

# Patience, defensive 'forte' should place Mooney near top

By Richard A. Kiley

The saying, "You can't rush a good thing" is clearly exemplified by the soccer program at Cardinal Mooney High School.

And according to varsity boys' soccer coach Paul Forte, the program's philosophy that "no player will make the varsity before his time" is here to stay for awhile.

"I'm never concerned with (the number) of seniors we lose," said Forte, who is beginning his seventh year as head coach of the Cardinals. "We prefer to work with kids with experience."

Forte was referring to experience his players have acquired at any level. He attributed much of Mooney's superiority over Rochester-area teams to the coaching his players received at the freshman and junior-varsity ranks.

"We've been successful because we stress the same system, set ups and plays," said Forte, referring to the cooperation he enjoys with freshman coach Dave DeSemone and junior varsity mentor Jim LeDuc. "By the time I get them here, the system is already familiar to them. We cooperate with each other and get along real well and that helps."

Forte added that the camaraderie even extends so far as the girls' program, in which he and girls' varsity coach Scott Morrison often exchange coaching ideas.

The LeMoyne College graduate also knows he has been fortunate to have a surplus of talent at the Greece high school. Combine that glut of talent with a healthy work ethic and one can see how Forte has compiled an awesome 97-20-4 record in six years.

"They (his players) work hard, and it's not that we practice long hours or have double sessions either. I don't believe in double sessions," said Forte, who is currently using the soccer fields at the Long Ridge School to ready the Cardinals for the upcoming season. "But I've been fortunate enough to have talented players here, and talented kids make great coaches. The patience we show in developing the kids slowly has helped build the program too."

So it shouldn't be a surprise that Forte shows little concern over losing nine seniors from last year's Section 5 AAA runner-up. Among those lost in the graduation exodus were Tom Sansone, Tony Ciccarella and Rick Oddo.

Sansone was Forte's leading scorer last year with 12 goals and 10 assists. Ciccarella, who is now a defender at Rochester Institute of Technology, was named the most valuable player of the 1985 sectional final. And Oddo was short in stature (only 5'5") but not in talent, recording 14 shutouts for last year's 18-2-1 squad and yielding a measly eight goals over those 21 games. Oddo will surely frustrate opponents this year as he defends the goal for Monroe Community College.

Forte will look to Rob Brunette and Peter Mojsej, last year's second and third leading scorers respectively, to pick up the offensive slack now that Sansone has moved on. Mojsej is a rare commodity at Mooney, having started as a sophomore on the varsity.

But Forte prides his team and himself on Mooney's defensive accomplishments during his tenure.

"I couldn't tell you (statistics on) our leading scorer after a year, but I could tell you how many shutouts we had," Forte said. "We stress everybody's defensive skills; we work on it a lot."

Mooney teams have shown appreciation for Forte's efforts to keep the defense strong; the players named a sweeper (defenseman) most valuable player the past three years.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Pat Corrigan is one of three netminders vying for the starting spot left by Rick Oddo. The three potential goalies will have a tough time filling the cleats of Oddo, who blanked opponents 14 times last year.

Looking ahead to this year, Forte expects tough competition from Catholic rival McQuaid, as well as East, Pittsford-Mendon and Hilton. The game against the Cadets will be under the lights.

"We'll have a decent team; we'll get a lot better as the season goes on," Forte said, referring to the fact that he has the smallest group of seniors he has ever had, in addition to 15 juniors on his squad this year. "I think we will develop into a very competitive team as the juniors come along."

Another one of the keys to the Cardinals' success this year, he added, will be the team's success in avoiding injuries — not necessarily serious injuries, just the nagging ailments that keep a player out for a game or two.

"One of the keys to how we do will be avoiding injuries," Forte said. "That's why we spend a half hour to 40 minutes stretching before practice. It's the little, minor injuries that get you; and they happen because of laziness, or because the players don't allow enough time to stretch."

Although Mooney has won the City-Catholic League the past five years, Forte is somewhat disappointed in the fan support toward Mooney soccer. "It's improving though," he said. "I'd like to see more people, but when you play right after school and some kids have to take the bus to get home, it's tough. Our Saturday games get good crowds, and we had 4,500 to 5,000 at Fauver last year."



Mooney Head Coach Paul Forte gives his team instructions in between drills during last Thursday's morning practice.

Forte would love to recreate the team and school spirit of 1983, the year Mooney captured the sectional crown and then went on to win the state championship as well.

"That was a balanced and unselfish team," said Forte, noting that the '83 team was offensively powerful with 93 goals, but stingy on defense, allowing just 13. "Everybody on the team liked each other. "It's a dream combination when you get a team like that"

But Forte is a realist, and he knows this is a new year.


"That's past history," said Forte, who also works in the Kodak Recreation Center, which provides athletic programs for kids. "We've got to keep on moving. That (championship) banner is not going to win you any games."

Forte will find out what kind of team he has this year when the Cardinals open the season September 6 against "an always tough and aggressive" Churchville squad.

"We'll find out real early what kind of season it will be," Forte said.

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