

Five Hamlets Teams In Contention for Maple League Titles

Passing the halfway point in the Mass Premier League five Hamlets' teams remain in contention for league titles; four teams, including the Under 11A Girls and the Under 18 Girls are unbeaten and the other two-the Under 15 Girls and the Under 13A Girls are unbeaten and top of their respective leagues.

Sunday games at the Bowden Fields got off to an amazing start with two Hamlets teams scoring 13 goals without reply. The Under 15 Girls who had some difficulty scoring in the early games of the season hit their stride against Western United-the Hamlets long-term rival from Springfield. This Western United A team was one of the weakest seen at the Bowden Fields in the last 20 years but this should take nothing away from a fine Hamlets victory against a good goalkeeper: 8-0. Briana Docimo scored first; Maura Fox scored on a spectacular left-foot 20-yard lob, and Erin Kinback twice combined with Maura Kasierski, scoring a power drive just under the cross-bar and another with a low drive through the left seam. In a memorable game Caitlin Boucher scored the other four goals, the last three of the game giving her a true hat-trick. All four goals illustrated the quite different goal-scoring skills learnt since she joined the team 18 months ago: meeting a cross from Maura Fox close-in; whipping in a through-pass from Hannah Moriarty in the midfield; finishing off a tight-passing move from a sharp angle with a left-foot tap-in, and faking out the goalie on a one-on-one breakaway.

The Hamlets will need to make fewer errant passes in the midfield if they are to win the league championship and gain promotion, and to advance to the Final Eight of the State Cup. But Maura Fox and Hannah Moriarty are approaching their best form and all things are possible if the other midfielders substantially increase their successful-passing percentage.

On the Bowden Lower Field the Under 11B Girls (mostly Under 10s) came up against a Greater Boston Bolts side which had the territorial advantage through the first half. But the Hamlets were more dangerous when they had the ball, particularly Nicole Wilson on the right wing. After one of her long runs on the right she set up a tap-in for Kara Breedon for the first goal and scored a second herself on a solo run. The second half saw the territorial advantage swing to the Hamlets. Bea Bowden scored on a low drive from 20 yards out on a direct free kick; Bridget Bousquet scored in a goalmouth scramble, and Nicole Scott hammered a poor defensive clearance back over the goalkeeper's head to complete the 5-0 rout and yield two wins in a row for the delighted young Hamlets.

The girls' successes in the first stanza were countered by the boys' losses in the second stanza. The Under 15 Boys, almost back to full strength, were no match for a very strong and big Stars of Massachusetts team on track to promotion to a higher division, losing 5-1. Goalie Brett Walberg was a standout for the Hamlets. The same story can be told of the Under 12 Boys who faced the league-leading Explosion team, sporting four players of real quality. The Explosion clearly belong in a higher division and the depleted Hamlets' team without their regular goalie did remarkably well to hold the opposition to a 6-2 score. Kevin Theriault filled in valiantly and with courage as the back-up keeper and Brandon Esteves and Derek Robertson led the team by example. The Hamlets' goals were scored by Matt Flowers and George Siotis (penalty).

The fifth Hamlets game at the Bowden Fields pitted the Hamlets Under 13B Girls

against an STS A team fielding players trained in the Hamlets program. Most of the Hamlets' B (or second-string) teams hold their own and often dominate the territorial and possession game but fall short in goal-scoring (proven goal scorers for obvious reasons are on the fast-track to the A team) This is the problem with the Hamlets Under 13B Girls who have the habit of winning late in games by 1-0 and reducing their supporters to nervous wrecks as they protect a precious lead for the last 10 to 15 minutes. And so it was in this game. The Hamlets welcomed the speedy Tracie Maffei to the team. She adds a new dimension to the team and gives promise of getting behind the opponents' back four and then scoring. If she can she'll be an instant hero.

This game turned on the performance of the goalkeepers. The busier-the Hamlets' Anna-Rae LeClaire-made two spectacular diving saves from the quick STS striker, Litvin, in the last 15 minutes, and handled the ball with confidence on crosses and kick-outs, and also made four good saves. The STS keeper, by contrast made two miskicks in the last 20 minutes, one nearly punished and the second one punished by Shannon Morton who showed great composure in lining up a low shot on goal from 25 yards out with the goalie out of the picture. The shot seemed to take forever to get there, but when it did Morton was mobbed amid wild rejoicing. And then there was the inevitable nail-biting period and Le Claire's keeper heroics before the 1-0 victory was sealed and delivered.

In the away games the Under 12A Girls moved up the league table with a comfortable 3-2 win over Crusaders in Plymouth-the home team scoring its second goal as the final whistle blew. Hannah Owen, Rachel Gillies scored two of the goals, the third is claimed by several players. The team's record is 2 wins, 2 ties, one loss. Gail Bagley's Under 11A Girls did very well in traveling west to Western Massachusetts Junior Pioneers and getting a 0-0 tie with a team that beat them at the Bowden Fields in the fall (team record 1 win, 3 ties). Colin Gordon's Under 13 Boys won 6-1 against Inter-Bandits at Fort Devens. Mike Pugh and Emil Ithier each scored one goal and Kyle Gordon was the second Hamlets player of the day to score 4 goals including a true hat-trick. In a game against Charles River United the Hamlets Under 18 Girls won 1-0 on a goal by Liz Welch assisted by Erin Bazinet and extend their record to 2 wins and 2 ties. The Under 12B Girls tied with the Rhode Island Sting-rays 1-1 on a goal from Jillian Murphy.

