

BELLEVILLE MENNONITE FIELD HOCKEY

Alum succeeds veteran coach; looks to turn tide

By **JEFF FISHBEIN**

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BELLEVILLE — Talk about change.

Belleville Mennonite starts the season with a new field hockey coach for the first time in more than a decade. The Thunder starts the fall with the nickname the school selected last spring.

And for what likely will be the last time, the smallest field hockey school in the commonwealth will contend for a District 6 title.

That's a lot to absorb for a first-time field general, especially one who graduated from the same school a scant three years ago. Meredith Foote — Spicher in her playing days — takes over for Glenna Young, who led Belleville Mennonite through strong times and lean.

But it may not get any leaner than it has going into this season.

"We were talking about that with the Huntingdon coach," Foote said. "She said, 'There's none of us in this anymore.'"

When Foote played, Belleville Mennonite won a district crown, upending Indian Valley — which no longer exists due to the merger that formed Mifflin County High School. That one also took Lewistown out of the pool; this year's co-op between Juniata and East Juniata means District 6 has but three Class AA field hockey teams: the Thunder, Huntingdon and Southern Huntingdon (Forbes Road, which represented the district in the state bracket a year ago, plays through from District 5).

And that means, more than likely, the PIAA will strip District 6 of a state berth and send the teams elsewhere for

AT A GLANCE

BELLEVILLE MENNONITE THUNDER

District 6, Class AA

Coach: Morgan Foote, assisted by SaraLynn Byler

inter-district play when a new cycle begins next fall.

Foote isn't looking that far ahead. She and assistant SaraLynn Byler — a 2008 grad of the school — are fixated on turning the tide from a team that lost most of its games a year ago.

"We're pushing. We're pushing those girls harder than they expected," she said.

The team starts the season down just two — Hannah Templeton and Rachel Anders were the lone seniors a year ago — but the tally going into September is just 14 players. And that assumes a new student from Korea arrives in time to join the squad.

"It can be frustrating because, not having many numbers, they don't have to work to get on the varsity team. They just are on the varsity team," Foote said. "This year we had two new girls that have never played hockey before. One of them was our manager so she knows the basic rules. I'm going to probably have to start one of them."

The Thunder has to play an



Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

Members of the Belleville Mennonite field hockey team are, from left, front, Leah Peachey, Hyojae Jung, Melissa Yoder, Tori Byler, Lex Fogelman, Meredith Spicher and Becky Kauffman; back, Alexis Peachey, Tori Gallaway, Bekah Yoder, Hannah Yoder, Mollie Morgan, Sydney Renninger and Alex Bookamer.

independent schedule — Foote played when the Susquehanna Independent Athletic Conference offered more of a field hockey slate — which means a lot of games against the same teams. Belleville Mennonite is playing a pair of home-and-homes against Forbes Road, for example.

There is some reason for confidence. Mollie Morgan is back in the cage, and a strong defender returns in Becky

Kauffman.

"She's going to play a key role. She's one of those players you can put anywhere," Foote said. "On offense, we actually have a lot of girls — we had to push some girls off the front line because we had too many."

Meredith Spicher and Tori Byler are expected to be scor-

ing threats, along with freshman Leah Peachey.

"I have been very impressed with her work ethic so far and how coachable she is," Foote said. "I'm blessed with a good team this year that does listen to me."

Because the team is largely starting from scratch — and there is no separate JV team

to offer learning time — Foote said the drills began with the very basics. She's hopeful that by infusing new ideas she and Byler learned in their post-secondary careers, they can add life to the program they came from.

"We have different drills,

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