

2014-15 All-Herald Girls Basketball

High Point's well-earned reputation for 'consistency'

By PETER STEIN
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Consistency is big in sports. Being the team that everyone knows will be a handful, the team everyone has to work extra hard preparing for, is big.

In some cases, consistent teams have won half the battle on reputation alone.

But, those teams have to work extra hard, too.

Staying consistent, remaining a team that's expected to be good every year takes preparation.

Even when they do win half the battle with their reputation, they have to go out and win the rest of it.

High Point's girls basketball team doesn't just mail it in. The Wildcats have worked for their reputation, for their eight straight league championships, their nine straight 20-plus-victory seasons.

The 2014-15 season was unique in its own way, but overall, the same as many seasons before.

The Wildcats secured that eighth consecutive league title and that ninth straight season of 20-plus wins.

And they worked hard at it. Their hard work resulted in the NJAC Freedom Division championship, the area's best girls basketball record (22-5) and best winning percentage (.815).

The 'Cats beat every team in the area they faced, including Jefferson twice and Newton by 15 on the road. They also defeated Sparta in the January 31 Pretty In Pink Classic, while helping raise \$20,000 to battle cancer.

And the High Point Wildcats are the Herald's Girls Basketball Team of the Year for the 2014-15 season. This past winter was like every winter — when opposing teams saw the red and white coming, they knew a challenge was on its way. And the Wildcats faced their opponents with the same kind of mental resolve.

It's a program-wide attitude. Newly-arrived players already know what it takes when they reach the varsity level. "I get a lot of great kids that come in; they've been playing basketball since they were in fifth grade," High Point's 13th-year head varsity coach Chris Dexter said.

"The feeder program is outstanding. I've got coaches at the youth level that are teaching the game the right way. That's a major part of it. They

Lynch

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Lynch, talented as she is, was but one factor into the overall sum. That's how Lynch said she wants to be remembered most at Newton. Not simply as a dangerous scorer who dropped in over 1,000 points throughout her varsity career. But as a player who used that production to help her team succeed.

This year, that production was more important than last. Lynch came into the season as one of the returning seniors. Feisty point guard Hannah Buckley was gone. Clutch forward Kayla Delnero had graduated, too, along with other important departing seniors.

"We did lose some tremendous players from last year," Lynch said. "But we still had a core group. ... So we knew that we had to come out strong."

Lynch specifically was often the go-to girl — during games when her teammates

GIRLS BASKETBALL Team of the Year

(the players) get to High Point, they want to wear the uniform and they want to play varsity basketball.

"We had a talented group of freshmen come in, mixed with the returning group, so we were very fortunate again this year."

Because of the prestige of playing High Point varsity girls basketball, younger players want in.

"Kids are waiting, they wait their time," Dexter said. "A lot of kids don't play their freshman and sophomore years when they have a chance to play on some other teams. They're hungry, they want to get a chance to be that next team."

"That next team" for High Point — the 2015-16 installment — will probably be pretty good, too.

Guard Maddy Smith — an All-Herald first-team selection this season and a second-teamer last year — will return, as will forward Margo Peterson, who made All-Herald second-team this season.

Everyone else will return, too, except center April Peterson — a four-year varsity veteran, 1,000-point scorer, and multiple All-Herald first-team selection.

April Peterson was a big reason why this past season's High Point team carried on the tradition of excellence, ran the Freedom Division table, beat all local comers. But they weathered the storms as a unit.

"Me and Maddy as captains definitely brought the team together a lot," April Peterson said, "and we became a family even before we stepped foot on the court. And I think that helped the chemistry on the court."

April Peterson was the elder stateswoman on this year's High Point team. She was once a newcomer, too, a player who came in ready to be part of the Wildcat tradition.

"Seeing girls older than me do so well," she said, "it was kind of, not so much pressure, but you're anxious, you want to do as well as the older girls. I think that has a lot to do with it."

looked to get her the ball and during practices when they looked to her, as the seasoned vet she was, for leadership and advice.

Those teammates are what mattered most to Lynch. When she scored her 1,000th career point on January 7, Lynch thanked those teammates. When she was playing on any day or night, the best part was being one cog of a successful group.

"I love playing basketball, I love playing with my teammates," Lynch said. "It's always fun when you're out there on the court, getting into a game, the whole aspect of a team."

For Lynch, that's what it was all about — team first, team always. Which makes it all the more impressive that, even with such an attitude, an attitude well-placed with regard to such a deep team, Lynch managed to stand out. Her scoring managed to stand out, her rebounds and blocks and leadership managed to stand out.

She managed to repeat as Player of the Year.



BRIELLE HILBERT
Walkkill Valley
Junior — Guard

One of the area's top guards, Hilbert helped bring Walkkill Valley's program back to respectability with her offensive and defensive skills. She averaged 16.2 ppg and 3 spg, and was, according to Rangers head coach Ed Paiva, "a one-woman press breaker."



ADDI HILLARD
Newton
Senior — Forward

Hillard was truly one of the area's top post players, whose numbers — scary as they were — could've been scarier had she not been removed from blowout games after three quarters. Hillard averaged 10.6 ppg, and team-bests of 8.3 rpg and 1.4 bpg. With Hillard and teammate Tara Lynch, Newton had twin towers that created frustrating match-ups for opponents.



