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Libertyville rebuilds right into state semifinals



Libertyville's Hope Nishimoto, middle, gets sandwiched by Lake Zurich's Katherine Anderson and Eden Edzak during the sectional final last Monday at Libertyville High School. Libertyville won 13-8. (Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer)

By Mike Miazga
Daily Herald Correspondent

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This was supposed to be a rebuilding year for the Libertyville girls' lacrosse team.

The only problem with that scenario is someone forgot to tell the Wildcats.

Thanks to rapid development in all phases of its game, Libertyville finds itself riding a six-game winning streak heading into Wednesday's state semifinals at Hinsdale Central against top-ranked Loyola Academy.

This is Libertyville's first-ever state finals appearance since the program started in the spring of 1997. The Wildcats bring a 12-6-1 record into the game.

"My gosh, is it unbelievable," Libertyville coach Dana Brady said. "Before the season started, I would have never imagined we would be in the moment we are in now. Everybody is excited and happy."

"This is so awesome," Libertyville sophomore Olivia Mayer added. "I wouldn't have ever imagined this would happen. This means so much to us to be able to say we are one of the best teams in the state. It's amazing what we've done."

Libertyville upended Palatine 10-6 in the supersectional game to advance to state--a stark contrast from earlier postseason play.

"We almost weren't here," Brady said. "We won by only 1 goal against Vernon Hills. We struggled against them and then we beat Palatine by 4 goals in the supersectionals. That's why I like this game so much. It takes the same number of people to put out on the field, but the outcome can be different for different reasons."

In the Palatine win, youth was the buzzword for the Wildcats. Sophomores Olivia Mayer and Ginger Yen each had 3 goals. Sophomore Abi Gearing had 2 goals, while seniors Hope Nishimoto and Gina Filippo each had one goal. Mary

Kate Lee and Gearing led the team with their draw controls and ground ball pick-ups to help keep possession.

"A lot of the offensive stars in that game were sophomores," Brady said. "To see that type of leadership on the field so earlier in their careers was great. That is going to help us in the next few years."

In addition to that strong offensive showing, Libertyville also excelled on defense in the Palatine win.

"They quickly learned Palatine's plays," said Brady. "The defense has learned over the course of the season to communicate super-well. They try and talk about what happened out there and what they need to do to make changes so it doesn't happen again. They did a good job of limiting Palatine."

Brady was particularly pleased with the play of senior captain Katie Piazzini and goalie Molly Toohey in the supersectional win.

"Katie is the one that has that vision of the field and Molly played a phenomenal game," Brady said. "Molly gave up 6 goals and made 9 saves. The chemistry between Katie and Molly is great. They communicate so well to the defense so we can keep the ball out of the 8-meter."

Lee, a junior, is a high defender-midfielder and has seen all phases of the game steadily move forward as the season has progressed.

"We've all stepped up as a team," Lee said. "We're connecting on passes on offense. We have so many weapons offensively. There are a lot of girls we can count on to score. Our defense has consistently grown throughout the year. We're able to stop a lot of shots. We have so much chemistry on the team. We're able to communicate well on the field."

Mayer also has noticed a common theme of late that has helped the Wildcats rack up the wins.

"We're letting our defense carry into our offense," Mayer said. "We have poise and confidence with the ball now."

The Wildcats are now ready to tackle one of the state's most revered programs in Loyola, which brings a 19-2 record into the game. Loyola's only two losses are to out-of-state teams this season (Sacred Heart Academy out of New York and Milton, Ga.).

"No, they are the leader," Brady said. "We talk about respecting the game and the spirit of the game at the state coaches meeting. This isn't about wins and losses. Win or lose, you walk up and you congratulate the other team. Loyola will have respect for us. It's going to be a mutual respect for all the players. This is a challenge for us at the next level. One of the ways you learn lacrosse is to play the best. We're going to get that chance to take away a lot from this experience. All you can ask for is for Loyola to give us a good roll on Wednesday. We're looking forward to playing them."

Lee and her teammates aren't intimidated by Loyola's stature.

"We're definitely looking forward to it," Lee said. "We haven't had a lot of success in the past against Loyola, but this a new year. Never say never. There is always hope. We always step up against better teams. I love it when we play better teams."

Mayer added: "We will be ready. Their reputation precedes them. They will be the best competition we will face. They are the best in the state. This is a chance for us to really pick it up out there."

Libertyville and Loyola will play at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday at Hinsdale Central High School. Host Hinsdale Central and St. Ignatius will follow. All four teams

will move on to Friday's action at Northwestern University. The losers of the two semifinal games will play at 5 p.m. and the winners will play for the state title at 7 p.m.

