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Vernon Hills really starting to shine



Warren's Nilcole Suchland, left, and Vernon Hills' Christi Curry battle for the ball at Warren. (*Steve Lundy | Staff Photographer*)

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The Vernon Hills girls' lacrosse team has picked up steam in the last two weeks.

The team recently scored a 13-10 win over Evanston in a game it was losing 6-4 at halftime. Vernon Hills was playing its first home game under the lights.

Sophomore goalie Meagan Hayes, in only her third start, starred in the net for Vernon Hills in the second half.

"Meagan Hayes has been outstanding in goal," said Vernon Hills coach Bob Thompson. "As a freshman, she played the field and this year has made it a mission to be our top goalie and she has done just that."

Thompson noted Hayes had played in 7 straight games through late last week. After two losses, Vernon Hills defeated Evanston (13-10), Warren (12-10), Regina (15-7) and Glenbrook North (15-9). The other game was an 11-10 loss to Naperville North. Naperville North scored in the last 30 seconds to win the game.

"We needed this win (against Glenbrook North) to get to .500," said Vernon Hills coach Bob Thompson. "We were up by only one at half and exploded in the last 5 minutes with 6 goals. Our defense held them to only 6 shots in the last 10 minutes."

Jihee Choi was leading the team with 26 goals, 16 groundball controls and 19 draw controls. Lauren Hernandez had 14 goals and 8 assists through late last week, while Christie Currie had 16 goals and 18 draw controls.

Shelby Fraizer, Emma Yao and Erika Peepo have also been key of late.

"They have come up big in the last two or three games by scoring goals when we really need them," said Thompson. "Our core girls get their chances to score all the time. It is when these three score that we win our games."

Sarah Lehman also has played well of late.

"She draws the defenders away from the other girls, helping them to get open, which has helped tremendously," said Thompson. "Her midfield play has been superb. She has 12 caused turnovers in the last 3 games."

Thompson has been pleased with the team's progress on a number of fronts.

"Their movement off ball has become the key to our offense," he said. "Without the movement to get open for passes, we would be relying on one or two players to do the work. Our defense is becoming more solid by attacking the ball and not allowing the free line to go goal.

"We are doing well, but my outlook was to be .500 and right now we are. We are moving in the right direction, but we still need to keep moving up and becoming more aggressive on the defensive end of the field."

Vernon Hills will host Deerfield on senior night. Jamie Lono from "The Voice" will sing the National Anthem.

Waubonsie Valley-Metea Valley: The Waubonsie-Metea co-op team was 4-5 through its first 9 games, but sported a 2-1 conference record.

The team recently scored wins over Naperville Central (8-6), Highland Park (11-1) and Regina Dominican (10-4).

"These games really showed our team that their hard work is paying off," said coach Mike Wegrzyn. "We hope to build off these wins and finish the year above .500."

Senior middle Emily Haynes (19 goals, 10 assists, 18 draw controls), senior middle Kim Rowell (27 goals, 7 assists, 28 groundball controls), senior middle Amanda Levin (7 goals, 5 assists, 20 groundball controls), senior attack Sarah Ley (9 caused turnovers) and senior defender Olivia Javornick (13 caused turnovers, 12 draw controls) have been key forces for Wegrzyn.

Haynes set a school record with 7 points (6 goals, 1 assist) in the win over Naperville Central.

"Kim, Emily and Amanda have been playing really well with each other," said Wegrzyn. "If a team focuses on stopping one girl like Naperville Central did with trying to stop Kim, another girl will step in her place. Sarah Ley (attack) has really improved her play in transition. In the past two games, she has caused 5 turnovers and helped get the ball back on attack before the opposing team got to their attack zone."

Wegrzyn has noticed a change in how the team approaches practice.

