

Girls lacrosse team capsules

By Mike Miazga and Ross Forman Updated 3/18/2011 9:35 PM

Barrington

Count Barrington among the programs capable of contending for a state championship -- perhaps very soon. Coach Suzanne Rich and assistant Jenna Zilka both competed themselves at a high level -- Rich at the University of Richmond; Zilka won a state title with Lake Forest -- and the Fillies' program is producing four-year players with a commitment to the program, and to winning. Barrington finished 15-7 last season, and Rich has a senior-dominated team this spring led by captains McKenzie McPike, Caitlin Donohue and Jacqueline Holdsberg. Julia Huldin is another first-rate talent, the kind the defending Mid-Suburban League champs will need to achieve their goal of improving on last year's Elite Eight run and making it to the Final Four. "Truly, we work as a team," said Rich. "We're all about being a team and working to make each other better."

Benet Academy

Benet coach Kendall Vail regards junior Maya McKeown as an excellent midfielder and a top scoring attacker. Senior defender Colleen Toner returns after notching a record for interceptions, and Morgan Birck and Taylor Valentine are aggressive defenders at the midfield and are also top scorers on the squad. The Redwings finished 14-5 last season and earned second place in conference play.

Conant

Eric Jacobsen takes over the head coaching reins at Conant, in the school's first season fielding a lacrosse team. He is assisted by Courtney Buss, and the team welcomed 56 girls to the program, freshmen through seniors. "The strength of the team will be its enthusiasm for beginning a new tradition at Conant," Jacobsen said.

Fremd

Coach Jake Hughes is counting on the experience of returning players Colleen Cox, Jenny Doherty and Sam Schroll and hoping for immediate contributions from sophomores Patty Miller, Katie Mullins, and Maclaine Purdy as he begins his first season as the varsity head coach. Without question, this is a program that is growing. Hughes says his varsity group has only a handful of seniors and juniors on the roster, with the bulk of the players sophomores. "We are starting to get girls with more and more experience even at the freshman level, which is great to see," said Hughes. This season, Hughes is hoping to improve on last season's record and win at least one game in the season-ending IHSWLA tournament.

Glenbard West

Glenbard West won 9 games in its first varsity season and returns 14 players from last year's squad. In addition to Christina Letmanski, Samantha Harkless and Kelly Malloy, coach Bob Regan will count on contributions from Elizabeth Simoneit, Kylie Malonie, Molly Strieker, Rebecca Abellera and Ellen Wentz. Sara Letmanski, Hailey Walch and Kirstin Ward are top newcomers for the Hilltoppers. "We had a solid first season of varsity play," Regan said of last year's 9-13 overall record. "Glenbard West should be competitive and be in every game. Strong senior leadership will help in the close games. This year's team is very athletic and should be able to keep it close in every game. We will be in the hunt for more wins than last year."

Hinsdale Central

Senior midfielder Dylan Voneiff is a returning first-team all-state selection who also earned academic All-America accolades. She'll play at Colorado College next year. Senior Betsy Arnold was an honorable-mention all-state selection. "Our team will be strong this year because of dedication, fitness, determination and our will to be the best we can be," said coach Lindsay Finocchiaro. "Although we graduated 13 seniors, we have many talented returners and new players that are ready to give it their all. Our youthfulness brings excitement to each practice and game, while our veterans bring experience and knowledge. We are as ready as ever to get back on the field and work as a team." The Red Devils finished 16-5 overall and 5-0 in league play last spring.

Lake Zurich

First-year varsity coach Julie Bryniczka and assistant Jen Ventrelle are looking forward to seeing further gains. Three players return from last year who've already made a name for themselves: juniors Emily Handrahan and Alexandra Sopocy and senior Kristy Peterson. Those three were among the top 10 in the state in at least one statistical category -- Handrahan in caused turnovers, Sopocy in save percentage and goals-allowed average and Peterson in ground ball control. Bryniczka is eager to see the healthy return of Katherine Anderson (back from an ACL) and bigger contributions from juniors Jessica Kittle and Gina Barbaglia as well as sophomore Maddie Carrigan. "We have a lot of strong players coming from JV last year, so in addition to the returning varsity players, we have a very well rounded team," said Bryniczka. "Our strength will be in the midfield -- these girls can run." Increasing numbers in the program have helped, as Lake Zurich has 60 out for the sport this spring.

Libertyville

Head coach Dana Brady, in her seventh season, has seven returning players: Mary Kate Lee, Hope Nishimoto, Lauren Pacholski, Nicole Panega, Katie Piazza, Meghann Stelzner and Molly Toohey. "Our ability to communicate on and off the field and the trust the players have in each other," is the team's strength, Brady said. However, the Wildcats graduated 10 seniors last year, so there's a lot of new blood on the varsity squad. "This can be seen as a great opportunity to give younger players more time to develop their skills by being challenged at the highest level of competition," Brady said. Midfielder Nishimoto will be key, along with low defender Piazza, midfielder Stelzner, and goalie Toohey. Keep an eye on senior offender Gina Filippo, who only started playing lacrosse last spring and has invested a lot of time and energy into this sport -- so much so that she committed to play at Augustana College next year. Also, watch sophomore offender Olivia Mayer, who played on the JV last year and has amazing speed and shooting placement, and junior defender Lauren Pacholski, who has vastly improved her play and strength. The Wildcats went 10-5-1 last year.

