

Young Warriors believe the best is yet to come

October 16, 2022



Soccer appears to be on the rise at Del Norte High School this year, and both the boys and girls teams are optimistic that good days lie ahead for each of them.

The boys are 4-3 in league play heading into a Saturday showdown at home to South Fork, while the girls came into the week 1-2-1 and unbeaten in two straight games.

Both teams feature a very young roster and both believe they have a big upside with the opportunity to grow together.

“I think that within the next two years, they’ll be a solid team,” girls head coach Cyndi Hansen said. “Especially with eight freshmen.”

Hansen has just two juniors — Channey Schaad and Abigail Stephens — and no seniors on a roster of 15, with five sophomores in addition to the sizable freshmen contingent.

And despite their lack of experience and a difficult early-season schedule that featured tough games against the powerhouse Big 4 teams, the young players have been showing plenty of improvement since they kicked off league play in late September.

It also helps that the Warriors have switched to the Little 4 this season and are competing with St. Bernard's, Ferndale and South Fork, which makes for far more competitive games.

The Del Norte girls opened league play with a narrow 2-1 defeat to Ferndale, with the winning goal coming in the dying minutes, and followed that with a 2-0 defeat to St. Bernard's.

Since then, however, they defeated South Fork 4-3 with four different players scoring — Liliana Ramirez, Mayleah Jackson, Alexis Agurrie and Bella Palmerin — and battled Ferndale to a 0-0 tie.

Goalkeeper Deja Payne continued to impress for the team with another big performance against the Wildcats and “has little to no fear,” according to the coach, who said “I feel she’s been a big part in keeping the (goals) down.”

Defenders Hollyn Wakefield, Haley Moerke, Aurora Mitchell and Kalyn Schaad each also played a big role in Saturday’s shutout.

The Del Norte boys team, meanwhile, kicked off league play with a couple of impressive wins over Fortuna (3-0) and McKinleyville (5-0), but have since faltered and have dropped three of their last five games to go to 4-3.

Head coach David Sanyaolu has a good-sized roster of 22 players, including nine sophomores and five freshmen, and they have been going through some growing pains but adapting.

“We started out on a good note, but we’ve been losing some games,” said Sanyaolu, whose team has given up four recent penalties on handballs and gifting their opponents some easy opportunities. “But we’re hoping the tide will turn in our favor very soon.”

There have been plenty of bright spots, including the season-opening win over a Fortuna team that has dominated the league for the past decade on the way to winning eight straight championships.

At the back, Yahir Alanis and Lyon Rigden have formed a very effective partnership at the center of defense and have consistently frustrated opposing attacks.

“They’ve really been the rock at the back for us,” Sanyaolu said of the impressive duo.

Mario Ledezma also has impressed and has been one of the team’s most consistent offensive threats from the left flank.

Sophomore Brandt Pennington also has been playing well in midfield and leads a large group of talented second-year varsity players.

“We’re heavy on the sophomore side, so I’m hoping the next few years will be good for us,” the head coach said.

“I’m still hopeful for the remaining games this year. Hopefully we can give it a go and have some good matches and get some more good results.”

Saturday's game against South Fork kicks off at 3 p.m.

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