

Sibiya plays for deceased dad

Contributed by Gerry Prince
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Sipho Sibiya could have taken last night off.

After learning his father, Soly, had passed away in South Africa, the Edmonton Drillers midfielder had the option of not suiting up for the NPSL tilt against the St. Louis Ambush.

He declined head coach Ross Ongaro's option.

Sibiya then went out and scored a natural hat trick to power the Drillers to a 23-6 romp over the Ambush in front of 5,763 onlookers at Skyreach Centre.

"I had to play, I wanted to play, I needed to play just to get my mind off things," said Sibiya, who notched his fourth goal of the game at 13:38 of the final quarter.

"I love these guys. I've been with them for four or five years and they're family to me. To be away from them would probably have hurt me more.

KEPT HIS SPIRITS UP

"The guys have been great. They kept my spirits up. I haven't seen my dad in a while and to have that happen when I'm away without any contact, it's kind of tough.

"It's a tragic loss. He's the one who started me playing soccer. I know he would have wanted me to play. We had a great game. I'm glad it went well."

Chris Clarke, fresh from stints with an English side and Canadian Olympic team, struck for a deuces 97 seconds apart and vaulted the Drill into a 10-2 lead.

Eric Munoz's fifth two-pointer of the year lifted the Drill to a 12-4 half-time lead.

A scant 42 seconds into the third quarter, Clarke completed his hat trick and touched off a nine-point run that included a three-pointer off the foot of Nikola Vignjevic and deuces by Damir Jesic and Kevin Holness.

"The first one I got, it was already going in. I just happened to be there," beamed Clarke, who redirected Holness's shot behind Ambush netminder and playing coach Jamie Swanner for his first of the night.

"The second one I got, I made the move (to beat Ambush midfielder Matt Caution).

"I was very excited to come back and play at home with these guys. I caught the vibes and was kind of feeding off Sipho."

With six men on the bench and no backup 'keeper, the Ambush were outmanned.

Despite the severe manpower shortage, St. Louis ran with the Drillers in the opening 15 minutes. After that, the now 9-32 Ambush found themselves running on fumes over the final 45 minutes.

"We don't have any bodies," said Swanner, who faced 25 Edmonton shots and saw his record drop to 2-6 on the year.

"We have three experienced players, everybody else is a first- or second-player.

GIVE THEM CREDIT

"You've got to give these guys a lot of credit. A couple of bad goals made it 6-2 and (Drill 'keeper Jim Larkin) made two or three good saves in the first or it could have been 6-6.

"Unfortunately it went to 8-2 and we had to push out which means you're going to give up the two-on-ones, three-on-ones and the two-on-me's."

With the victory, the Drill evened their seasonal log at 21-21 and reduced their magic number to clinch a playoff

berth to one.

A win by Kansas City over the Detroit Rockers at Kemper Arena tonight would put the Drill into the post-season.

If that happens, it will be the third time in the last four NPSL seasons the Drill have advanced to the post-season without setting foot on the turf.