

Quest for league titles begins for girls' teams

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

The high school girls' soccer season began this year before school was even in session.

And diocesan high school soccer coaches are hoping that the season will continue longer than last year, when only Bishop Kearney — which advanced to the Section 5 Class B finals — survived past its first game in post-season play.

Ready to repeat?

Last season, Aquinas (12-6-1) won its first Private-Parochial League crown and appeared to have the talent to win the Section 5 Class BB title. But the Little Irish, who were seeded fourth, suffered a 3-0 upset loss to fifth-seeded Pittsford Mendon on national television in the sectional quarterfinals.

The Little Irish will enjoy the return of all but one starter from last year. Kathy Thies, one of the team's leading scorers, was lost to graduation.

But while the team remains essentially the same, the person at the helm will be different. Gary Page, who led the Aquinas JV girls' soccer team to a 12-4 record last year, has replaced Greg McMaster.

"This team should have won the sectionals last year," said Page, who has also coached youth soccer in the summer for the past 15 years. "This year, our goal is at least that."

The Little Irish appear to have the players to support such optimism. Among the key returnees is senior left wing Lisa Messuro, who played for the scholastic West team in the Empire State Games this past summer.

Also returning are seniors Kim Mason, Molly Meagher, Beth Kelly, Mary Radford and Christy Prame as well as sophomore Michelle Khuns.

The only big question mark for the team is who will play in goal. Last year's net-minder, Katie Byrne, will return for her senior year, but she is battling senior Cindy Smith and sophomore Mary Beth Bell for the starting spot.

"I think the strength of the team is their experience," Page said. "Most of the girls (starting) have played for four years."

And with 90 players going out for the varsity and JV soccer teams, he added, the team will have a deep bench.

Aquinas has a rugged schedule this year, with games scheduled against traditionally strong Pittsford Sutherland and Livonia — and a rematch against Mendon. In addition to those non-league games, AQ will play

league rivals Bishop Kearney, Mercy and Nazareth at least twice.

Kearney and Mercy may give the Little Irish a battle for the league title, but — barring serious injuries — Aquinas appears to have the players to retain the league crown and to go far in sectional play.

The first test of the season will come in the opening round of the Brockport Tournament on Friday, Sept. 7, when Aquinas faces Sutherland.

Depending on defense

Bishop Kearney (10-6-3) suffered a grueling 1-0 loss to Honeoye Falls-Lima in the finals of the Section 5 Class B tourney last year.

This year, the Kings must contend with a different kind of loss: seven players to graduation. Among the key players who have moved on are Kris Laboski, the team's leading scorer, Dede Gause, Michelle Pecor, Stephanie Fame and goalie Kathy Pero.

But third-year coach Leo Teerlinck predicts that his Kings will be competitive near the end of the season.

At this point, the defense boasts the team's strength, the coach said, with seniors Mandy Darlak, Holly Bham, Beth Maring, Courtney Weber and Melanie Sztanko as well as sophomore Janet D'Agostino returning.

Teerlinck is also looking to Darlak, D'Agostino and sophomore Megan Shackelford for scoring punch.

How quickly new players can take up the slack left by those who graduated will dictate whether the Kings will contend for the league title, and how far they will go in the sectionals.

Overpowering on offense

Our Lady of Mercy (8-7-2) lost eight seniors to graduation — including Leslie Hyatt and the team's second-leading scorer in Amy Doyle — but fans of the Monarchs can take comfort in one fact: Sheila Doyle is back.

The younger Doyle, who will be a junior this year, led the team in scoring last year with 22 goals even though she frequently drew two or sometimes three defenders.

Fifth-year coach Kathy Boughton predicted that if opposing fullbacks try to key on Doyle this season, they will hurt their chances of beating Mercy.

"I don't mind them putting two players on Sheila, because they will free someone else up," Boughton said.

Those "other players" this year will include senior Julie Fasso as well as juniors



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Aquinas soccer player Jill Hutchinson keeps her eye on the ball during an Aug. 29 scrimmage against Gates-Chili High School.

