

Wildcats optimistic about girls soccer season

By Tommy Keeler Jr.
The Northern Virginia Daily

FRONT ROYAL—Warren County's girls soccer team may be young this season, but that doesn't mean expectations are low.

The Wildcats have 11 freshman and sophomores on the squad and coach Erly Moya said he likes the team he has.

"We're very young this year," Moya said. "We have a lot of freshman and sophomores. They're good players — both freshman and sophomores. I think we might not win state, but we're going to try to go as far as we can."

The Wildcats do have some key pieces returning from last year's squad led by senior defender Kaley Foulks. Senior forward Megan Dennis and senior goalkeeper Kayleigh Hite are also key senior returners.

Foulks said that conditioning will be important with only 17 players on the squad. "We do not have that many numbers this year but we're making the best out of it," Foulks said. "We're going to condition, condition, condition and learn how to work together as a team. Luckily, we have a lot to build off of from last year."

The Wildcats started off slow last season, but improved as the year went on and began to have success.

Moya, in his second season as head coach, said that he thinks the players learned what he and his coaching staff wanted from them as the season went on and that should help them start out of the gates



Foulks



Moya

WILDCATS, B3



Rich Cooley/Daily

Strasburg's Nyla Sperry, center, gives teammate Karly Colcombe a pat on the back after the Rams fell short of Maggie Walker during the Class 2 state quarterfinal Friday night in Quicksburg.

Heartbreaking loss

Rams fall to Maggie Walker in state quarterfinals

By Brad Fauber
The Northern Virginia Daily

QUICKSBURG — Strasburg junior Jaden Alsberry said that for just a quick second, the Rams may have forgotten what they were supposed to be doing.

It's hard to fault them for that. The moment she was referring to was to that point the biggest play in the closing seconds of the biggest game any of the Rams had taken part in as members of Strasburg's girls basketball program.

Alsberry had just fielded a lob from teammate Nyla Sperry and converted a critical bucket in the lane, one that gave Strasburg a one-point lead over Maggie Walker

RAMS, B2



Rich Cooley/Daily

Strasburg's Christyan Reid and Maggie Walker's Kaitlyn Campbell battle for the ball during Class 2 state quarterfinal Friday night in Quicksburg.

Hornets' postseason run has raised expectations for program



Photo courtesy of Shenandoah University

Shenandoah University head coach Melissa Smeltzer-Kraft holds up the net that the Hornets cut down after winning the program's first Old Dominion Athletic Conference tournament championship on Feb. 24 at the Salem Civic Center. The Hornets, who went 16-14 this year, will try and build on their first winning season in nine years in 2019-20.

By Robert Niedzwiecki
For The Northern Virginia Daily

Turning the ball over 29 times and having your opponent score 30 points off of those turnovers is not an enjoyable experience.

The intense full-court pressure that the DeSales University women's basketball team applied in its 77-49 win over Shenandoah University on Friday night in the first round of the NCAA Division III Tournament is just one thing from the last couple of weeks that is going to help the Hornets grow as a program, though.

In a phone interview on Sunday, SU women's basketball coach Melissa Smeltzer-Kraft said there was definitely no shame in losing to DeSales, which is located in Center Valley, Pa.

The Bulldogs (27-2 and winners of 22 straight games) are ranked 15th in the country by d3hoops.com, and they advanced to the Sweet 16 by following up their win over SU on Friday with a 70-55 win over Middlebury College on Saturday.

Smeltzer-Kraft, who graduated from Drew University in New Jersey in 2007 and played against DeSales, believes this very well might be the best team 29-year DeSales head coach Fred Richter has had. This is his 11th NCAA Tournament team and first Sweet 16 team.

Against SU, the Bulldogs went on a 22-0 run that lasted from the 1:38 mark of the first quarter to the 4:09 mark of the second quarter to take a commanding 42-11 lead.

"They're probably the

toughest team I've had the privilege of going against as a coach or a player," Smeltzer-Kraft said. "And I can't think of a better thing for a team with all but one kid returning to experience and talk about and grow over the offseason. "Just that high pressure. [DeSales] kids were fit. They were prepared. They did the simplest things at the highest level. So I think it was a good thing to face that [pressure]."

Friday's game was Shenandoah's first in the NCAA Tournament in 19 years. The Hornets had not advanced past the ODAC quarterfinals in their first six years in the ODAC prior to their stirring run to the ODAC Tournament championship this year.

Eighth-seeded SU had a losing overall re-

HORNETS, B3

CLASS 1 GIRLS SOCCER STATE SEMIFINALS

One more goal to go

Generals advance to Class 1 state final

By Tommy Keeler Jr.
The Northern Virginia Daily

RADFORD – As the time was ticking off the clock, Stonewall Jackson senior Virginia Biller couldn't contain her emotions.

One of only two seniors on Stonewall Jackson's young girls soccer squad this week, Biller said it started to hit her exactly what her team was about to accomplish – playing in a state championship game.

"I had tears in my eyes when there was three minutes left in the game because we were ahead and it's unreal," Biller said. "It's like I can't believe we're here but I completely believe that we're here. It's like I know we have it in us to be here and I know we deserve it but it's still so incredible. It's very exciting. I cannot wait 'til the morning."

