

RETURNING TO THEIR ROOTS

Colgan trio will represent El Salvador at U-17 event

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

They arrived in El Salvador filled with uncertainty.

Could Colgan's Cassie Villafan, Anika Berger and Mia Arevalo-Delcid still represent the Central American country in the upcoming Concacaf Under-17 Women's Soccer Championship?

Or had the moment passed?

They had been so close before – only to see COVID cancel the tournament in 2020 and then postpone any future involvement throughout 2021. Now another shot beckoned.

Of the three, Arevalo-Delcid had first crack when, for 2½ weeks from February to March, she played for El Salvador at the Concacaf U-20 championships.

Her performance did two things: It helped El Salvador post its highest finish (eighth) since the tournament's inception in 2002 and it secured Arevalo-Delcid a U-17 roster spot.

Berger and Villafan, however, attended a week-long U-17 camp in late March believing they still needed to prove themselves. Berger was extra nervous. She suffered a torn ACL during Colgan tryouts in April 2021 and still wore a brace to protect her left knee.

Once the camp concluded, both players anxiously waited for head coach Eric Acuna to post the official roster. But nothing came. Instead, Berger and Villafan left El Salvador with these parting words from Acuna: "I will see you back in April."

That's all they needed to hear.

When El Salvador opens group play April 24 against Guatemala in the Dominican Republic, it will feature all three Colgan girls, along with Unity Reed freshman Amy Angel, as the only Virginia players on a 20-member roster split between domestic and international participants.

El Salvador has never advanced beyond the group stage since Concacaf held its first U-17 Women's Championship in 2008. But by expanding its pool of prospective players into the U.S., Acuna hopes to elevate the program to a new level.

The approach also benefits the American players. They will represent a country where their parents are from and where family members still live. And they will compete on an international stage that might otherwise have not happened.

After first gaining exposure at a tryout held in Woodbridge more than two years



Colgan soccer players (from left) Cassie Villafan, Mia Arevalo-Delcid and Anika Berger.

COURTESY

LOCAL PLAYERS COMPETING FOR EL SALVADOR



AMY ANGEL

NAME	HIGH SCHOOL	YEAR	POSITION	EL SALVADOR CONNECTION
Amy Angel	Unity Reed	Freshman	Center midfielder	Both parents were born there
Mia Arevalo-Delcid	Colgan	Junior	Forward	Her father and her maternal grandparents were born there
Anika Berger	Colgan	Junior	Midfielder	Mother was born there
Cassie Villafan	Colgan	Sophomore	Defender	Mother was born there

ago, they'd navigated an up-and-down journey to reach this point. Now, the wait is over.

"We're excited we are going together," Arevalo-Delcid said. "We have stuff in common. And we get to share that together on the same field."

MAKING CONTACT

Ruby Bermudez of Prince William Soccer Inc. set all this in motion after two coaches from the El Salvador U-17 program initially contacted her in 2019 to ask her daughter, Noracelina, to join the team.

The coaches learned about Noracelina after a family friend shared a Facebook post of her playing soccer. The coaches saw the post and followed up with Bermudez.

While thrilled for her daughter, Bermudez saw an opportunity to take things one step further.

Well connected in local soccer circles through her role as Prince William Soccer Inc.'s director of member relations, Ber-

mudez told the two coaches to consider tapping into the local market. In an area heavily populated by people with El Salvadoran roots, Bermudez knew there were other players here like Noracelina for the coaches to evaluate.

In the past, the El Salvador coaches scouted players in places like California. But based on Bermudez's recommendation, they added Virginia to their itinerary.

Once the coaches agreed to come, Bermudez got to work. She and her husband sponsored the two coaches. Through a friend of hers who runs an adult soccer league, she set up a three-day tryout for prospective players in October 2019 at George M. Hampton Middle School in Woodbridge. And she provided the necessary equipment to hold the tryout.

Most importantly, though, she communicated information about the tryouts to her intended audience. Word spread quickly among the tight-knit group of

COLGAN » PAGE 24

CONCACAF UNDER-17 WOMEN'S SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP

APRIL 23-MAY 8 IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

DEFENDING CHAMPION: The United States. The Americans have won four of the six Concacaf titles since the first tournament in 2008.