Carol Ganey and Maureen McCarthy.

Also returning for Mercy are junior goalie Ellen Lennox, senior sweeper Krista Nesta and junior halfback Gabby LaMagna.

In the past, the Monarchs were noted for their scoring. Boughton predicted that with her current lineup, the team could average four-to-five goals per game.

The difference for Mercy this season could be the defense. "Our defense is going to be a lot stronger, a lot faster this year," Boughton predicted.

If Boughton's assessments are correct, the Monarchs could also give Aquinas a strong fight for the league title. Mercy could also improve on its showing in the sectionals after losing in the first round of last year's Section 5 Class A tournament to Hilton, 3-1.

Making the move up?

All of the victories for Nazareth Academy (4-8-1) last season came against non-league opponents. First-year coach Dave Prophet is hoping that this year's Lasers will pick up a few wins against league opponents.

But Nazareth will have to accomplish that with a relatively young team — and limited play from standout Liz Sawyko. Sawyko, a junior who led the team in scoring last year, is currently undergoing therapy for a knee injury she suffered over the summer.

Nazareth will also be without Renee Gambetta and goalie Rory Cottrell, who both graduated last June.

Nazareth was scheduled to start its season against Harley-Allendale Columbia in the HAC Tournament Sept. 5.

Back to the basics

After a year's hiatus, DeSales will field a varsity girls' soccer team this fall.

Under first-year coach Greg Lavin last year, the Saints played a JV schedule after an 0-13-1 season at the varsity level in 1988. Lavin, who played Division 1 soccer for Colgate, guided the JV team to a 2-10-1 record while trying to rebuild the program.

"The talent was there," Lavin noted, "but it wasn't developed."

Lavin spent last year going back to the basics with his players. This year, he said, "Everybody knows what to do and why. I think that the biggest thing I've given the team is some purpose."

How well his players can implement those lessons will be revealed Sept. 11 when the Saints travel to Romulus for a

Finger Lakes West League contest.

DeSales returns most of its standouts from last season, including sophomore and leading-scorer Krista DeVaney; sophomore Michelle Liberatore, the team's top defender; and senior Danielle Boncaro, who Lavin said was the team's most valuable player.

Also returning are senior Megan Jenkins, juniors Holly Sears, Sarah Peters and Kim Long, and sophomores Cecelia McCann and Alicia DeVaney.

The team is still unsettled at the goalie position. Boncaro played in the crease part of last season, but moved out into the field where she was needed more, Lavin observed. This year, Lydia Fernandez and Heather Otis are contending for the job.

The Saints will be young, with 16 of 22 players either sophomores or freshmen.

"Right now, I think we're a better team than we were at the end of last year," said Lavin, who hopes his team can come away with a few victories this fall.

Winning with Weber

Elmira Notre Dame (10-5-2) was seeded second in last year's Section 4 Class C Tournament. But hampered by the injury of goalie Sandi Pace, the Crusaders lost in their opening-round game to Trumansburg, 3-0.

This year, Notre Dame must contend with the loss of Pace due to graduation. Also graduated are three of the team's four fullbacks — including Kathy Lynch, who earned All-Sullivan Trail Conference honors last year. Therefore, defense may be a problem area for fifth-year coach Steve Weber.

At least Weber will not have to worry about his offense.


Returning this year are seniors Jenni Fagan and Melanie Crisco, who finished second and third, respectively, in STC scoring last fall.

Weber will be starting three freshmen this year, and he will also alternate goalies. Senior Erin Kernan and junior Becky Sherman will both see time in the goal.

The ND coach is also looking to juniors Theresa Gardner and Bobbi Jo McMail to play key roles this season.

In Weber's first four years, Notre Dame has steadily improved with four wins in 1986, followed by seven in 1987, eight in 1988 and 10 victories last year.

"I think this team has an opportunity to be as good as the team last year," he predicted.



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