The league-leading Under 13A Girls traveled to the North Shore to face the S.F.Vikings and came away 4-0 winners. Stephanie Seagrave scored first, following up on a hard shot from Mary-Claire Pelletier. Anika Farina then scored from close range after a Briana Poulin drive; the third came from a corner headed out into the path of Anna Gallerani who scored on a 25-yard thunderbolt, and the fourth goal was driven in by Poulin, parried by the keeper and slotted home by Emily Nasuti. The Vikings were better than the score indicates, and they had the Hamlets under pressure for several long spells but Samantha Whittier in the Hamlets' goal made a succession of fine saves including one of her patented clutches from a one-on-one breakaway and a tip-over of a low drive. Whittier was the Hamlets MVP for the second game in a row.

The Under 14 Girls playing at Rehoboth faced a tough NOVA team that lost 2-0 to the Hamlets at the Bowden Fields in the fall and were far from happy about the loss. In the return game the tables were turned and NOVA won 2-0 on a goal that hit the upright and somehow

screwed in, and on a wind-helped direct free kick that veered sharply and fell kindly for a NOVA player. Erin Ronan made several good saves, and Michelle Laramee and Caitlin LaBonte shone in the midfield. The Under 14 Girls played a more significant game the day before at Stonehill College~the Massachusetts State Cup qualifier against South Shore Select, a team with a well-earned reputation as comeback kids. The Hamlets scored three unanswered goals in the first half: Erica Annis met a comer firmly and scored in off the upright; Michelle Laramee followed this with a 20-yard left-foot drive after a move involving LaBonte and Kate Malcolm, and the third came from a Kelsey Jarosz chip from the right steered in by LaBonte. In the second half coach Coulter, with a 3-0 lead, brought on the players who rarely start and it was soon deja vu all over again as Select scored two comeback-goals. With the Hamlets starters back in, the Hamlets, with good luck and good saves from Erin Ronan, completed a rare win (3-2) over Select and gained a place in the Final Eight at the Big Show: the Massachusetts State Championships at UMass Amherst in June.

Match of the Day was the Under 11 Boys versus Greater Boston Bolts. With both teams unbeaten and untied there was promise of a splendid game, and so it proved. Strangely the game was scheduled for Sutton Memorial Field without a referee when there was a field with referees available at the Bowden Fields. No comment on the vagaries of Maple scheduling. Without their captain and key defender Joe Lacasse, and against a very quick Greater Boston team which quickly showed their heading and dead-ball proficiency the Hamlets soon realized they had a tough game ahead. They scored first on a splendid Colin Hughes header from a good cross from Ryan Stacey. But the Bolts countered almost immediately. A well-struck corner kick into the east wind bore the ball high and then a gust dropped it sharply at the near upright. Goalie Blatchford had a difficult high catch to make, dropped it, and in the goalmouth scuffle the ball crossed the goal-line.

With the slope in their favor the Hamlets played the Bolts even in the first half but in the second half upslope the Hamlets' forays upfield were infrequent although sometimes dangerous. Ryan Stacey was superb in anchoring the Hamlets' defense, with technically sound clearances, quality decision-making and precise passing out of the backfield-clearly the Hamlets' MVP. Hayden Melia did well at right fullback and Riley Steele at left midfield was impressive in his tenacious tackling and accurate passing. Ryan Elster, forced back into an unaccustomed covering role on the left, read difficult situations well and plugged holes in and around the Hamlets' left seam. Nick White also had a good game and was the most effective Hamlets player in breaking through the Bolts defense.

The Bolts had many shots in the second half, most of them missing narrowly, but keeper Blatchford dealt well with the six good shots that came into the face of the goal, and it seemed that the Hamlets would hold on for the tie. But it was not to be. In injury time a minor foul 40 yards out was well-struck and found the Bolts best player 15 yards out on the Bolts left. His low drive across the face of the goal hit the right upright on the inside, came out, but struck the sprawling body of the goalie and crept over the goal-line for the winner. There was one minute for a promising Hamlets counterattack, but the ball got away, and the final whistle blew.

The Hamlets will take some positives from this game. The very windy conditions helped the Bolts with their equalizer and the second goal was just rank bad luck. Furthermore with two significant injuries the improvised defense held the Bolts to a tie until the last minute. And the

coaches now know what to expect, having analyzed the Bolts' strengths and weaknesses. We can all look forward to many replays of this rivalry over another seven years.

The Hamlets Over 35 Men remained unbeaten following their 2-2 with the Worcester Cosmos on goals scored by Glenn Melia and Rich Pellon, coach of the Hamlets Under 12B Girls. The Hamlets Over 30 Women beat Sudbury 1-0 on a goal by Hamlets Under 11A Girls coach Gail Bagley. In sum, over the weekend, the Hamlets youth teams won 8, tied 2, and lost 4. Including the adults it was 9 wins, 3 ties and 4 losses.