on a free kick in a 4-1 win over Martin County two months to the day after his surgery.

"He was not timid and not shy when he came back," said Castillo, who at first had been hesitant to play Faeth. "He brought everything we were lacking with his leadership, hard work and elevated everyone around him."

The Bobcats wrapped up the season at 13-9-1 and while seeded sixth in the district, with their Faeth restored, they earned a berth into the regional final.