

Rec Sports Spotlight: Gamber lax mastering MYLA Junior B Division

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The Gamber 1 girls' travel lacrosse team has been around quite a long time, almost 10 years as a matter of fact. But until recently, it had been only a so-so player in the Maryland Junior Lacrosse League.

But Gamber has broken out the last two years. The Jennifer Hawks-coached Gamber team lost only once in the regular season last year. And that is one more loss than it had after this year's regular season when it rolled to a 10-0 record in MYLA's Junior B Division.

Gamber was eliminated in its first playoff game last season. But this season's post season has gotten off to a much better start. Last Sunday Gamber topped Havre de Grace 14-7 in its first-round playoff game and looks forward to a lot longer postseason ride.

Hawks, the team's head coach since its first game eight years ago, says that one reason for the improved performance of the past two years is the fact that the players are used to playing as a unit.

"We've had an opportunity to play together a long time, and this allows the players to feed off of each others' strengths," she said. "Five have played the whole eight years, and 10 have played with the team the past five years."

This year's edition is a rather young team for the MYLA Junior Division. Most of its players are in the sixth and seventh grades and compete in a division in which many are a year or two older. Even so, Hawks felt her team would do well.

Her confidence was fortified when Gamber opened on the road April 1, and beat Catonsville 13-7 on its home field.*

"After that game, I felt we'd made the right decision to move up to the Junior Division," Hawks said.

That became more and more apparent as the season went on.

The Gamber kids won all 10 of their regular season games by comfortable scores. The closest any opponent ever got to them in the final score was five goals, and that happened only twice. In eight of the 10 games, Gamber at least doubled the final score on its opponent.

It easily outscored the rest of the teams in the division and allowed far fewer goals than any of them.

A lot of the reason for the team's sudden success was the fact that the girls jelled as unit. But that wasn't the only reason.

"There was a lot of depth on this team, so we could use the whole team in any situation," Hawk said. "We found the position where the players were best and played them there. But we also moved them around to play other positions when the score allowed."

The frequently comfortable leads allowed the coach to move her players around.

However, despite their spectacular regular season success, Hawks didn't want the girls to get too relaxed coming into the playoffs. She reminded them of what happened in last year's first playoff game.

"I told them that each game is a new game. They couldn't take anybody for granted and that everybody wanted to beat an unbeaten team," Hawks said.

Gamber's opening game was against Havre de Grace, which it beat 16-6 in the regular season. And her kids made very sure that the Harford County squad would do little better this time around.

Havre de Grace did jump ahead 2-0 in the game's opening minutes, but Gamber quickly retaliated. At halftime, it led 8-3, and would pull away to an easy 14-7 win.

"Once they get into their rhythm, they played their normal game that they know how to play," Hawks said.

And that meant curtains for their opponent. The playoffs soon continue, and Gamber is scheduled to play South Carroll I in a semifinal game around the middle of this week.

It coach is confident that her team has the talent to go deep into this postseason tournament. It all depends on the intangibles.

"If we continue to play as a team and feed off of each other's strengths, we'll be fine," Hawks remarked.

Her daughter Emma, who plays defense and midfield, likes Gamber's chances, too.*

"Our team has a good chance of winning (a championship). We've worked very hard and come together," Emma said. "We are very well together as a team."

It only has to do that for two more games.

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