Hinsdale Central update: Hinsdale Central advanced to the state finals after a close 15-13 victory over 2010 state-qualifier Montini in the Hinsdale Central supersectional.

"The game against Montini was a very competitive, emotional game against a great team," Hinsdale Central coach Lindsay Finocchiaro said. "Montini did a great job on the draw controls and going hard to goal. The game came down to draw controls and possession."

Finocchiaro lauded her team's defensive play.

"Our defense and Alyson Bean (Hinsdale Central goalie) came up with some big saves, especially in the end of the game," Finocchiaro said. "With about 1:30 left in the game, she made a huge save giving us possession. We converted it into a goal and went up by two. Montini won the next draw and, again, our defense came up big and with 30 seconds left we transitioned it down to our attacking end where we finished game."

The win moved Hinsdale Central to 14-6.

"Our attackers made their shots count and did a good job of running down the clock later in the game," Finocchiaro said. "Montini did a great job and we always look forward to playing a great, competitive game with them. They have some very young, talented players that will make them a tough competitor for years to come."

Hinsdale Central has not faced St. Ignatius this season. St. Ignatius is 14-4-1 and won the Chicago Metro Conference title. Hinsdale Central won the West Suburban Conference title.

"I think it is going to be another competitive matchup with their quick speed and talented players," Finocchiaro said. "We're excited to play another great team."

In the win against Montini, Hinsdale Central enjoyed balanced scoring. Tyra Santangelo, Maggie Langhamer, Dylan Voneiff, Chelsea Boyle, Amy O'Grady, Betsy Arnold and Kate Christian each had 2 goals, while Katie Coyle had 1 goal. Bean made 9 saves in goal.

Get ready to draw: A key to Montini's success in its sectional final win over Neuqua Valley was winning the draw. That's where sophomore midfielder Fran Meyer comes in.

"I take the draws," she said. "It's what can win a game. It's how you can keep possession and that's what we did. If you get possession, you can take it down and settle into your offense and score and get off to a good start."

Meyer said the Broncos came in prepared against Neuqua Valley.

"Neuqua Valley is a very good team," she said. "We were ready for the game. We prepared well and felt confident. We felt we had to step it up more."

Meyer added the team has benefitted from last year's fourth-place state finish under coaches Virginia Kosenkova and Michelle Sebastian, who were in their first seasons at Montini last year.

"Last year we had new coaches and they have definitely helped us," Meyer said. "They are really good motivators. We got fourth in the state last year, which is the best we have ever done. We gained a lot of good experience. A lot of players on the team have experience outside of high school. Last year's experience has helped us this year. We were ready this year. We felt like what we did last year could help bring us so much this year and it did."

Palatine update: In the supersectional loss to Libertyville, Palatine coach Leslie Schock felt her team struggled at times against the Wildcats' defense.

"Libertyville played tenacious defense and caused us a lot of trouble in the midfield," she said. "We struggled to move the ball down the field. We also looked sloppy and not as mentally sharp as we have been the past two weeks. We committed 20 turnovers -- kudos to their pressure -- but it was also because of silly mistakes. We are not going to beat a good team at this level of play without playing our best lacrosse, and we didn't play our best (against Libertyville).

Palatine earned its first-ever sectional championship this season.

"It is a tremendous testament to the work ethic of these girls and their determination to win that we beat St. Charles and Barrington in just our second year of having a full varsity schedule," Schock said. "Our defense improved each and every game. We will miss the seniors, but we had a very young team. Hopefully the success we had this season will leave them wanting to accomplish even more next season."

Schock lauded the play of captains Lauren Radtke and Rose Silveira.

"The leadership of this team was tremendous through Lauren and Rose," she said.

Silveira, a junior midfielder, was named to the all-Mid-Suburban Conference team, along with Radtke (senior midfielder), sophomore goalie Veronika Metanova, junior defender Adrianna Filipek and junior attacker Marcy Karabin.

St. Charles update: The St. Charles co-op team finished 8-6 overall and lost to Palatine in the sectional semifinals.

Meghan Brady led St. Charles with 53 goals and 13 assists. She earned all-conference honors and has been nominated for All-American status. She is

ranked ninth in the state in goals scored.

Katie Bogle had 17 goals and 28 assists. She's ranked ninth in the state in assists and 12th in draw controls (46). Bogle also earned all-conference honors and has been nominated for All-American status. She also has been selected to the academic All-American team.