PAIRINGS: El Salvador is in Group H with Haiti, Guatemala and Cuba. Haiti is Group H's top seed
EL SALVADOR'S FIRST GAME: April 24 vs. Guatemala

MOVING ON: After round-robin play, the top three teams in each group advance to the 16-team knockout stage

ROUND OF 16: Begins Saturday, April 30

SEMIFINALS: May 6

FINAL AND THIRD-PLACE MATCH: May 8

The top three finishers advance to represent the region at the 2022 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in India

DID YOU KNOW? El Salvador has never advanced beyond the Concacaf group stage since the U-17 Tournament began in 2008

players and their parents with El Salvadorean roots.

The tryout's turnout confirmed Bermudez's expectations, drawing over 100 girls from as far south as Richmond and as far north as Maryland.

Villafan and Arevalo-Delcid arrived unsure why they were there in the first place. Berger was skeptical, but remained curious. All understandable. This was a new experience for them. At the time, Berger and Arevalo-Delcid were 14 and Villafan 13.

The cold, rainy weather didn't help the setting either. But once the tryouts began, the players grew more comfortable as they displayed their technical skills in front of the coaches.

The players performed drills like small-sided games to test their shooting and finishing abilities on the first day and then participated in a full field scrimmage the second day.

On the third day, the coaches brought back the players they planned to invite to training camp in El Salvador. Told they'd made the cut, Berger, Villafan and Arevalo-Delcid responded with a mix of shock, confusion and excitement.

"I made what?" Villafan remembers thinking.

RAISING THEIR GAME

To compete for El Salvador in the 2020 U-17 Concacaf Championship, the girls needed to become dual citizens by verifying their relationship to someone from the country. All three were born in the U.S., but each had at least one parent originally from El Salvador.

To help streamline the process, the girls received assistance from the Woodbridge-based Consulate General of El Salvador, a branch of the country's Washington embassy.

They faced some unexpected obstacles. In comparing Arevalo-Delcid's birth certificate with her mother's, El Salvador questioned why Arevalo-Delcid's last name did not have a space between Del and cid like her mother's. Delcid is her mother Siomara's maiden name, but Siomara spelled it with a space between "Del" and "cid." To straighten everything out, Siomara updated her daughter's birth certificate by adding the space.

The pandemic provided another unplanned obstacle. The U-17 Concacaf Championship is usually held every two years. But in March 2020, Concacaf announced the cancellation of the tournament, which had been scheduled for April 18-May 3 in Mexico.

With things up in the air, El Salvador wanted to stay in touch with the players it selected from the U.S. by holding a training camp in November 2020.

Of the 20 girls who made the cut after the original tryout, eight were invited to the training camp, including the three Colgan girls, Angel and Noracelina. This would be the first trip to El Salvador for Arevalo-Delcid and Berger. Villafan last visited the country when she was 6 months old.

By now, Acuna had taken over the El



Mia Arevalo-Delcid (left) has scored 10 goals this season for Colgan.

BILL KAMENJAR|FOR INSIDENOVA

Salvador women's program. Although the pandemic halted any future get-togethers, Acuna still planned on bringing in outside players to elevate El Salvador into a contender once Concacaf scheduled the next tournament.

Although Noracelina eventually aged out, the three Colgan girls were still young enough to compete for the next U-17 Concacaf Championship if it took place in 2022.

Establishing an immediate rapport with the girls, Acuna helped ease their transition with his encouragement and passion. The relationship only grew stronger over time.

"He made you feel comfortable," Berger said. "He didn't put a lot of pressure on me. He kept saying, 'You will get another chance.'"

The girls faced no major language barriers. Of the three, Villafan is the most comfortable speaking and hearing Spanish. Berger and Arevalo-Delcid speak some Spanish, but are better at understanding it.

The girls said the biggest adjustment practicing for El Salvador was the faster pace and more physical style of play. The ball moves quickly as players are expected to promptly find the open space.

During their two sessions in El Salvador, in 2020 and earlier this year, they also dealt with an intense practice schedule. They trained everyday two hours in the morning and in the afternoon and spent another hour either in the gym or scrimmaging.

The demanding timetable boosted each

of the girls' confidence in a game they already excelled at.

All three started for Colgan as freshmen. Villafan, a 16-year-old sophomore defender, and Arevalo-Delcid, a 16-year-old junior forward, have regularly started this season, while Berger, a junior midfielder who turned 17 in January, is easing back from her injury.

