

JUNIATA FIELD HOCKEY

Coaching change the least of Juniata's challenges

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AT A GLANCE

**JUNIATA
FIELD HOCKEY**
District 6, Class AA
Coach: Becky Loy

MIFFLINTOWN — It's no secret that some years are more difficult than others in scholastic sports. Becky Loy, the new coach to Juniata field hockey, would probably be quick to agree.

Loy — who grew up playing field hockey at West Perry High School, went on to be part of two national championships at Old Dominion, and since graduation has spent time coaching and officiating field hockey — knows the sport. However, this year at Juniata High School, Loy will face the whole new challenge of coaching a team of 12 players — four of whom spent all or part of the preseason injured.

It's true, with low numbers and injured players, it might be a tough season for Juniata field hockey. Add onto that the fact that Loy is the sixth coach in as many years for the team, and the outlook seems even more grim. However, despite all indicators that Juniata will face a tough season, Loy and team keep their heads high.

"I try to make it fun, and I want them to learn stuff," Loy said, keeping a positive attitude about the upcoming season. And from the way Loy describes preseason practices, those goals are already being achieved.

The girls on the team may be small in numbers, but already they have demonstrated a heroic effort in keeping a positive attitude, remaining flexible and working with what they have to make the best of the season.

One way in particular that they have impressed Loy is by their willingness to try

new, unfamiliar positions on the field.

"The team's great," Loy said. "They're willing to try new positions, and they know ahead of time that if I'm like, 'I need you here,' they step up and they try to do the best that they can do."

The minimum number of players a team can play in field hockey is eight, which may be what the team has come opening day. As a result, the girls don't have the luxury of preferring one position over the other — they simply have to play where ever they're needed at any particular moment, but Loy has been proud to see how willing her girls are to be flexible in that regard.

"When I ask them to do something, they try to do it," Loy said. "And that's all I can ask for the kids."

A good example of the willingness to play different positions is sophomore Katie Searer, who volunteered to be goalie for the season. Loy said Searer is a skilled player who could play either on the field or in goal, but because Searer stepped up and volunteered to take the position, she'll be the one in front of the cage this season.

But it has not just been a story of one player stepping up for the team — the whole team has been stepping forward to make this season work. Loy seems especially proud of the way the girls have begun to work together during practice. As the only coach, Loy can only do so much at a time, but the girls have been working together



Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

Members of the Juniata field hockey team are, from left, front, Alayna Clark and Jenn Yetter; middle, Katie Searer, Katie McLaughlin, Hannah Kauffman and Nala Brackbill; back, Elizabeth McClure, Makenzie Bishop, Minna Digon, Jenn Houtz, Jessie Wagner, Megan Yeager and coach Becky Loy.

to make practices as productive as possible.

"I actually have the kids critiquing the other kids," Loy said. "If I'm working with someone, that means (the others) still know what they're doing."

Last year Juniata lost eight seniors to graduation. This is a heavy loss considering it represents two-thirds of this year's roster. However, Loy has been pleased with the way she's seen this year's upperclassmen stepping into leadership roles.

Although seniors Jenn Yetter and Alayna Clark were both sidelined in the preseason, Loy has noticed that her juniors are filling in as leaders of the team.

"I haven't really elected captains, but I see (the upperclassmen) taking the lead," Loy said.

As Juniata approaches the beginning of the season, Greenwood, Newport and Line Mountain promise to be tough competitors in the Tri-Valley League. But, Loy doesn't plan to approach the tough competitors differently than she would any other team.

"I'm going to prepare for each game the same, to go out and do the best that we can do," Loy said.

But regardless of final record, Loy has one thing in mind for the team.

"As long as they learn something that they can walk

away with this year and that they feel like they went forwards and not backwards — that's a successful season to me," Loy said.

And already, before the season has even begun, it appears as if Juniata is on its way to achieving that goal.

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