

CALEDONIA – Louis Alexander has been blessed.

Last week, the Caledonia High School soccer coach talked about his good fortune to have leaders like Annalyse Chance and Karianne Reed earn opportunities to continue their careers in college.

On Friday, Alexander had another opportunity to brag about his players, but this time it was on the boys side, as seniors Daniel and Preston Holmes celebrated their decisions to play soccer in college at Mississippi University for Women and East Central Community College in Decatur.

“They have been a staple,” Alexander said of the twin brothers. “More importantly, they have showed the natural progression of change you can make in your game and improvements you can make by just being dedicated and coming to training every day and giving everything.”

Daniel and Preston – like Chance and Reed – set examples for their team in more ways than one. Daniel scored four goals and had three assists as a team captain. He earned All-Region honors and was named a North Mississippi All-Star. Preston scored 12 goals and had nine assists and earned All-Region honors.

While each player left his mark on a team that finished 9-6-2, won a district title and advanced to the second round of the Class 4A playoffs, Daniel and Preston did it in different ways.

Alexander said Daniel played a more defensive role in anchoring the Cavaliers' back third, while he said Preston played with a little more "flair" in driving the team's offense. That's why Alexander knows his time with the Holmes brothers – like Chance and Reed -- was special.

"They're students of the game, too," Alexander said. "They're not done with soccer as soon as practice is over or when the game is done. They're constantly watching footage, which is huge."

Preston said he wasn't sure he was going to play college soccer up until a few weeks ago, but he said he received an invitation to attend a tryout for East Central C.C. He said the tryout went well and that he liked the coach and knew he had found a place to play.

"I always work hard, and hard work has definitely helped me throughout my high school career," Preston said. "The coach told me he would like to see me as an attacking player and that he likes how I carry the ball forward and really drive at defenders, but I will play anywhere he puts me. I am up for the new challenge."

Daniel also didn't immediately receive an offer to play in college that suited his desire to stay close to home. The timing proved to be right about a month and a half to two months ago when Daniel was eating at Zaxby's and BJ Pheasant, the men's soccer

coach at The W, entered the restaurant. Daniel said he didn't hesitate.

"I was on my way to the bathroom and when I saw him I thought, 'He has The W gear on and he looks like the picture of the coach,'" Daniel said. "I knew I needed to hurry. I came back and I asked him, 'Are you BJ?' I was on a goal to talk to him and get myself on the team."

As much as Daniel and Preston play soccer differently, it was fitting that their desire and passion for the game found new homes. Daniel said it will be an adjustment not playing with his brother for the first time in years and that he will miss the competitive nature Preston brings out in him because he always tried to beat him.

"I am interested to see the different levels of soccer and how his journey goes compared to mine," Daniel said.

Alexander is eager to see how things play out, too, after the brothers showed patience and confidence that something would come their way.

"This was no surprise," Alexander said. "This was a goal these young men had going into this year. There were some nervous times here and there, but they stayed with it. ... I just kept telling them they have worked too hard, and they have improved so much that you're going to get a nod somewhere

and that we just have to wait for it to pan out. The cream rises to the top.”