The girls will miss a minimum of four regular-season games for the Concacaf tournament, but will come back in time for the postseason to help Colgan (6-0 in Cardinal District, 8-1-1 overall through Wednesday) make a realistic run at the state title.

The Sharks, who haven't reached states since the school opened in 2016, return nine starters from last season's 10-1 regional semifinalist. This season, they've defeated 2021 Class 6 state runner-up Patriot and region finalist Battlefield, while tying defending state champion South County.

Five members have committed to colleges, with four at the Division I level, including Arevalo-Delcid (James Madison University), who led the team with 10 goals when she left for the Concacaf Championship. Another player, sophomore Kamryn Winger, attended the U.S. Under-16 Women's Youth National Soccer Team training camp April 8-18 in Portland, Ore.

"Mia, Anika, and Cassie are excellent players in addition to being young women of the highest quality and character," said Colgan head girls soccer coach Tom Warzywak. "They cannot be replaced, but



Colgan's Cassie Villafan (right) had a grandfather who was a standout semi-pro soccer player in El Salvador.

BILL KAMENJAR|FOR INSIDENOVA

we are fortunate to have many talented players competing for starting spots on this team, and we are comfortable starting any one of them."

FOR FAMILY

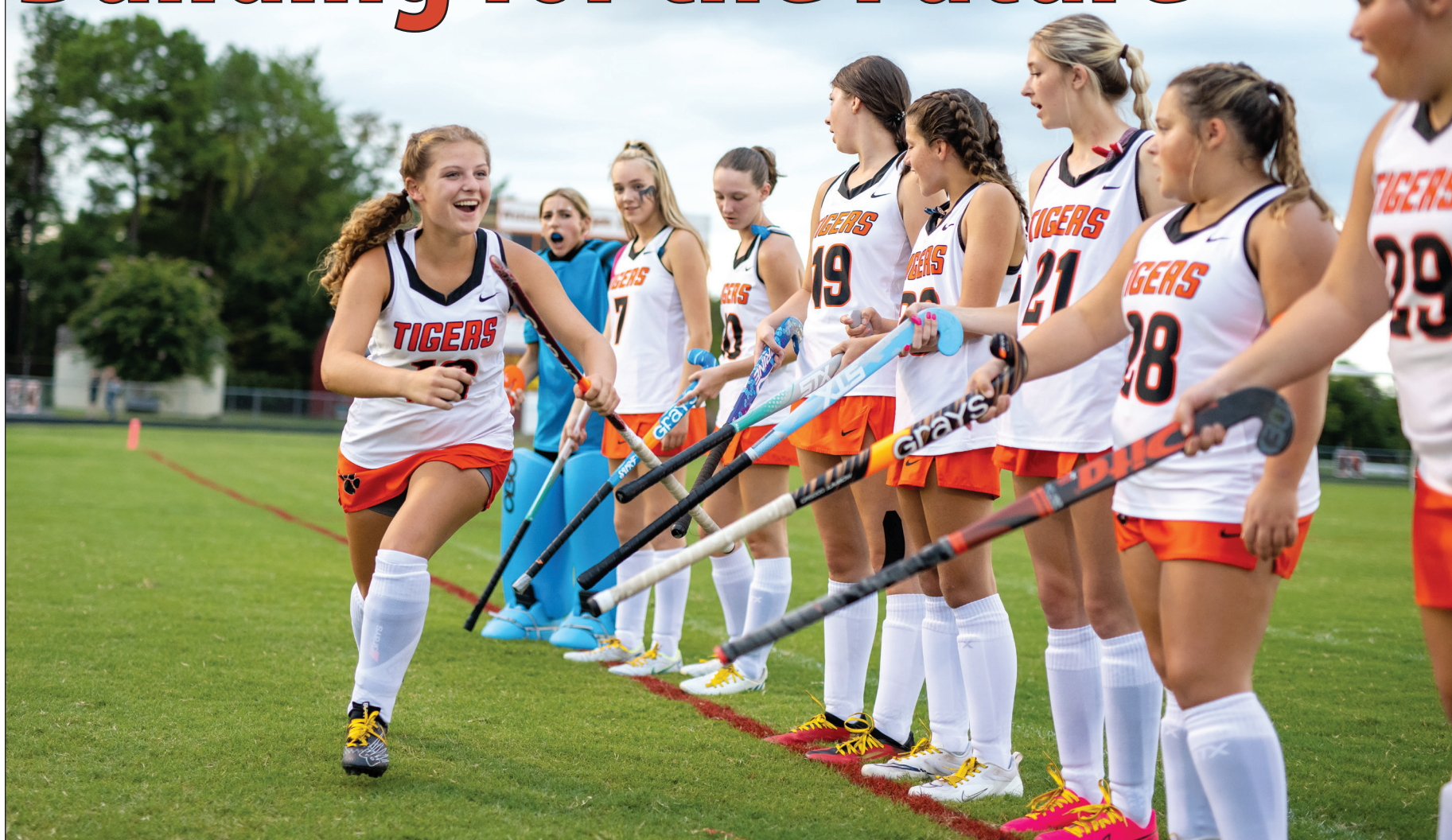
As they prepare for this moment, the girls remain committed to honoring their past.

