



FEATURE STORY

CAN THEY WIN IT ALL AGAIN? ESTRELLA FOOTHILLS GIRLS SAY YES

PHOENIX, AZ (Jan. 21, 2010) – The girls soccer team from Goodyear Estrella Foothills High enjoyed the view from the top last year after winning the Class 3A/2A/1A winter championship.

The Wolves liked the feeling so much that they plan to stay in the No. 1 spot for as long as possible.

Entering the week of Jan. 18, Estrella Foothills had an 18-2 overall record and No. 1 on the Arizona Interscholastic Association's power-points list.

It would have been no surprise if the team had slipped a bit after the departure of coach Joe Rhoades. But the new coach, Kathy Fox, and assistant Steve Petty helped the players adjust and have them playing at a high level.

"We told them that this season would be a lot tougher than last year, because every team was going to be out to beat us, that we would be a target," Fox said. "But we have a good group of seniors (six, a third of the roster) and they are determined not to have the team fall back."

The most prominent seniors are the two captains, Sydney Patton and Amy Bishop, as well as Kayleigh Oreskovich and Gabby Wingfield.

"We were excited and a little nervous last year, because we had never been past the first round," said Oreskovich. "But we won state and we want to do it again. The fact that everybody wants to beat us makes us want to play even harder."

One of the main objectives is for the team to try and score a few goals early in games, "then have kind of a snowball effect, keep them coming," Oreskovich said.

Wingfield has been one of the keys to the Wolves' defense.

"She really knows what she is doing," Oreskovich said.

There still is a lot of work to be done before the start of the state tournament. Losses to two bigger schools, Goodyear Millennium and Prescott, in a tournament hosted by Scottsdale Notre Dame Prep, gave the Wolves an idea of areas where they can show improvement.

"We need to be on the offensive, work the ball quicker because those bigger schools had the speed on us," Fox said. "We need to make better decisions with the ball, be more aware of the options we have."

Younger players such as Patton's sister, Elyse, a freshman, have made important contributions.

"When you start playing varsity, you want to go out there and give everything you have. You don't want the other players to doubt you," Elyse Patton said.

"We need to be working on our passes more, making them legit and on the spot. Once we get that down, we are going to be even better. We do a lot of talking on the field, and that's what you need to do. If you don't communicate, you're not going to do as well."

Communication includes adjustments during the game and the break between halves.

“That’s one of the things that are the most fun,” Elyse Patton said. “We sit in the circle and talk about what we need to do to improve. We joke around sometimes. You don’t want to have a lot of stress.”

Trying to balance schoolwork with practice sometimes can be stressful, but Elyse Patton said she and her teammates have done a good job with that.

“Coach has emphasized getting good grades,” she said. “If we are slipping, there is tutoring available to help us.”

Estrella Foothills meets Phoenix Northwest Christian, the team it defeated for the title last year, in the regular-season finale on Jan. 28. Despite a 3-0 win over Northwest Christian earlier this season, Fox knows this game won’t be easy, which is a good thing because it will help prepare her team for the state tournament.

“We might even switch a few things up, let some of the players play different positions so the other team and those who might be looking at us (scouting) might not get too good of an idea about us,” Fox said. “We want the girls to enjoy it, make soccer fun.”

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