Stonewall Jackson faced a little adversity Friday but responded well.

The Generals found themselves in a tie game, but scored again within a minute and held on for a 3-1 victory over Eastern Montgomery in the Class 1 state semifinals. The Generals will play Auburn, a 4-0 winner over Rappahannock County in the other semifinal, in today's final at 9 a.m. at Christiansburg High School. The site of the championship game was moved due to the weather.

Biller said that when the game was tied at 1-1 with about 23 minutes left in the first half, it was a bit of a wake-up call for her team.

"When they scored on us, we had a little bit of a 'wait a second' moment," Biller said. "We're not too used to this. Then we kicked it in gear. We started at-



Rich Cooley/Daily

Stonewall Jackson's girls soccer team celebrates after a 3-1 victory over Eastern Montgomery during the Virginia High School League Class 1 semifinal match Friday at Radford University.

tacking. We pressured; cleared it; got it up there."

Stonewall Jackson sophomore Kylene Franklin scored the game's first goal on an assist from Biller just six minutes into the game for a 1-0 lead.

"I saw the opening and I took it," Franklin said. "It went right between the goalie's hands and it felt good. It definitely gave our team that boost to be able to push us through the rest of the way."

The Mustangs (14-3) were able to tie the game at 1-1 with 23 minutes left in the first half on a goal by Yesenia Mercado. Stonewall Jackson sophomore goalkeeper Lilly Proctor had the wet ball but it slipped right through her hands and into the goal in rainy conditions.

"That was very frustrating to Lilly (Proctor) but she really rallied," Stonewall Jackson coach Ginny Dellinger said.

"Lilly played a great game today. Once that went in, she dug in and decided that there were not going to be anymore. So I was happy about that."

Less than a minute later, Stonewall Jackson sophomore Brooke Jones scored to give the Generals a 2-1 lead.

"We don't like to lose," Biller said. "We don't like to be behind, and when we get a little kick in the butt like that, we are all full steam ahead."

The Generals (19-4) said they struggled getting used to playing on the turf field at Radford University's recreation fields, and the steady downpour that was going on in the first half did not help. However, the Generals were able to control the action much more in the second half.

"I think we got a break (at halftime) and

GENERALS, B2



Rich Cooley/Daily

Stonewall's Kylene Franklin, right, and Eastern Montgomery's Mackenzie Kidwell fight for position as they get into a footrace for the ball.

Depth, versatility paying off for Stonewall

By Tommy Keeler Jr.
The Northern Virginia Daily

RADFORD – Stonewall Jackson girls soccer coach Ginny Dellinger preaches to her team that they need to be able to play multiple positions, and this week it is paying off.

Stonewall Jackson's Casey and Morgan Gibson are out of town this week on a vacation cruise. Dellinger has had to make adjustments to her lineup without the two valuable starters but the squad hasn't missed a beat in advancing to today's Class 1 state finals.

"I try very hard to have almost everybody be able to play two positions," Dellinger said. "Because I feel like with injuries, sickness ab-



Rich Cooley/Daily

Stonewall's Katie Jordan positions herself to make a kick as Eastern Montgomery's Shae Davis defends.

sences, vacations you're going to run into situations where somebody is going to have to play not where they're maybe most comfortable or their best."

Dellinger said she tries to take advantage of every opportunity she gets in the regular season to move her players

DEPTH, B2



Rich Cooley/Daily

Stonewall's Madison Wright collides with Eastern Montgomery's goalkeeper Maddie Smith on a scoring attempt Friday. Eastern Montgomery's defense was able to thwart the attempt on this play.

CLASS 3 STATE SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT SEMIFINALS

Bitter endings

Hawks' slow start proves costly in tough setback to Turner Ashby

By Tommy Keeler Jr.
The Northern Virginia Daily

SALEM — Skyline's softball team got off to a slow start on Thursday and couldn't recover.

The Hawks fell to Turner Ashby, 11-0, in the Class 3 state semifinals held at the James I. Moyer Complex.

"We're a team where when we're up we can stay up, but once we get down, we have trouble coming back," Skyline senior catcher Rachel Sirbaugh said. "We're a good team. We're not an 11-0 loss — that's not us at all. We didn't play our best, but that's all right. We had fun while doing it. We never gave up and that's all I can ask for."

The Knights scored four runs in the bottom of the second, aided by two Skyline errors, and didn't look back.

Turner Ashby's Mackenzie's Cyzik reached on an error and Sydney Lyons was hit by a pitch from Skyline pitcher Emma Benson. The bases were then loaded with no outs as Benson's throw to third on an attempted fielder's choice was not in time.

Turner Ashby's Bailey Fulk drew a walk to score Cyzik and give the Knights a 1-0 lead. A sacrifice fly RBI by Gracie Moyers made it 2-0. The Hawks intentionally walked Turner Ashby's Carley Davis to load the bases again. The Knights scored two runs on a force out at second and a throwing error.