Villafan mentions her paternal grandfather, Julio Chacon, a standout semi-pro soccer player from El Salvador. Arevalo-Delcid cites her surname. Berger highlights playing for El Salvador.

Soccer put them in this position, and it's a driving force for them to compete at this level. But they always remember their family of origin laid the foundation.

"This is such a big opportunity for us," Arevalo-Delcid. "Even though we live in the United States, [El Salvador] is still our roots. It's a big deal when you get to represent your last name."

Building for the Future



Brentsville's Lilian Mayes (16) shares her team's enthusiasm as her name is announced at the beginning of the Tigers' home opener Sept. 6 against Colgan.

DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

First-year program at Brentsville faces steep learning curve

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

The Brentsville High School varsity field hockey team spent most of its inaugural home opener in a familiar spot. The first-year program full of first-year field hockey players faced relentless pressure.

Whenever the Tigers tried to push the ball up the field, a more experienced Colgan team quickly countered and bottled Brentsville up in its end.

Watching this unfold from the sidelines, Tigers' head coach Tessa Yates and assistant coach Taylor Deeley did their best to keep the girls upbeat and on track as the steep learning process continued.

"Learn from it and fix it," Deeley yelled in what became her common refrain throughout the game.

"I want to see those sticks down," Yates reminded them.

At times, Brentsville remembered to close the gaps and block passing lanes. Other times, they forgot and gave Colgan too much space. And when they did, Colgan took advantage.

Brentsville allowed its first goal 90 seconds into the 15-minute first quarter. By halftime, they trailed 7-0.

When Colgan tallied its last goal late in the third quarter, the scoreboard was blank because its power had gone out. But the result was never in doubt. In another lopsided decision ended by the mercy rule in the third

quarter, winless Brentsville lost 10-0.

At this point, the Tigers had a choice: hang their heads or highlight the positives.

After the game, Yates gathered the girls in front of the Brentsville bench and began the team's post-game ritual of determining the game MVP. To keep it a mystery, Yates described the person without naming her.

"She brought the ball up the field nicely and did not give it away," Yates said.

Yates also said this individual played the whole game, in part, because she forgot to take her out for a breather. Then it was time for the big reveal: Yates asked for a drum roll and announced sophomore midfielder Marie Mambourg as the winner.

For her efforts, Mambourg received a ceremonial plastic light-bulb necklace adorned with Brentsville's black and orange colors to wear around her neck.

The girls issued a collective cheer that expressed their gratitude for everyone who supported the team. And then they dispersed for the evening.

The season was only two weeks old, but everyone saw the same thing: One more game. One more step in the right direction.

Brentsville head coach Tessa Yates (right) is a 2020 Osbourn Park graduate who played field hockey there and served as a team captain.

DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

GETTING STARTED

Near the end of the 2021-22 basketball season, Lilian Mayes, then a freshman, asked Brentsville activities director Seth Cameron about the possibility of starting a field hockey program.

Cameron was open to the idea. But before committing to anything, Cameron told Mayes to come up with a list of girls interested in trying out. A few years earlier, another girl had requested the same

FIELD HOCKEY » PAGE 25



thing, but it fizzled after no one else expressed a desire to participate.

This time was different after Mayes and her father, Chris, got to work. Less than a month after the initial proposal, Mayes gave Cameron a list of about 25 interested girls.

Cameron ran it by his principal, Katherine Meints, and began the next phase. He called around to see what equipment the school needed.

He also sought a coach.