"We are practicing much harder, which has turned into wins on the field," the coach said. "In every drill, girls are challenging each other at game speed which has transitioned into playing well in games. I set a new challenge for the girls based upon how we have been playing as of late. We want to finish the last 6 games, 4-2. This would give us 8 wins, quadrupling our total from last year. We also want to get a playoff win. If we continue to play and practice as well as we have in the final 3 weeks of the season, we have a really good chance to complete those two goals."

Waubonsie-Metea remained in the thick of the conference last week, especially since Wheaton United recently defeated Neuqua Valley.

"When Wheaton defeated Neuqua last week, it gave a lot of teams the opportunity to win conference," said Wegrzyn.

Carmel update: Carmel, a first-year program, was 9-6-1 through its first 16 contests.

"We have lost all of our games except for one by 2 goals or less," said Carmel coach Jim Lasky. "Playing the games are important. Losing teaches us a lesson on how to improve."

The Corsairs are receiving strong defensive play from Emily DeCicco, Mary Pat Doyle and Elizabeth Green.

"They are the defensive wall," said Lasky. "All three are returning next year. They protect Shannon Poulos, our goalie."

The team is led offensively by Kayla Quinn, Tara Grandolfo, Nikki Pavlis and Nicole Westberg. Amy Parish and Erin Shannon, two of the team captains, also have been key contributors along with Maddie Groeninger and Rene Meyer.

Passing has been a team strength.

"It's nice when a referee comments how well you pass as a team," said Lasky. "Three games this year we have been told we pass really well for a first-year program. Our girls work as one and fight for one another when they hit the turf."

Lasky, to say the least, has been impressed with what the team has been able to accomplish in its first year.

"I don't want the season to end," he said. "The season has been filled with incredible athletic experiences. It will be nice to have a full conference schedule next year. We all see how to improve and our focus is to compete. Regardless of how we finish the season, we will be above .500 and finish with a winning record. That is all about hard work. MT Lee, my assistant coach, and I are very proud of the team's efforts."

Carmel will host Marist May 14 at 5:30 p.m. at Baker Field for senior night.

Schaumburg update: The Saxons were 2-9 through their first 11 games. In recent action, Schaumburg dropped an overtime game to Fremd and an 11-10 decision to Northside Prep.

"It was frustrating because we played well in both games," said Schaumburg coach Drew Lazarra. "We just couldn't come away with wins."

The Saxons changed their fortunes with an 8-3 win over Naperville Central.

"We needed that one after losing a couple of close ones," said Lazarra.

Megan Huber, a middie attack, had 27 goals through late last week. Stephanie Montiel, a middie attack, had 16 goals, while senior goalie Sam Kossack was second in the state in save percentage at 65.7. Huber had a career-high 6 goals in the win over Naperville Central.

Lazarra noted the team has improved its defense and is finding the net with more frequency of late.

"After getting off to a slow start, we're finally competing and playing in close games," he said. "We could go on a little run and get our record close to .500 and boost our confidence level heading into the playoffs."

Schaumburg faces Palatine on Monday.

"In my past three years of coaching we have yet to beat Palatine," said Lazarra. "A win over them on Monday would mean a lot."

Naperville North update: Naperville North was 3-5 through its first 8 games. The team recently scored wins over Warren, Vernon Hills and Naperville Central. North defeated Central in triple overtime for its first win of the season.

Senior Izzy Smith has 12 goals through late last week. Senior Izzy Kane had 8 goals, while junior middie Jackie Peikos had 5 goals and freshman attack-middie Carly Shisler also had 5 goals. Smith has battled a foot injury all season, but has been a force for the team on draws and groundball controls.

"We dominate in the transition," said North coach Kirk Lamitie. "Fast players and crisp clean passing has led to 3 wins in 4 games. Great goaltending by senior Natalie Weimer has led to big stops at key moments."

Senior captain Maddy Nave also has contributed.

"Maddy has stepped up to be a leader on the team and plays multiple positions," said Lamitie. "Her leadership on defense has led to a decrease in our goals against."

Overall, Lamitie likes the progress he has seen thus far.