"The last five, six games we played we hadn't made (any errors)," Skyline coach John Ritter said. "It's not like us to throw the ball around but it happens. You learn from it.

...Sometimes you tend to press and when you press you can let yourself make mistakes. And I think they got to pressing a little bit."

The four-run lead was more than enough for Turner Ashby pitcher Makayla Cyzik. The senior, who has signed to play at Winthrop University next year, struck out the first 11 Skyline batters she faced.

"I think we just got in our head early," Sirbaugh said. "She is a good pitcher but she wasn't unhittable, by any means. I give credit to her though because she had a career game, I'm sure, with all those strikeouts. I think we just got in our head and let her overpower us."

Makayla Cyzik finished with 16 strikeouts and allowed only one hit, a bunt single by Taylor Bowers in the fifth inning.

Ritter said his team wasn't patient at the plate, especially when Makayla Cyzik was throwing her rise ball.

"We knew the rise ball was coming," Ritter said. "We just had to lay off of it and we didn't. She pitched a great game. She's a good kid. It's just one of those things where we could have been a little more disciplined at the plate than what we was."

The Knights (23-4) added two more runs in the bottom of the sixth on a two-run single by Paige Eavers and then added five more in the bottom of the sixth.

"We just didn't play well," Ritter said. "I hate seeing that for the four seniors. Not a good game to not play well but it happens."

Turner Ashby was led



Rich Cooley/Daily

Skyline's outfielders Abbey Lee, left, and Alana Smith run down a fly ball that hit the ground during the third inning of Thursday's state semifinals. Skyline lost its game with Turner Ashby 11-0.

at the plate by Makayla Cyzik and Lyons with two hits each. The Knights will play Liberty-Bedford, a 5-1 winner over Warren County in the other semifinal, in the Class 3 state championship today.

Sirbaugh said she was still proud of the way the team played throughout the season.

"I told them in the huddle they're the best team I've ever been a part of," she said. "No drama, everybody loved everybody. Every win was a team win for sure."

It was the second straight year the Hawks lost in the state semifinals, and Ritter said he was proud of his team for making it back.

HAWKS, B2



Rich Cooley/Daily

Skyline's Emma Benson, Grace Benson, Lexi Clatterbuck, and Rachel Sirbaugh regroup at the pitcher's mound during second inning action.

Warren County's early deficit too much to overcome in loss to Liberty

By Kip Ritenour
For The Northern Virginia Daily

SALEM — Warren County couldn't come up with the big hits it needed against lefty ace Millie Thompson of Liberty, falling 5-1 to the Minettes in the Class 3 state semifinals at Moyer Complex in Salem.

The loss ends the Wildcats season at 21-3. Liberty will face Turner Ashby in the finals. The Knights defeated Skyline 11-0 in the other Class 3 semifinal.

"They left it all on the field," said Warren County coach Ted McDaniel. "In my 19 years of coaching, I've never been so proud of a team."

Liberty, which advanced to the state semifinals last year and will also be making its first state championship game appearance, jumped on the Wildcats and senior pitcher Elizabeth Keener in the bottom of the first for three runs.

Lead-off hitter Taylor Ariees started the inning for Liberty (22-6) with a single to left-center off a 3-2 pitch.

After a fielder's choice put Riley Taylor on first, Keener struck out Kacey Whorley for the second out. But Liberty then strung together four consecutive hits to



Rich Cooley/Daily

Warren County's Morgan Coons walks off the field in disappointment after the Wildcats were defeated by Liberty Bedford 5-1 during the Class 3 softball state semifinals Thursday morning at Moyer Complex in Salem.

put the Lady Cats in a 3-0 hole.

"We came out tight in the first inning," McDaniel. "We couldn't make the big play."

Two of the Minettes' hits were infield singles. "My location was a little off in the first," Keener said. "They are a really good team, and we just didn't get the big hit at the right time."

Meanwhile, the Wildcats had little success against Thompson, a junior who has already committed to play for

Clemson.

Thompson sandwiched three strikeouts in the first inning around Hailey Stiltner's one out opposite field single to left.

Savannah Haffer singled for the Wildcats in the second with two outs and advanced to second on a wild pitch, as did Stiltner in the first inning.

Again, the Wildcats couldn't get the big hit with two outs against Thompson.

Warren finally broke

through in the third as Ramsey Young started the inning with a single to right.

Morgan Coons followed with a walk, and Stiltner executed a perfect sacrifice bunt to move both runners over the base.

Jayda Saulsbury's grounder to third allowed Young to score. But Coons was left stranded at second as Keener popped out to second.

Liberty tacked on two big insurance runs



Rich Cooley/Daily

Warren County's first baseman Savannah Haffer can't get the ball in time to get an out on Liberty-Bedford's Gracie Dooley.

in the fifth as Gracie Dooley and Thompson delivered back-to-back RBI hits with two outs.

All five of Liberty's runs came against the Wildcats with two outs. "We settled down a little after the first inning," Keener said. "But,

yes, they are a good hitting team."

Warren threatened in the fourth as Alegend Baltimore-Lance produced a one out single, but Thompson struck out Haffer and retired

WILDCATS, B2