Knowing Brentsville was starting a field hockey program, Kristen Barrickman had the perfect candidate in mind: Through family connections, Barrickman, who assisted her father Sonny with the Brentsville girls soccer team, remembered that Yates played high school field hockey at Osbourn Park for four years and wanted to someday become a teacher.

On the surface, Yates was an unconventional choice. She had never coached before and at the time was only 19 years old (she turned 20 in May).

Could someone who was just a year older than the high school seniors be responsible and reliable to oversee a high school team? Barrickman thought so.

“What better way to start a program than with a brand-new young coach so both Tessa and the program could grow together as one,” Barrickman said. “Every coach has to start somewhere.”

With Barrickman’s recommendation, Cameron reached out to Yates and asked if she was interested. Yates said she was. After Cameron posted the position, Yates applied.

The 2020 Osbourn Park graduate had flexibility in her schedule. After earning her associate’s degree at Northern Virginia Community College in the spring, Yates had planned on finishing her final two years of college by enrolling in Western Governors University, an online school based in Utah.

Staying close to home, something she preferred anyway, also helped her take care of her 1-year-old daughter, Lorelai. Plus, Yates loves field hockey. If this opportunity allowed her to stay connected

to the sport even better.

Cameron said he had initial concerns about her age. And Yates feared her age would negatively affect her chances. So understandably, Yates was nervous during her first interview with Cameron.

But her youth became a non-factor after Yates impressed Cameron with her passion and maturity.

Other people gave him names to check on as possible coaches, but each one declined to apply. At the time, Yates was Brentsville’s only applicant, but Cameron saw no reason to wait.

“She had an ease about her,” Cameron said. “And a light in her eyes. She knew what she was talking about.”

Yates expected shocked looks when people learned her age. She encountered that at her first Brentsville parent meeting in mid-May.

“You should have seen all [their] faces when I walked in,” Yates said.

But over time the parents saw the same thing in Yates that Barrickman and Cameron did. She carried herself professionally and left no doubt about her level of commitment.

“Her being this young, she’s good for this team,” said Joel Andrews, whose daughter, Alyssa, is one of the team’s three captains.

The girls were curious how old she was, but Yates kept it a secret. Knowing it would not happen, she told them she would reveal her age only if someone on the team scored enough goals to match it.

Some girls eventually figured it out when Brentsville played Osbourn Park on Aug. 29 and heard Yates say she remembered some of the Yellow Jackets’ seniors as freshmen. But the girls let it drop beyond that. They had no issue with her age. If anything, they liked that she was younger. It allowed her to relate to them on things like school or personal issues.

Most importantly, they wanted someone to teach them the sport with patience and understanding rooted in modest expectations. An older, more experienced coach might take a different approach and be too set in their ways.



Brentsville team captain Ainsley Clark (12) battles for a loose ball against a Colgan forward. DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA

Not Yates. She grew as they grew, and the girls appreciated her taking the time to instruct at the most fundamental level as often as necessary until the lesson sunk in.

“She’s like an old soul,” said senior Ainsley Clark, another team captain.

The addition of Deeley as assistant coach has helped complement Yates. Andrew Ssekikubo was supposed to serve as the assistant, but then took another job. A week before Aug. 1 tryouts, the 24-year-old Deeley came aboard after she attended a summer practice with Andrews, her sister.

Yates told Deeley she needed an assistant. It was perfect timing for a number of reasons.

Besides filling out the coaching staff, Deeley’s arrival gave Yates an ideal counterpart. Yates was more of an offensive player in high school, but Deeley, a 2015 Patriot High School graduate and all-conference performer who played field hockey at Arcadia University, is an expert on defense.

Together, they have formed a unit the parents have rallied around.

During a study hall before the Sept. 6 home opener, the parents gave Yates and Deeley black t-shirts with orange writing on both sides in honor of the school colors and history. On the front, the shirts cite the year Brentsville field hockey began and on the back is “IT BEGAN WITH US” with a list of players underneath and followed by the coaches’ names.

“The parents of this team are all so dedicated and involved,” Yates said.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Cameron and Yates expected to have enough players to field a varsity team. But on the first day of tryouts, Yates received a pleasant surprise: The Tigers had enough girls for a junior varsity team as well.

With only enough uniforms to fit the varsity team, Brentsville had to adjust on the fly by using the junior varsity girls lacrosse uniforms for the sub-varsity field hockey team.

