

New role, same results for Mercy graduate

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

SYRACUSE — She went from being a team co-captain last fall to a rookie this summer.

One thing that hasn't changed, however: wherever Melanie Heeder goes, she winds up on championship teams.

"I've been lucky," remarked Heeder, who graduated from Our Lady of Mercy High School in June.

Yet it takes more than luck to qualify on your first try for the talented Empire State Games Western region women's open-division soccer team. Heeder was one of three newcomers to play for Western, which enjoyed a supremely successful week. The squad won all four of its games from Aug. 4-7 to take the ESG gold medal in competition held at Syracuse University.

Nine months prior to the Empire State Games, Heeder played on her second Section 5 Class A title team in three years at Mercy. She finished with 18 goals and 22 assists for the 1993 season, and scored the clinching goal during an overtime shootout in the Monarchs' 2-1 win over Brockport in the sectional semifinals.

Although she didn't get any goals at the Empire State Games, the 18-year-old Heeder received an ample amount of playing time as she competed among several more experienced women's soccer stars.

"I still get nervous. I don't want to do anything to mess the team up," she said.

Heeder said her teammates have been a calming influence for her. "These people are so nice and so much fun to be with," she commented. "And I'm really learning a lot. They just play a completely different kind of soccer than I've ever played."

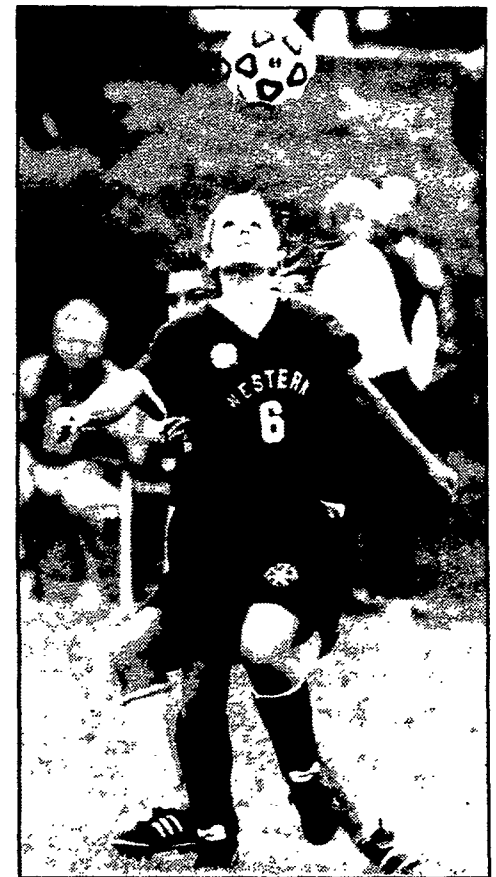
Heeder also took part in ESG competition held last summer in Rochester, helping the Western women's scholastic team to a bronze medal. This fall, Heeder will take her talents to the Division I college level at St. Bonaventure University, where she has agreed to a full athletic and academic scholarship.

Meanwhile, she'll spend the rest of August relishing the ESG accomplishments of her Western team, which recorded victories of 3-0 over Hudson Valley, 1-0 over Adirondack and 4-2 over New York City before winning 3-0 over Long Island in the gold-medal game held Sunday, Aug. 7.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Melanie Heeder, an Our Lady of Mercy High School graduate who played for the Western region in the Empire State Games at Syracuse University, dribbles the ball away from an Adirondack player during an Aug. 5 game.



Heeder keeps her eye on the ball during the Western team's 1-0 win over Adirondack Aug. 5.

More ESG gold

Several other athletes with ties to Catholic high schools and colleges in the diocese earned ESG team and individual gold medals. These champions included:

- **Mike Montesano**, who played for the Western men's open basketball squad which captured the gold. Montesano is a McQuaid Jesuit High School graduate who now plays guard at LeMoyne University. He made a key contribution in Western's third-round game on Aug. 6, scoring 15 points in a 107-98 win over New York City.

- **Ben Wandtke**, a senior-to-be at McQuaid, who came up big for the gold medal-winning Western men's scholastic team. Wandtke, a forward, helped Western advance by scoring 21 points in a 121-72 second-round triumph over

Central on Aug. 5.

- **Adam Lehmann**, who is also entering his senior year at McQuaid. Lehmann was a goaltender on the Western men's scholastic soccer team which took home top honors by knocking off Hudson Valley, 3-1, in the Aug. 7 gold-medal contest.

- **Larry Pierce**, a McQuaid junior-to-be, who played forward for the Western scholastic gold medal-winning ice hock-

ey club. Western posted a 4-0 record during the week, outscoring its opponents 25-8.

- **Renee Rombaut**, a Cardinal Mooney High School graduate, who gained a victory in the first-ever ESG women's half-marathon. She recorded a time of one hour, 20 minutes and 28 seconds over the 13.1-mile course.

- **Kim Schneider**, a recent graduate of Nazareth College, who won gold medals in the women's open 100-meter butterfly and 100 freestyle swimming events. Schneider earned one NCAA Division III national championship and nine state titles during her career at Nazareth.

Benefit dinner for ex-boxer to take place Aug. 18

ROCHESTER — Former world heavyweight boxing champions Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier will appear at a benefit for fellow heavyweight George Chuvalo on Thursday evening, Aug. 18. The event will take place at the Mapledale Party House, 1020 Maple St.

Chuvalo, a former Canadian boxer who fought both Ali and Frazier, has endured a series of family tragedies in recent years. Proceeds from the Rochester dinner will be put toward a trust fund for Chuvalo's family, as well as St. Joseph's Villa in Greece.

Several additional guests from the boxing world are scheduled to attend: broadcaster Larry Merchant, who will serve as master of ceremonies; former world welterweight and middleweight champion Carmen Basilio, who now resides in Irondequoit; ex-world feather-

weight champ Willie Pep; and *Boxing Illustrated* publisher Bert Sugar. Also appearing will be veteran local toastmaster Jerry Flynn.

Tickets for the Aug. 18 banquet are still available at \$50 each. They can be purchased by stopping at the Mapledale Party House or by calling Tony Liccione at 716/964-3077.

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