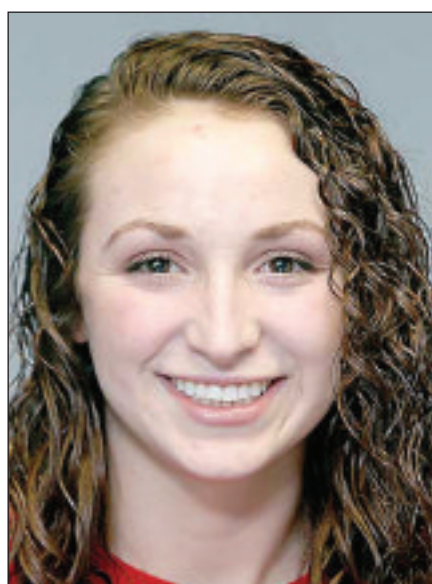
TARA LYNCH
Newton
Senior — Forward

The Herald's Player of the Year for the second consecutive season, Lynch supplied everything a veteran post player should — points, rebounds and leadership. She led the area in scoring with 18.7 ppg, knocked down her 1,000th career point on Jan. 7, and also averaged 6.4 rpg and 3 apg. More importantly, she was a player her teammates looked to, on and off the court.



JULIA MURAWINSKI
Jefferson
Junior — Forward/Center

One of the region's best all-around players, Murawinski averaged 16.8 ppg, 7 rpg, 2.2 bpg and 2 spg. Whether competing in Morris, Sussex or Warren County, Murawinski was a player opponents had to contend with, no small task indeed.



APRIL PETERSON
High Point
Senior — Center

Has been a fixture in area basketball for four years, because she's been part of High Point's varsity program for that long. Peterson reached 1,000 points in the Wildcats' final game of the season, a fitting way to end her h.s. career. Averaged 16.3 ppg, 8.7 rpg, 1.9 spg, had 23 blocks and sank 81% of FT attempts.



MADDY SMITH
High Point
Junior — Guard

With one of the area's smoothest outside shots, Smith helped the 'Cats win their eighth straight league championship. Averaged 13.1 ppg, 5.9 apg, 2.2 spg, and hit 85% of FT attempts. She also had 73 rebounds and 3 blocks, not too shabby for a guard.

The wins just continue to pile up

By PETER STEIN
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Chris Dexter has a great job.

He gets to coach a great girls basketball program, gets to coach players who want to be part of a great team, players who want to show up for practice, players who want to win.

That doesn't mean, though, that he has an easy job. Dexter brings a lot to the party — his personality, his expertise, his patience.

He has held down that job for 13 seasons now. And is one of the reasons, one of the big ones, that the Wildcats have posted nine straight seasons of 20 or more wins, and have won eight league titles in a row.

This past winter was same-old, same-old for Dexter.

He gave his all to coaching, his players bought in and stood out, and together they went 22-5 while winning the NJAC Freedom Division and defeating every local team they faced.

And for his role in it all, Chris Dexter is the New Jersey Herald's Girls Basketball Coach of the Year for the 2014-15 season.

The players had to go out there and get it done.

But it was Dexter guiding them from the sidelines.

"I definitely think Dexter has a lot to do with it, having a winning momentum through his coaching career," said center April Peterson, High Point's lone senior.

"I think he brings a lot of enthusiasm to our team." Peterson and the team's other co-captain, junior guard Maddy Smith, provided leadership, which helped.

And the other players did what was necessary to win, which helped as well.

"Everyone kind of learned their role," Dexter said, "and was able to be in that spot — April and Maddy as the scorers, some girls played great defense.

"I think that was a large part of it. Girls accepted their roles."

Part of Dexter's role was getting his team ready for two Freedom Division games against perennial contender Jefferson, and the Wildcats swept those games, winning the first one by six up at Jefferson and the second one by more than 30 at home. With the latter victory, High Point clinched a share of the Freedom title.

Dexter readied his team to play Newton, a team that had beaten his Wildcats twice the previous season — once in the annual Pretty In Pink cancer-fundraising game, the other in the North 1, Group 2 championship game.

On February 12 of this year, Dexter led his Wildcats into a boisterous Newton gym, and they came away with a 57-42 victory.

"The Newton game, clearly I was motivated, the girls were motivated," Dexter said. "They played two great games against us last year; we definitely wanted a shot at them again this year."

That victory against last year's Group 2 finalists was a crown jewel in High Point's area-best 22 victories. Leading the Wildcats to that success was made a bit easier on Dexter, because his players did their part in being ready to go.

"I really like game-planning," Dexter said.

"The kids do a lot of stuff in the offseason. They come in with more skills than most players have, so it gives me the ability to spend a good amount of time trying to figure out ways to beat some of the better teams we play.

"I love practices, I love trying to get us better every day. I'm fortunate to have a good group of girls that commits itself to working hard inside and outside the season."

Dexter also counts himself lucky for the assistants on his staff — assistant coaches Kurt Walton and Kelly Kuzicki, and volunteer assistant Alayna Donadio.

It's a tight-knit group, making it enjoyable for Dexter to coach. Could he ever see himself not coaching someday?

"Probably more now that I have two kids," he said.

"It's definitely more of a challenge having a 2 1/2-year-old and a 7-month-old at



Chris Dexter
NJ Herald
Coach of the Year

home. "If you asked me that question 10 years ago, I'd say no way I could ever see myself stopping.

"But adding kids to your life adds a different perspective. It's difficult to leave them and be away in winter."

Even when Dexter is away during the winter months, he has about 12 or so daughters around.

"He's like a father figure to us," Peterson said, "not just a coach."

All-Herald Girls Basketball Second Team

Meghan Boryeskne	Sparta	Senior	Forward
Meghan Falk	Pope John	Senior	Guard
Eldina Kucevic	Lenape Valley	Junior	Guard
Jen Makarevich	Kittatinny	Senior	Guard
Margo Peterson	High Point	Freshman	Forward
Kristyn Spetz	Pope John	Sophomore	Guard