Yates said Brentsville also forgot to or-

der a goalie pad and stick. And there was a grueling schedule to prepare for against bigger and more experienced schools.

The field hockey roster features numerous athletes, many of whom play lacrosse. But none had played field hockey before. To counter the inexperience, Yates and Deeley practice patience and measure success beyond wins and losses. Instead of overwhelming the girls with too much information, they try to implement a new technique or strategy.

Against Osbourn Park, for example, Brentsville worked on formations.

Brentsville improved in its next game against Meridian by pushing the ball mostly into the opponent’s side.

The highlights were fewer against Colgan, a Class 6 program that returned seven starters from last season’s state quarterfinalist. But they popped up, in some cases, at the most unexpected times.

“Did you see Ainsley air dribble the ball on the stick?” Deeley exclaims.

Freshman goalie Catherine Cleveland’s athletic saves also drew applause from the stands.

On Monday, Brentsville lost 5-0 to Unity Reed, but it was the Tigers’ first game that didn’t end because of the mercy rule.

Junior defender and captain Mollie Felder, who swims in the winter and plays lacrosse in the spring, decided to come out for field hockey because she sought a fall sport that was a “little more intense.”

Andrews, who did only competitive cheerleading last year outside of school, came out because it was her senior year and she wanted to play a sport at Brentsville one more time before graduating.

Cleveland wanted to play a fall sport as well. She considered volleyball but thought field hockey would be more fun and offer more opportunities.

One of three freshmen on the varsity, Cleveland said she wants to stick with field hockey. She likes the tight-knit family feel. It’s an atmosphere the older players have worked hard to create.

“It’s about relationships and building this program over the next few years,” Clark said.



Brentsville goalie Catherine Cleveland (4) shares a little joy with her teammates doing a little celebratory dance Sept. 6 against Colgan. DOUG STROUD | FOR INSIDENOVA



Organizations are struggling to recruit and retain referees at the high school and youth sports levels.

BILL KAMENJAR FOR INSIDENOVA

FRIDAY NIGHT LIMBO

Referee shortage disrupts schedules

» BY DAVID FAWCETT
dfawcett@insidenova.com

Five Prince William County high schools will have to play some of their home football games on either Thursday nights or Saturdays instead of Fridays this fall due to a shortage of officials.

After receiving schedules for schools already under contract with the Northern Virginia Football Officials Association, Larry Kendrick, the association's commissioner, informed the activities directors at Colgan, Forest Park, Freedom-Woodbridge, Gar-Field and Potomac on June 14 that he had room to handle some Friday night requests from those schools for this season.

But he could not accommodate everyone's wish to cover all of their Friday games, and the two other local referee associations were already booked.

The Northern Virginia association had at least one open spot for most weeks during the 10-game regular season that runs from late August to early November. The only unavailable Friday dates were Sept. 9 and Sept. 23. One Friday (Sept. 30) was completely open. The first Friday (Aug. 26) and Oct. 21 were non-factors since none of those five schools were home. Kendrick also had Friday, Sept. 2, open because most schools are playing the previous night due to the Labor Day weekend.

LOCAL FOOTBALL OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATIONS

- » **Bull Run:** Nine schools – Osbourn, Battlefield, Osbourn Park, Patriot, Gainesville and Unity Reed from the Cedar Run District, Brentsville from the Class 3 Northwestern District, Kettle Run (Fauquier County) in the Class 4 Northwestern District and John Paul the Great (private school in Dumfries).
- » **Northern Virginia Football Officials Association:** Covers 53 public schools in Loudoun, Fairfax and Arlington counties, the city of Alexandria and Falls Church and five Prince William County schools (Freedom-Woodbridge, Gar-Field, Potomac, Colgan and Forest Park). Also covers three private schools (Flint Hill, Potomac School and the NVHAA Centurions).
- » **Rappahannock Valley:** Covers 25 schools as far west as Culpeper, as far east as Warsaw, south toward Richmond and as far north as Woodbridge and Hylton in Prince William County.

The five schools hope to have their schedules ironed out by the end of this week.

Kendrick is trying to help anyway he can. Rivalries. Homecomings. Pep Rallies. Revenue from ticket sales. He understands why Friday nights matter so much to so many.