Loyola

The defending state champions lost 19 players from the program, but don't expect Loyola to struggle. Coach John Dwyer counts several elite players back, including Loyola, Md.-bound Molly Hulseman and Villanova-bound middle Nicole Gleason. Other key familiar faces include attackers Stephanie Schere and Meg Perkaus, midfielders Kelsey Gallagher, Meredith Abrahamson and Katherine Eilers. Junior Emily Nimrod will be a new face in goal, but Dwyer likes his team's chances. "We have a little more inexperience than usual, but we feel very confident in our abilities," he said. "We like our speed, depth and overall athleticism."

Montini

The Broncos graduated only two seniors from last year's team, and all six all-conference players return, including senior attacker Maddie Iadarola (headed to

Grand Valley State) and senior defender Alyse Suffield (Augustana), who are captains along with sophomore Fran Meyer (the team's MVP in 2010). "We have a very athletic, coachable group of girls who work very hard," said co-coach Michelle Sebastian. "This is a team that gets better with each game. We are looking forward to continued success this season." Sebastian will be joined by Virginia Kosenkova as co-coach. The Broncos finished 12-11 overall, 5-0 in league play and claimed fourth place in state tournament play last season.

Naperville Central

Senior goalie Sarah Osier had a 58-percent save percentage last year en route to an all-conference selection. She's headed to play at Augustana. Senior midfielder Sarah Schumacher and senior attacker Sam Skodi are captains this season. "This year's team will come in more experienced and determined," said second-year coach Adam Washington. "We have 9 returning starters and depth at midfield. We're going to be relying on Sam Skodi to lead the attack along with Sarah Schumacher contributing from midfield." Kate Scholin will anchor the defense, which will help Osier to another strong season. "Already, this team looks much better than last year's version," the coach noted. "They are more focused, are executing better and practices have been amazing. The future looks very bright for us." Naperville Central finished last season 2-13 overall and 0-7 in league play.

Naperville North

Senior midfielder Emily Swatkowski and senior attacker Paige Hoerle are both all-conference picks from a year ago. Naperville North returns nine starters from 2010. "We hope that our experience will give us the edge over the competition," said third-year coach Allison Galindo. "The girls have been conditioning hard in the off-season and have returned faster and have the endurance to outlast their opponents." Galindo is excited about the young talent that dots the roster. "We have a couple of freshmen on the varsity this year whose talent will really help

elevate the team," the coach said. "It is sure to be a great season for the Huskies." Naperville North finished last season 6-13-1 overall and 1-6 in the league.

Neuqua Valley

Senior center/mid Rachel Leibovitz (Grand Valley State), senior middle Taylor Maduro (Augustana) and senior goalie Annie Kidston were all-conference picks last year. Kidston has quickly come into her own in the net. She stepped in last year when the original keeper was hurt and is now drawing college interest. "The 2011 season is going to be exciting for Neuqua," said Neuqua Valley coach Lauren Rippy. "We had a core group of six or seven girls who made it their priority to gain athleticism, stick skills and gamesmanship over the off-season." Leibovitz is a commanding presence at the draw who gains ball control and dictates the tempo of the game. Rippy is equally complimentary of Kidston's development. "She has not looked back yet," Rippy said. Returning juniors Caren Lee and Kendall Maduro and freshmen Becca Wolfe, Leah Newman and Noella Lamparelli also will contribute for the Wildcats, who finished last season 18-3 overall and 6-1 in league play.

New Trier

Pete Collins begins his 10th year as head coach with a group certain to maintain the program's reputation as one of the tops in the state, region and nation. The Trevians return eight starters from last year's state runner-up squad. Senior attacker Janie Gion (63 goals, 46 assists) is a returning All-American choice, and sophomore Kelsey Murray (65 goals, 24 assists) was nearly as productive last spring. Two national team choices are back, Ellen Katchka and goalie Laura Van Horn, along with Under Armour All-American underclassman Taylor McGinnis and senior all-conference picks Kristen Wright and Mackenzie Martin. "We are looking toward strong leadership and experience by our returning players, and

we have a lot of talented and athletic newcomers who will look to make an impact," Collins says.

Palatine

Palatine has 13 returning players and must find a way to replace last season's leading scorer, Mo Brodeur, who graduated. Coach Leslie Schock is back for her fifth season and she'll rely heavily on junior midfielder Rose Silveria, an all-conference player last year. Also back for her fourth season: midfielder Lauren Radtke, an all-conference player as a junior. Opponents also must contend with junior attack Marcy Karabin and sophomore Lacey Serafino. This season's breakout star may be Jamie Lloyd, who played defense last year as a freshman. Junior goalie Sarah Davis must come up big. "We are very young, but hungry," Schock said. "Last year, we had a successful season and the girls are looking forward to maintaining and improving upon last year's performance." The Pirates went 11-3 last season, only losing to Deerfield, Barrington and Glenbard.

