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High school field hockey Notebook: Exchange students import wins in Ipswich



IPSWICH MA. – OCTOBER 27: Linde Ruitenberg and Ella Vogler, exchange students who play field hockey at Ipswich, on October 27, 2021 in Ipswich, MA.

Before officially enrolling in a foreign-exchange program to come to the United States from the Netherlands, senior **Linde Ruitenberg** didn't exactly have the highest expectations for what playing field hockey at Ipswich would look like this season. It had nothing to do with the Tigers; it had nothing to do with the Cape Ann League. Anyone with even a remote knowledge of how field hockey's significance in the United States stacks up to Europe can imagine her low expectations. Ruitenberg started playing field

hockey at 6-years-old. Most in Massachusetts start in middle school or later.

Conversations with former Ipswich foreign-exchange student **Rixt van der Kooi** helped build a promising idea, but she had no idea what would come. She didn't know she would instantly build a strong bond with junior **Chloe Pszeny** in the midfield, following suit with an incredibly well-gelled roster across the board. She didn't know she would be joined by junior **Ella Vogler** as a

foreign-exchange player from Germany, giving each of them a friend to go through a similar experience together. Neither of them knew how tough the CAL would actually be, and they definitely didn't expect the challenges they faced to come down to the one game that could end a 15-year league title drought on Thursday.

But with a 2-0 win over Manchester-Essex, Ipswich (14-1-1) finished off the season sweep of its longtime rival, securing the CAL Baker title for the first time since 2006. Ruitenberg scored a goal in the win, while Vogler invoked her typical disruption as a defender.

The two are still learning the intricacies of their team's histories, but that hasn't stopped either from leaving a European flavor on the Ipswich experience themselves.

"They've been huge," said first year head coach **Nikki Pignone**, a 2015 Ipswich graduate. "They just know the game so much better than everyone, myself included. Field hockey overseas is just so much more respected and valued over there. ... Their skills are so much more developed, and I'm most impressed with their knowledge of the game."

Vogler admits she didn't even know the race for the league came down to Thursday's matchup with Manchester-Essex until the week before, and is still a bit unsure of how the MIAA state tournament – her team currently holds the No. 3 seed in the Div. 4 field – works. She and Ruitenberg can sense the excitement of their teammates to get an idea of its magnitude, but the junior has mostly focused on having a good American experience, playing her best field hockey, and contributing any way she can to spread her extensive knowledge of the game.

Helping the program win something it hadn't won since the year before Vogler was born was a nice bonus, though.

"It's actually a big thing and I'm super excited," she said. "From the first day on, I felt like I was a part of the team and the chemistry is probably the biggest part of (the success). ... It's been better than I expected."

As a four-year varsity player, senior goalie **Morgan Bodwell** absolutely understands the magnitude of winning the CAL – not only for how long it's been since the program did it, but also in realizing how strong the team is moving forward. While energy has been a work in progress, the team's chemistry shows in how the defense plays around Vogler and how Pszeny, Ruitenberg, **Lexi James**, **Ashton Flather** and **Halle Greenleaf** work together up the field. Bodwell ranks among the top goalies within the CAL, too.

Between not having to face Watertown down the road and just how much better the team is playing compared to years past, she sees a lot of potential for the group.

Of course, it doesn't all stem from the impact of Ruitenberg and Vogler's presence on the field. But it plays a major part, and Ruitenberg – a youth coach in her hometown – enjoys her role as a key contributor and teacher, especially for a group that has made the transition from the Netherlands to the United States so pleasant.

"I like it," she said. "I've been a coach for seven years in the Netherlands. I know how it is to (teach) people things and I like it. ... Field hockey has been a big distraction (from missing home) for me. I'm just enjoying it so much, (playing for Ipswich) helps me a lot."

The benefits seem to be mutual. And as a result, Ipswich has soared to heights it hasn't in 15 years.

The Tigers are hoping it won't stop there.

Linde en Rixt zijn deelnemers aan High School Select

van Interlanguage Study Abroad.

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