Samantha Link finished with 24 goals and 3 assists en route to all-conference honors. Defender Emily Thornton was also an all-conference selection and an academic All-American selection. Goalie Margaret Zimmer was another academic All-American pick. Mary Fahey was the team's rookie of the year award-winner as a freshman, while Leah Horton, a first-year varsity player as a senior, won the team's spirit award.

St. Charles played conference-champion Neuqua Valley close both times, losing by two goals and then losing by a 16-15 count in the second contest.

"The season progressed just how you would like it to as a coach," St. Charles coach Peter Bogle said. "Every week the players got better and better and understood their roles individually and as a team."

Bogle was especially pleased with the development of his sophomore class, citing strong play from Ashley Trippidei (defender), Emily Arvia (defender), Jane Noelker (defender), Maddie Smith (midfielder, 8 goals and 2 assists) and Claire Dillon (midfielder, 2 goals, 2 assists). Attacker Emma MacNeille had 15 goals and 1 assist and worked well with senior attacker Bridget Tobin (5 goals, 6 assists).

"These are all good signs for next year's team," Bogle said.

The team played without senior midfielder Caitlyn Terryl (2 goals, 2 assists) after she suffered a season-ending knee injury.

"That was a major blow to the team," Bogle said. "Her speed and aggressiveness would have been a major factor heading into the playoffs."

Bogle also is excited to have players like Zimmer, midfielder Kee Winterberger (6 goals, 3 assists) and Link back next season, and is looking forward to the development of players such as freshman goalie Sara Brown and midfielder Mary Fahey (7 goals).

Bogle lauded the contributions of seniors Katie Bogle, Tobin, Brady, Horton, Terryl and Thornton.

"This was a great leadership group of seniors and more specifically, the elected captains (Katie Bogle, Brady and Thornton)," Peter Bogle said.

Katie Bogle will continue her career at Colorado State, while Brady will play at Robert Morris.

"The key to next year's squad is off-season play, not only by the returning varsity players, but the younger girls coming up from the JV," Bogle said. "If these girls really pick up their games in the off-season, all of them could be major contributors to next year's St. Charles squad."

Lake Zurich update: The Bears finished the season 13-7 and lost in the sectional semifinals to Libertyville.

Junior Emily Handrahan led the Bears in goals with 63. Junior Katherine Anderson was tops in assists with 19, while senior Kristy Peterson led the team in ground ball controls with 55. Handrahan led the team in caused turnovers with 49 and Peterson was tops in draw controls with 50.

Lake Zurich goalie Alexandra Sopocy leads the state in saves 277 and has an impressive 63.2 save percentage, which ranks second in the state.

"Alex has consistently led our defense," Lake Zurich coach Julie Bryniczka said. "We wouldn't be as strong as we are without her. She is a playmaker and has shutdown some of the great attack players out there."

Bryniczka saw a different team square off against Libertyville in the playoffs.

"The last time we played them we weren't gelling as a team," she said. "When they stepped out there to play in the sectionals, they were a whole different team. They wanted to win, did the best they could and went out with a fight. Although we hoped to advance to the next round, assistant coach Jen Ventrelle and I were very proud of them."

Handrahan, Andeson, Peterson and Sopocy earned all-conference first-team honors, while Maddie Carrigan, Audrey Forier, Taylor Gore and Kara Zelasko were second-team selections. Peterson won an all-conference sportsmanship award.

"As a fourth-year varsity team, we had our most successful year," Bryniczka said. "We ended the season 15th in the state. While our goal was Top 10, I know the underclassmen are excited to try for it next year. This year I was pleasantly surprised with the growth of many players. The seniors did a fantastic job setting the precedent for teamwork and communication. I'm excited to see how we start next year. We have many returning starters and strong JV players that will make a huge impact next year."

Vernon Hills update: Vernon Hills, which lost 7-6 to Libertyville in the playoffs, was paced on offense this season by Jihee Choi, who had 39 goals and 10 assists. She also had 43 ground ball controls and 37 draw controls.

Christie Currie added 32 goals and 8 assists. She had 41 ground ball controls and 25 draw controls. Lauren Hernandez finished with 20 goals and 12 assists. She had 39 ground ball controls. Erin Keller finished with 26 ground ball controls.

Sarah Lehman had 9 goals and 4 assists to go with 19 ground ball controls and 15 draw controls. Jiwon Lee had 29 ground ball controls. Nikki Nathanson had 25 ground ball controls and 17 draw controls. Jessica Westman had 24 ground ball controls and Christina Pasquesi had 19 ground ball controls and 8 draw controls.

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