



Fall Sports

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Girls' soccer programs generate titles, respect

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Who's got the better athletic teams; Catholic or public high schools? The question can easily generate several hours' worth of heated discussion.

However, there wasn't much to debate regarding the success of several Private-Parochial League girls' soccer teams last year.

The league contains only five squads: one non-Catholic school, Harley-Allendale Columbia, and four Catholic-school programs. Two of those Catholic schools — Our Lady of Mercy and Bishop Kearney — enter the 1996 season as defending Section 5 champions.

These programs have emerged only recently as dominant forces. Mercy won its first Section 5 Class A title in 1991, but has since added Class A crowns in 1993 and 1995.

Kearney followed a similar route. BK earned its first sectional title in 1993, taking the Class CC championship; and then captured the Class CCC title just two years later.

A third Catholic school in the league, Aquinas Institute, was a Class A finalist in 1992. The Little Irish also reached the Class BB semifinals in both 1994 and 1995, and finished with a 13-7 record last year.

Further illustrating the league's strength, Nazareth Academy, despite going winless against Mercy, BK and Aquinas last year, still compiled an 8-3-2 record by winning the bulk of its non-league games.

Mercy head coach Kathy Boughton said that Private-Parochial teams have kept pace with the expanding interest in girls' soccer in the Monroe County area.

"Soccer is the sport that's grown at such a rapid rate. The competition has gotten so tight that in my program, kids have to train year-round now," Boughton said.

Paul Forte, head coach at Bishop Kearney, noted that non-league opponents don't find too many breathers when they meet up with Private-Parochial opponents.

"We bang heads with each other, and that makes us stronger when we go outside of our league," Forte said. "We've earned the respect of a lot of teams. They like to play us because they know it's going to be a good game."

But as Boughton noted, her team's success has made it harder to schedule games with Monroe County League schools.

"Sometimes the county is hesitant to play us," Boughton acknowledged.

That's a far cry from the league's reputation 10 or 15 years ago, Boughton said, when "everyone would play you."

Forte noted that the Kings' 1993 and 1995 sectional titles have helped attract new talent to the BK program — which may help prevent the recent wave of Private-Parochial success from ending any time soon.

"The kids read the paper; they see which teams win the championships," he commented.

"Success breeds success," Boughton agreed. "Once you win, kids want to come to your program."

Entering 1996, it appears quite possible that Mercy and Kearney will rise to the top once more. Both squads return their top 1995 play-off scoring performers, each of whom was selected to the All-State first team.

Mercy features forward Abby Wambach, a junior who scored 39 goals last year. She starred in last year's Section 5 Class A title game, scoring two goals as the Monarchs pulled off a stunning 3-2 upset of previously undefeated and untied Greece Athena. The Monarchs advanced to the state semifinals and finished with a 21-2-1 record. They are also the defending league champions.

Kearney is led by senior forward Sandy Moll, who scored the winning goal in both the 1993 and 1995 sectional title games. BK knocked off Marcus Whitman, 2-1, in last year's Class CCC championship contest. The Kings went on to reach the state Class C quarterfinals and posted a final record of 18-5-1.

Other programs in the diocese further evidence growing success for girls' soccer.

In the Southern Tier, Elmira Notre Dame reached nine consecutive Section 5 semifinals between 1986 and 1994. ND won the sectional Class C title in 1993 and is also the defending Sullivan Trail Conference co-champion.

Meanwhile, in the Finger Lakes, Geneva DeSales ended a 73-game winless streak in 1993. By last season, the Saints had improved to a 5-12-2 record.