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Phoenix lands knockout blow



Chris Pierce, of Rivendell, left, heads the ball away from the Raptors' goal, tended by Carter Bacon, center, off a corner kick from Sharon Academy during their game in Sharon, Vt., on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2021. Sharon won 4-1. (Valley News - James M. Patterson) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online without permission. Send requests to permission@vnews.com. Valley News photographs — James M. Patterson » [Buy this Image](#)

Sharon Academy goalie Elli Vt., on Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2 Valley News. May not be re Patterson » [Buy this Imag](#)



By [SETH TOW \(/byline?byline=By SETH TOW.\)](#)

Valley News Staff Writer

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SHARON — The Sharon Academy boys soccer team entered its home game against Rivendell on Tuesday with a clear plan.

Sharon head coach Blake Fabrikant knew Rivendell's last game against White River Valley ended 1-1 on Saturday, after the Raptors dismantled the Wildcats' 8-0 to start the season. He knew Rivendell's players could be in tricky head spaces and sought to take advantage.

The Phoenix opened the match aggressively, and it worked. Sharon pulled away early and hung on for a 4-1 win.

"We hadn't played in a while, we're rested, we were ready to go. So we were trying to hit them early," Fabrikant said. "We have speed up top. We were just trying to play the ball through and take our chances, and when we have chances, we usually do finish them off."

Sharon (5-1-0) opened the scoring five minutes into the game when junior midfielder Jack Lloyd cleaned up a cross from senior forward Riley Eastman and scored to the goalkeeper's right.

The problems for Rivendell (5-3-1) compounded five minutes later, when freshman Will Knowles fouled Sharon senior midfielder Ever Tofel in the box, giving the Phoenix a penalty kick. Tofel stepped up to the penalty spot and doubled his team's lead on a low shot to the keeper's right.

"I pick my spot before I shoot it," Tofel said. "I knew I wanted to put it on the right side. Main priority is just keep it on the goal, because you have the advantage on the goalie. You should be able to score."

The Raptors settled into the game from there. Rivendell created plenty of scoring opportunities but couldn't convert. The 2-0 scoreline held up through halftime.

That push continued into the second half, but Sharon's defense continued to hold strong. The Phoenix made it 3-0 in the 53rd minute when Tofel played a through ball to Eastman, who finished through pressure from two defenders.

The one-goal, one-assist performance has become standard for Tofel. He's had at least a score and a helper in each of Sharon's five wins, and he now has six goals and nine assists on the season.

He's in the middle of almost everything Sharon does on the field.

"Ever is the glue for us," Fabrikant said.

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"It's funny; people say 'box-to-box midfielders,' but I've literally seen him on one end scoring a goal at the line, and then at the other end clearing the ball. So he really does run end to end for us."

Sharon scored its fourth 10 minutes later, as Eastman picked up his second goal of the afternoon. Senior defender Jaxon Nichols provided the assist.

The brace put Eastman at 14 goals on the season, and the assist on the opener takes him up to 11 assists.

Like Tofel, he's one of Sharon's most important players.

"Riley is kind of the sparkle, (in) that he gets the ball and he weaves in and out and through people," Fabrikant said. "His spatial awareness is incredible."

Rivendell didn't stop fighting, though, and got a goal in the 72nd minute. Raptors senior Kyle Carter put a slick move on Lloyd and fired a laser into the top left corner of the goal.

Fabrikant was particularly pleased with his team's defensive effort after taking the lead. He said it's the most organized his defense has been all season, and he credited Nichols and junior Caleb Benjamin for strong performances.

He likes the way his team is paying at the midway point of the season.

“I think we still have a ways to go in terms of skill, positioning and space, but this was huge for us,” Fabrikant said. “Rivendell’s a tough team and this was a pretty comfortable result, and it’s a big turning point for us.

“I feel pretty confident moving forward. I like where we are. I think we can keep improving, but we’re right in the mix right now, so I’m pleased.”

Both teams will be back in action on Thursday. Rivendell will return home to face Leland & Gray, and Sharon hits the road to take on West Rutland.

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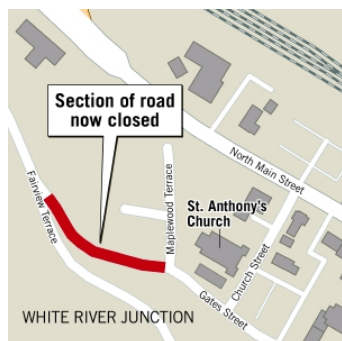
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