But certain realities make it impossible for the officials association to meet everyone's desires, especially in Prince William, a place close to Kendrick's heart. He graduated from Osbourn (now Osbourn Park) in 1975.

"I feel bad I had to do that, but I was bound by contracts," Kendrick said.

AN OFFICIAL CRISIS

Driving all this upheaval is a nationwide shortage of officials for high school and youth athletic events.

"It's not going to get better," said Kendrick, who has overseen the Northern Virginia association since 2019 and is entering his 48th year as an official. "Every year, we're losing officials."

On a national level, an estimated 50,000

high school officials left the profession between 2018 and 2021, said Dana Pappas, director of officiating services for the National Federation of State High School Sports.

Virginia had just over 7,000 officials this past school year, according to the Virginia High School League. That is up about 1,000 from the prior school year due to fewer COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. But overall, the numbers are down from the pre-pandemic years.

Due to the shortfall, some schools, primarily in southwest Virginia, are already switching their varsity football games to Thursdays or Saturdays.

Kendrick said the Northern Virginia association has dropped from 165 working officials in 2019 to 105 this season. Another local association, Rappahannock Valley, saw its numbers drop from about 110 to between 90 and 100.

The national federation held a consortium April 12-14 to discuss the issue. Although not the only reason, the group's 61 attendees identified poor sportsmanship as the primary reason why officials quit or why individuals show no interest

WANT TO BECOME A FOOTBALL OFFICIAL?

If you're interested in officiating local football games, reach out to the following organizations:

- » **Bull Run:** Commissioner John Joback, jjoback1@verizon.net
- » **Northern Virginia Football Officials Association:** www.nvfoa.com; commissioner Larry Kendrick: larry.kendrick@nvfoa.com
- » **Rappahannock Valley Website:** www.rvfoa.org; commissioner Eric Barnes: 106barnes@gmail.com

in becoming an official.

"The consensus was that this type of behavior has become normalized. Unfortunately, it is almost expected that fans – sometimes coaches and others – will disrespect the men and women who are serving as officials," wrote the federation's chief executive officer, Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff. "Along those same lines, there is a lack of respect for the role of an official – adding another deterrent to becoming an official!"

Time commitment is another reason organizations struggle to recruit and retain referees. Referees usually work day jobs and then have to officiate games in the evenings, as well as participate in training sessions. It makes for a long day.

Economics can play a role as well, but most people don't become officials for the money. Northern Virginia association crews receive between \$400 and \$500 a game, split among the referees working

OFFICIALS » PAGE 21

Agnos trying out for national team

Battlefield High School graduate Zach Agnos received an invitation Monday from USA Baseball to try out for the 2022 Collegiate National Team.

The national team training camp is June 30-July 4 in North Carolina. Agnos is among 48 to 50 players invited to the camp that will feature a five-game Stars vs. Stripes series.

USA Baseball will name a final, 26-man Collegiate National Team roster after the training camp. The team will represent the

United States at Honkbalweek Haarlem in the Netherlands from July 9-15.

Agnos' older brother, Jake, played for the Collegiate National Team in 2018.

Agnos, one of three East Carolina baseball players to start all 67 of the team's games this season, earned second-team ABCA All-Regional honors after hitting .330 (88 for 267) with seven home runs, 42 RBI and 56 runs scored. Agnos was also 3-0 as a relief pitcher with three saves in 21 appearances.



Battlefield graduate Zach Agnos was a first-team all-AAC shortstop for East Carolina this season. WWW.PETEWRIGHTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

OFFICIALS » FROM PAGE 20

the game, Kendrick said. Another local association, Bull Run, pays each of its officials \$100 to \$120 a game.

And the pandemic hastened the departure of older officials. Most officials in the local associations are 40 or older. Kendrick said his officials are typically in the 50- to 60-year-old range. Without an infusion of younger officials, the associations are left scrambling.

Ideally, the local official organizations want at least five on-field referees for each football game. Associations will provide a game clock operator as well unless the school wants one of their own staff members to handle that responsibility.

In some games last season, Kendrick said the Northern Virginia association used four on-field officials. But that made it difficult to keep up with pass-oriented offenses. Each association also wants to ensure quality officiating out of fairness to the players, coaches and schools.

"The game is moving a lot more versus when it was smash-mouth football," Kendrick said.

