

Young Eagles ready to fly right now



Lakes High's Ashley Chernich booted in three goals in Saturday's 6-0 Class 2A regional championship game win over Grayslake Central.
(Michael Schmidt/News-Sun)

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With only one senior on its roster, no plaques in its trophy case and two of the school's best players not competing this season, there wasn't much reason to think that Lakes High's girls soccer team wasn't at least a year away from making noise in the IHSA state tournament series.

While it wasn't a sonic boom, the Eagles did some major squawking on Saturday with a 6-0 thumping of visiting Grayslake Central to claim their first-ever regional championship and earn a berth in Wednesday's Class 2A Grayslake Sectional semifinals.

"We know we have a chance to be a real good team next season with the players we have coming back, but we aren't thinking about that right now," said junior striker Ashley Chernich, who tallied three goals in Saturday's win.

"Our motto after every game now is that we want to be 'Playing in June.' That's when the state finals are, and that's where we want to be."

Chernich helped the Eagles (14-7-1) take a big step towards making it to state with her hat trick performance against the Rams. The junior had been struggling finding the back of the net in recent contests before breaking out in a big way on Saturday.

It was Chernich's career-best 13th, 14th and 15th goals of the season for the Lakes' team leader, who also tallied 13 goals last season as a sophomore.

"When Ashley gets in the right position and the ball gets at her feet, you can see the power she has and the ability to put up some big numbers," said Lakes coach Kevin Kullby. "That's what makes her a special player."

Chernich wasn't the only one playing well in the regional title contest, as playmaking teammates Ashley Neubeck, Emily Mason, Brittany Mooney, Rebecca Hill, Michelle Kosmen and Meghan Mulloy, the team's only senior, kept the pressure on Grayslake Central the entire game.

Junior backers Kristina Umlaug, Alyssa Baker and Sarah Bartlett helped keep Rams' forwards away from freshman keeper Ashley Downing, who earned her fifth shutout of the season since replacing the injured Sarah Fitzpatrick.

"When Sarah first went down, you could see our team's psyche drop a lot," said Kullby. "But with Ashley doing so well lately, everyone's confidence has grown right along with hers."

It's a confidence which has grown enough for the coaches and the players to think that they can turn around a 4-0 defeat on May 6 at the hands of North Suburban Conference Prairie Division rival Vernon Hills in just a few days when they meet the Cougars (12-6-2) in a sectional semifinal on Wednesday at 3:30 p.m..

If not, Lakes can look ahead to next season and the possible joining of club soccer stars Kecia Morway (an University of Notre Dame signee) and Alex Neal to the squad.

Not so fast, says Kullby.

"You don't know what those girls are going to do, and you don't know how the season is going to unfold," he said. "You have to take advantage of the opportunities when you get them, and since we are playing in (middle enrollment) Class 2A this season instead of with the big schools like we've done in the past, we have an opportunity right now to go a long ways."

Prep Girls Soccer