



Girls soccer: County aims for Hawks

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Girls soccer preview

River Hill is talented, but others have title designs

Mention the River Hill Hawks to any other soccer team in the county and watch them start salivating. Everybody wants a piece of the perennial county and state champs.

Maybe this year, those teams might get a good bite. After all, Player of the Year Erica Suter has graduated. Gone, too, are her county-high 19 goals.

Oh, the Hawks just "always reload with an amazing amount of talent," Marriotts Ridge coach Robin Grey said.

But there is a chink in the Hawks' armor. Brittany Yancey, who was right behind Suter in the scoring department, had anterior cruciate ligament surgery and won't be back until Sept. 9, coach Brian Song said. Teams are checking their schedules, hoping their play date comes before Yancey returns to full strength.

That's not to say that River Hill can't win without her. Amy Song, with the most dangerous throw-in in the state, headlines a core of returning starters who are very healthy.

"I told the team that everyone will be after us and our goal is to ... not take any opponents lightly," Song said.

But Song does say that team depth is a "little light." Yet, he added, "The expectation that I have is no different this year." That means he expects this team to win.

Other teams have a strong nucleus of returning players.

"The county seems as strong from top to bottom as I have ever seen it," said Jack Thomas, who is temporarily wearing the head coach's hat at Centennial.

Wilde Lake has a stunning lineup but, like River Hill, has a huge question mark. Midfielder Faryn Watts, who plays on the same club team as Yancey, also had ACL surgery. She's been cleared to play, coach Phil Webster said, but, like Yancey, no one can predict how quickly she'll return to last year's form.

Mt. Hebron has a healthy Rachel McKee and Glenelg has impressive defender Ellie Axenfeld and Marriotts Ridge has probably the best goalkeeper in Samantha Olson and...

Well, as Thomas said, "No one will be an easy win."

"That is Howard County soccer for you. ... The amount of talent that resides in all of the teams in this county is unbelievable," Grey said.

But until proven otherwise, River Hill is the team to beat.

Motherhood

Kristen McManus won't be on the Centennial sidelines for a few weeks. Volunteer assistant coach Jack Thomas will be there instead, giving McManus some time to bond with her newborn daughter.

At Marriotts Ridge, a very pregnant Robin Grey will start the season but will take a baby break in October. She hopes to be back in time for the playoffs.

Top picks

Want to watch potential Player of the Year candidates? Check out Centennial's Amanda Mathews, Mt. Hebron's Rachel McKee, River Hill's Amy Song and Brittany Yancey and Wilde Lake's Faryn Watts and Kristina Jackson.

As the season begins this week, here's how the teams look:

Atholton

(5-4-1 county, 8-5-1 overall in 2007)

Top players: Senior Rachel Aronchick (F); junior Lizzy Parr (MF); sophomores Bridgette Snyder (MF) and Ayanna Carter (D).

What you need to know: The Raiders will again be competitive in the county and regional arena -- if they can fill the void left by two-time all-county keeper Jocelyn Papciak. Aronchick and Parr also need to put away a lot of goals.

Freshman Amy Weinberg has been tapped to fill Papciak's shoes and another freshman, Adriana Vitagliano, will help Carter on defense.

"We are definitely playing better than last year. We are playing together better and attacking faster," coach Stephanie Stoutenborough said.

Centennial

(9-0-1, 11-4-1)

Top players: Seniors Amanda Mathews (F) and Molly Standeven (D).

What you need to know: The Eagles' mascot should be changed to a carpenter because there is so much rebuilding to do. Centennial graduated three first-team all-county picks and will need the leadership of Mathews and Standeven to rebuild.

"If we are to compete in this very strong league, a host of youngsters have to develop," coach Jack Thomas said.

Mathews "has the talent to be a Player of the Year candidate, but she will need the support of an emerging group behind her. ... Last year she had a habit of scoring big goals for us. The hope is she can continue that," he added.

Glenelg

(6-4, 12-7-1)

Top players: Juniors Ellie Axenfeld (MF), Kristin Schmidbauer (MF) and Hope LaHayne (MF/D).

What you need to know: The Gladiators return three starters and are still fitting together the puzzle pieces, which is exactly where the team was last year at this time. Not to worry, though. Glenelg went on to win a Class 1A state championship.

"I think we have the potential to be as good as last year," coach Dean Sheridan said. "With eight new starters, we have a lot to learn but by the third week of October (as the playoffs start), we could be the same class and caliber as last year."

Among the newcomers is freshman keeper Brooke Carey. It took her just three days to earn a starting position. "She's going to be good," Sheridan said.

Hammond

(1-10, 2-12-1)

Top players: Seniors Kim Humpert (F) and Cathlene Webster (HB); junior Cristina Maldonado (GK, HB).

What you need to know: Coach Pete Di Marco believes his team will improve on last year's record. "We have great speed at forward and a solid midfield. We need to remain consistent and stay away from injuries."

Humpert led the Golden Bears in scoring in 2007 and should get lots of opportunities created by Webster. Maldonado's versatility will be a plus. The Bears also got a break when sophomore defender Amanda Mercer who reportedly was moving out of the Hammond district, returned for another year, Di Marco said.

Howard

(5-5, 7-8)

Top players: Seniors Carrie Groman (MF) and Katelyn Striebich (MF); juniors Nicole Clark (MF) and Alyssa Kozlowski (D); sophomore Julia Cocozza (F).

What you need to know: Coach Michele Osterberger's Lions will surprise teams, just like last year. "I am pleased with how we look now. We are playing well as a team which is what we will need to do in order to be successful," she said.

Clark and Kozlowski return to anchor the team. But the Lions have lost one veteran, junior goalkeeper Kathleen Rohrback, who has Lyme disease and won't be playing this fall, Osterberger said.