"We are finally coming together as a team and the girls are starting to understand their roles on the field," he said. "A lack of bodies on the sideline has led to the team getting tired during late times in some games, but in the past few games, they have dug deep and fought hard."

Stevenson update: Stevenson was off to a 7-3 start through 10 games. The Patriots scored a 9-8 win in double overtime against Barrington.

"Barrington is traditionally one of the top 10 schools in the state, so winning this game was highly important to us to reach our goal in being part of that top 10 list this season," said Stevenson coach Janette Eichfeld.

Senior middie Rachael Banas was leading the team with 29 goals and 6 assists. Senior center Kelsey Patten had 25 goals and 16 assists (7th in the state in assists). Junior attack Jennifer Schultz had 23 goals and 8 assists. Junior defender Lily Walker was leading the team in interceptions and caused turnovers followed by Patten and Emily Loretto (senior defender). Patten and Walker were tied for second in the state in interceptions.

"Kelsey Patten has taken leadership on the field to keep the team's momentum going at the highest level possible every game," said Eichfeld.

Senior goalie Alyssa Gorenberg was fourth in the state in saves and fifth in the state in save percentage.

Stevenson was recently stung by the injury bug.

"We are continuing to work together even though we lost four starters due to injuries this past week," said Eichfeld. "The team is continuing to impress everyone with its passionate play and hard work. We've been unfortunate to have as many injuries as we have had this season, but everyone is figuring out ways to fill the gaps the injured players have left. From this challenge, we will only get stronger."

The Stevenson JV team took third at the Huskie invitational at Oak Park-River Forest recently. The frosh-soph team was still undefeated after a 6-5 win over Lake Forest.

Eichfeld also lauded the efforts of assistant varsity coach Laura Camastro.

"Laura is an expert pasta maker, so the team now knows how to make linguini and rotatini," said Eichfeld.

Stevenson plays Vernon Hills Wednesday on senior night. The Patriots will honor its 10 seniors. Fremd update: The Vikings were 7-5 after a 4-game winning streak. That tear included wins over Deerfield and a 2-1 overtime win against Schaumburg.

"The team continues to find a way to win when we are down or close late," said Fremd coach Jake Hughes.

Junior attack middle Katie Mullen was leading the team with 33 goals. Junior attack middle Patty Miller had 32 goals and 4 assists, while junior center Maclaine Purdy had 25 goals and 5 assists.

"The offense is starting to move the ball around the zone much better than we were," said Hughes. "The fact that we have three girls with 30-plus points is evidence of this."

Lisa Van has been a big contributor in goal for Fremd.

"She is playing goal for the first time this year and has been doing a wonderful job for us this year," said Hughes. "She has 90 saves through 12 games and continues to come up clutch during close games."

Fremd heads to Palatine Wednesday for a renewal of the city series.

"I am very happy with the team's progress this year," said Hughes. "Practices are getting more competitive and the girls are starting to really pick the game up on their own, which is exactly what I am looking for."

Libertyville update: Libertyville was 7-4 through its first 11 games. In recent action, Libertyville earned a measure of revenge with a 9-5 win over St. Ignatius. St. Ignatius was third in state last year, Libertyville was fourth. The team also scored wins over Lake Zurich (11-7) and Stevenson (15-14), which put it in second place in the conference.

Junior Olivia Mayer had 34 goals through late last week. Senior Lauren Pacholski had 25 goals, while junior Madi Piranian (Stoneman) had 21 goals.

"The team is using every loss as a learning experience and stepping up to make direct changes in the games following a loss," said Libertyville coach Katie Lettinga. "Whether it be game skills or mental toughness, we are steadily improving. New players are stepping up. Every time we have set a new team goal, we have achieved it. We're looking to continue that trend. The season started with a lot of promise and a string of wins. We have encountered injuries and illness, but we are fighting back and finding our stride again. With newer

players gaining confidence and skill, and with injuries fading, we hope to peak toward the end of the season."