The referee shortage is forcing high school activities directors to juggle games and be creative with scheduling since the home team is responsible for providing referees. For example, Battlefield High School activities director Jason Koch said the Cedar Run District scheduled two field hockey matches last fall at the same site so they could use the same officials.

Spring sports such as baseball and softball that traditionally have played on Fridays often play on Thursdays instead. In some cases this spring, junior varsity softball games only had one umpire.

"Right now this is all so new and folks aren't grasping how real this is," Koch said about how the referee shortage is affecting scheduling and games themselves.

Prince William's bus driver shortage has only compounded the scheduling challenges. No buses are available to transport teams to games until 4:30 p.m. at the earliest. For sports like tennis and cross country that begin earlier in the afternoon, parents often have to drive athletes to the events.

Some local coaches have even acquired their commercial driver's license so they



"It's not going to get better. Every year, we're losing officials."

— LARRY KENDRICK,
COMMISSIONER OF THE NORTHERN
VIRGINIA FOOTBALL OFFICIALS
ASSOCIATION

can drive team buses.

In dealing with the behavior issues, the national federation's Niehoff said one solution would be to institute a "broad-scale nationwide campaign that addresses behavior and respect. While sportsmanship is always front and center in high school sports, this emphasis will go beyond the general tenets of sportsmanship."

The Virginia High School League posts requests for new officials each week on its social media channels. The local commissioners help to spread the word as well.

The national federation has proposed targeting high school and college students, as well as women and minorities and military service members.

Better compensation might help too, especially with gas prices skyrocketing. All officials are independent contractors.

The referees' associations remain sympathetic to schools' plights, knowing there is only so much they can do under the current circumstances.

"Everyone wants to play on Friday nights," said Rappahannock Valley commissioner Eric Barnes. "That's where people make their most money. I wish I could help. I get it."

FIRST THINGS FIRST

To determine which schools received Northern Virginia association officials for this fall's Friday night games, Kendrick had to give priority to the other schools in its coverage area (Fairfax County, Falls Church, Alexandria, Loudoun and Arlington) that had existing multi-year



Football officials prefer having at least a five-person crew these days to keep up with pass-heavy offenses that stretch the field. BILL.KAMENJARFORINSIDENOVA

contracts with the organization. Loudoun is under contract through 2023 and the other four districts through 2025.

Prince William Public Schools and Osbourn, however, faced a different situation. Their contracts were up for renewal after expiring following the 2021 season. Kendrick said the Cedar Run District had a three-year contract with the Northern Virginia association and the five Cardinal District schools a one-year contract. Technically both ran out after the 2020 season, but each school received a one-year extension because the pandemic postponed the 2020 season into the spring of 2021.

In January, Kendrick emailed the five Cardinal Schools along with the six Cedar Run District schools from Prince William and the city of Manassas who used the association the previous year to tell them it appeared the organization could not officiate those schools' varsity football games this fall if they were played on Friday night. The Cedar Run District's other two schools (John Champe and Freedom-South Riding) were not affected by the decision because they are in Loudoun and thus already under contract.

Following Kendrick's suggestion to check for possible openings with the other two nearby officials associations, the Bull Run and Rappahannock Valley, Koch and Osbourn activities director Ira DeGroot took the lead for the Cedar Run, which preferred each of the county schools and Osbourn to use the same officials associa-

tion to maintain consistency in scheduling. DeGroot contacted Rappahannock Valley, which told him it did not have any openings.

Koch contacted Bull Run, which did have openings. The Bull Run football officials' commissioner, John Joback, informed Koch on Feb. 1 they could work their Friday night games because they had room to take on six schools in addition to the three they already provide officials for: (Brentsville, Kettle Run in Fauquier County and John Paul the Great in Dumfries).

The only exception was one one week in which two schools had to switch a game to Thursday.

"We were fortunate," Koch said. "We did move fast."

Unlike the Cedar Run District, the Cardinal District schools pick their own football officials' associations. The five Cardinal District schools tried to join the Bull Run and Rappahannock Valley associations, but neither organization had room for them.

Woodbridge left the Northern Virginia association for Rappahannock Valley after the 2019 season. Hylton was the first county school to join Rappahannock more than six years ago after activities director Sal Colangelo heeded warnings by Dennis Hall, then the Northern Virginia commissioner, of an impending referee shortage.

"We made the decision and never looked back," Colangelo said. "They are professional and on time and they were cheaper."