Long Reach

(0-10, 4-11)

Top players: Seniors Sam Brown (F) and Megan Johnson (MF); junior Nicole Snell (MF).

What you need to know: Long Reach didn't win a county game last year, but coach Josh Webster is optimistic. Prolific scorer Brown (13 goals, five assists) leads a veteran team that has eight seniors and five juniors. The program also has a deep junior varsity team, for a change.

Webster said the team's goal is "the best season in the history of the program. This team is not looking for a captain to lead them. Each and every one of them has taken on the responsibility of turning this team into a winning program."

Webster notes that sophomore Abby Kramer could make an impact on the team but laments the loss of another sophomore, Katie Haarer, who has torn her ACL.

Marriotts Ridge

(4-4-2, 8-7-2)

Top players: Juniors Samantha Olson (GK), Marissa Goon (D) and Shelby Shoen (MF).

What you need to know: As a two-year-old varsity program last year, this team was impressive, if a bit inconsistent. But all the leaders from that team are now gone.

Coach Robin Grey said the team needs new leaders to step up. Will it be Olson, Goon and Shoen, or someone else?

This team is "still looking to make a name for ourselves in the county. My girls are set and determined to prove themselves to anyone and everyone. Practices have been more intense. The skills are there. The big question is will the leadership emerge?"

No one can take this team lightly.

Mt. Hebron

(4-5-1, 7-8-1)

Top players: Senior Rachel McKee (F); juniors Kathleen Stafford (D) and Michelle Sentinella (D).

What you need to know: Rachel McKee. She played only four or five games last season because of an ACL injury and scored six goals and added three assists. She has the potential to take the county by storm. Jess Giles can also score. They could be a powerful 1-2 punch.

"We will be better than last year," coach Tim Deppen said. "Three of our four defenders have been playing together on varsity for three years now and Rachel McKee will be healthy for the whole season."

Mt. Hebron has the potential to play a huge role in determining the county champion.

Oakland Mills

(2-7-1, 3-8-3)

Top players: Senior Dana Wiedel (F); sophomore Anna Kiely (D).

What you need to know: Wiedel needs to control the offense and Kiely must organize the defense, but the impact player might be goalkeeper Rajani Ghosh. She's a senior who follows in the footsteps of second-team, all-county keeper Margo Santiago, who kept the Scorpions in many games last year. Veteran Clara Bacmeister, the team's top scorer in 2007, will likely miss the season because of a torn ACL, said coach Susan Rosner.

Freshmen who need to mature quickly include Mary Grace Grandfield (MF), Sarah Owen (F) and Nicole Twardowicz (GK).

"In order to be better we will truly need to share a common goal and sense of team," Rosner said.

Reservoir

(3-6-1, 4-10-1)

Top players: Seniors Brooke Romm (CMF) and Lyndsey McKeown (F); junior Kelsey Reiff (F).

What you need to know: A new coach -- Josh Sullivan -- might give the Gators the lift they need to become competitive again. He inherited a program that lost only one senior. Still, the Gators, with six sophomores, are young.

"I think the talent is there to really do something special, but we need to come together and play as a team in order to reap the benefits," Sullivan said.

"I think it all starts on defense. We're looking really for our defense to shut teams down and start a solid transition," said Sullivan, who also becomes the school's new head boys basketball coach this winter.

River Hill

(9-0-1, 18-1-1)

Top players: Seniors Brittany Yancey (MF), Amy Song (D), Kathryn Rodgers (MF), Becky Perrault (D) and Semret Seyoum (MF).

What you need to know: To be the best, you first have to beat River Hill. If Yancey (14 goals, 13 assists) returns to form after ACL surgery, beating the Hawks will be very difficult. With her knack for scoring big goals, and Song's dangerous throw-in, River Hill has a powerful offensive punch. Both could be Player-of-the-Year candidates.

Just be sure to bring your A game and then some if you want to beat the defending county and Class 2A state champs.

Wilde Lake

(9-2, 15-5)

Top players: Seniors Faryn Watts (F), Caitlin Duff (MF), Kristina Jackson (MF), Bethany Keefer (MF) and Grace Koplow (GK); junior Beth Glaros (D).

What you need to know: Watts, who had 13 goals and eight assists in 2007, had ACL surgery. Still, Wilde Lake returns perhaps the strongest core of players in the county. With new head coach Phil Webster aboard, they want another shot at a state title -- and a county title as well. This team could wrestle River Hill for county bragging rights if Watts returns at full strength. Both Watts and Jackson have Player of the Year potential.

Chapelgate

(3-5 IAAM B Conference, 8-5 overall)

Top players: Juniors Allie Kohr (F) and Kelly Stambaugh (GK); freshman Kristin Thomas (D).

What you need to know: The Yellowjackets lost five seniors last year, all starters. This year they need Kohr and Stambaugh to be the leaders. "We need Allie to score and we need Kelly to stop the scoring," new head coach Kable Cunningham said. Thomas is strong and "fits right in," she added.

Chapelgate has already played two non-league games, beating Key, 6-0, and losing to CHEN, 1-0.

Glenelg Country School

(IAAM C Conference; record not available)

Top players: Senior Jackie Plant (D/MF/F); junior Olivia Weinrub (MF/F).

What you need to know: The Dragons have just one season of varsity fall soccer under their belts, so this could be another rough season as they suffer through growing pains. Also new to the program are co-coaches Lionel Francis, who coached the boys team for four years, and Christy Mink. Francis said the girls program is going to need another year before "I can feel comfortable" saying the team can give the conference leaders a challenge. "I'm hoping by next year we will have a solid team."

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