Libertyville faces Lake Forest Wednesday in a key conference game.

"A win over Lake Forest would put us No. 1 in the conference," said Lettinga. "Lake Forest is ranked fourth in the state. We are hoping to come out strong against them."

St. Charles update: The St. Charles co-op team had a 13-3 mark through its first 16 games.

Attacks Samantha Link, Jordyn McFarlane, Emma MacNeille, Claire Dillon and middies Maddie Smith (also plays attack), Anna Bartels, Mary Fahey and Mary Wirth have produced close to 85 percent of the team's goals this year.

St. Charles notched a recent 11-2 win over Glenbrook North as part of the Windy City Classic.

"This was important because it showed us how we could play against a good team," said St. Charles coach Peter Bogle.

St. Charles dropped a 10-9 game in the tournament to Oak Park-River Forest.

"We scored to tie the game at 10-10 but the goal was disallowed," said Bogle. "OPRF historically is very good. Nothing different from this year. St. Charles has never beaten them, so this was a moral victory for our team. When we play our game, I honestly feel nobody can beat us. We move the ball and transition very well and clear very well. We possess the ball very well. Two of our losses were by one goal each and we had double-digit turnovers, so we basically gave the game to the other team. The girls learned a lot from those losses."

Senior captains Samantha Link (attack), Margaret Zimmer (goalie) and Ashley Trippeidi (defense) were cited for strong leadership.

"They are great leaders on and off the field and well-respected by the team," said Bogle. "They truly bring out the best in the team from their work ethic to their communication skills. It goes to show how having great captains can really make a difference."

Junior Emily Arvia has been a key part of an improving defensive unit.

Bogle added nearly 50 percent of the team's goals this year have been assisted by another player.

"That shows how unselfish the team really is," he said. "We are about to launch a new offense in time for the playoffs that will knock socks off. We had some good insight and feedback from a very famous local college coach that has won her fair-share of national championships. It will be fun to watch."

Lake Zurich update: The Bears were 5-7 through their first 12 games. Lake Zurich recently scored an 18-7 win over Warren in conference play.

"The team is trusting each other and working together," said Lake Zurich coach Julie Bryniczka. "They have kept fighting and have kept a positive attitude after our losing slump."

Sophomore Sarah Frommelt has been essential in the midfield for the Bears.

"She catches everything and has great shot placement on attack," said Bryniczka.

Goalie Alex Sopocy has worked well with the defense on transitions, while senior Morgan Moodhe has been a key defensive cog for Lake Zurich.

Naperville Central update: While Naperville Central was 0-10 in its first 10 games, coach Adam Washington has seen progress both as a team and on an individual basis.

Senior attack Bridget Maloney leads the team in goals with 12. Senior attack wing Jana Sztuck was tops on the team in groundball controls with 22.

"We are playing better transitional defense and we've gotten much better at putting the ball in the back of the net," said Washington. "We need to have a little more patience at times on attack."

Maloney, Sztuck and Megan Shoemaker accounted for 20 of the team's 27 goals during one span, while Nicole Pinella and Liz Goeden combined for 15 caused turnovers in a recent three-game stretch.

"If you look at our record, most people would consider this a 'bad' season," said Washington. "We are a much better team than our record indicates. This team is more skilled and has more leadership. We just haven't been able to put together a complete game. We've been making marked improvements in all aspects of the game. Our transitions are getting cleaner. The program is headed in the right direction. We have five games left. I feel that we can compete and win all of them. It's just a matter of the girls staying positive, sticking with the game plan and peaking in time for the playoffs."

Of note, freshman Jaye Dvorak scored her first high school goal against Warren on April 21 and freshman Meghan Bedigian had her first goal against St. Charles five days later.

- The Daily Herald has two lacrosse applications -- one for boys and one for girls -- that will help you follow the high school lacrosse season. The apps, available in Android and iPhone formats for 99 cents each, will contain all the lacrosse coverage from our printed sports editions, plus timely results and more photos.

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