St. Charles Co-op

St. Charles has a number of impact players. Senior midfielder Meghan Brady led the state with 70 goals last year. She's headed to Robert Morris in Chicago to play. Senior attack/mid Katie Bogle, the daughter of head coach Peter Bogle, led the state in draw controls with 65 and will play at Colorado State. Margaret Zimmer, only a junior, is a three-year starter in goal and was second in the state in save percentage (65.8) with the lowest goals-against average despite the highest minutes played in the state. Sophomores Emma MacNeille and Jane Noelker are both returning starters and will push an already fast and aggressive defense, which is also anchored by three-year starter Emily Thornton (senior). "This year's team is a lot faster and has developed their skills with most of the returning players having picked up playing for local club teams as well as participating in several development and recruiting camps over the summer and fall," Peter Bogle said. "I have a lot of trust in this team heading into the season.

We have some very aggressive goals set to accomplish." St. Charles finished 16-5 overall and 6-2 in league play last spring.

St. Ignatius

First-year coach Audra Rupinkas takes over a program that's taking big steps forward. This is the first year the sport will be accorded full varsity recognition by the school. The Wolfpack was ranked as high as No. 6 in the state last year, and Rupinkas is aiming for a top-five this spring.

Schaumburg

As the program enters its third year, coach Drew Lazzara is hoping for across-the-board improvement after a winless debut season and a 1-win finish in 2010. The good news for the Saxons is there's reason for optimism. Senior Myria Kerr and junior Stephanie Montiel will provide a 1-2 offensive punch, and Lazzara is counting on junior Maggie Garcia to anchor the defense. "This year," says Lazzara, "the goal is to head into every game with the mindset that we can win." It still figures to be a learning year for Schaumburg, as Lazzara is counting on a majority of sophomores and juniors on the varsity roster.

Stevenson

Head coach Janette Eichfeld is in her seventh season at Stevenson, where she looks to improve on the team's 10-9 record in 2010. Sophomore Makala Udoni could be the reason. "She is very fast, (has) excellent stick skills and is difficult to defend. Expect a lot of goals and assists from her," Eichfeld said. The Patriots feature several solid seniors, such as Katlyn Cook, Taylor Halpert, Hyunji Lim, Emily Nisson and Katie Pearson. The junior class brings Rachel Banas, Kelsey Patten, Erin Rice and Alyssa Gorenberg. Junior goalie Alyssa Gorenberg certainly will be a key to the Patriots, as well as junior midfielder Rachel Banas, senior defender Katlyn Cook, junior defense Kelsey Patten, and junior attack

Erin Rice. "When we believe in ourselves and our teammates, we are unstoppable," Eichfeld said.

Vernon Hills

Vernon Hills boasts a strong offense, yet the defense is sketchy, mostly due to the graduation of last year's goalies. Head coach Bob Thompson is in his 10th season and has 12 returning varsity players: Erin Steele, Christie Currie, Nikki Nathanson, Nicole Amari, Christina Pasquesi, Jaylin Lee, Jessie Westman, Erin Keller, Lauren Hernandez, Molly Gilhart, Sarah Lehman and Jihee Choi. Steele, a senior midfielder/center, could be the team's breakout star. "She is a three-year return player (who) ran the offense last year from behind the goal. This year she will be taking on the center position full time and again running our offense," Thompson said. Vernon Hills finished 11-9 last season. "Our team will be fast and intense. We will have to play relentless defense as our goalie will be a first-year player and we will need to protect her at all times. For us, beating Lake Forest would be a wonderful victory, but they consistently finish in the top three since Vernon Hills has been in the league. So realistically, beating St. Charles and Libertyville would be our two top teams to beat."

Waubonsie Valley/Metea Valley

The Waubonsie-Metea squad enters its first season of varsity girls lacrosse. "With the team short on varsity experience, we are going to look for big improvements throughout the season," said coach Mike Wegrzyn. "Maintaining possession will be a key to success for us. If we can get the ball into either Kylie (Burkhardt's) or Kim (Rowell's) crosse, they will be able to create scoring opportunities for themselves and their teammates." Junior Amanda Levin figures to be a key at midfield for the team. Last season, the Waubonsie/Metea team finished 9-9 in JV action.

Wheaton United

Senior midfielder Kelly Stelzer and senior attacker Brina Antuna were all-conference picks last season. Stelzer was the team's most outstanding player. Both she and senior midfielder Nattali Shelton will play at Augustana, while Antuna is still deciding on her college destination. United returns 8 of 12 starters. "We're looking to better our 2010 eighth-ranked (in the state) goals allowed averaged with our stingy and well-disciplined defense," said fourth-year coach Charles Solomon. United scored 9 goals per contest last year and Solomon feels the potential is there to score more. "The expectations have been set high for this season with conference and sectional championships well within United's grasp," Solomon said. Last spring, Wheaton United finished 11-11 overall and 5-3 in league play.

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