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North takes Holland on title ride

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In the moments immediately following the championship game of the largest classification in Section VI, Williamsville North players celebrated their victory on the turf at Amherst High School.

Then an interesting thing happened.

"Hey Holland!" one yelled. "Get out here!"

The Williamsville North girls, the repeat Class AA champions, invited the Holland girls players to watch their championship game. Then they waved them onto the turf for something of a postgame celebration.

The Holland players were victim of a major administrative error, one that led to them playing one game above the state limit. So they were not permitted to compete in the postseason. The fact that Holland was the No. 1 small school most of the season, was the defending Class C champion, and had many top players back from that team exacerbated a dismal situation.

After some discussions among team members and even around the dinner table, North senior captain Nikki Charboneau reached out to the Holland players and asked if they wanted to attend the Spartans' championship game.

"We thought that was awful that they had their chance taken away, and thought about 'What if that happened to us?'" said Charboneau. "So we wanted to do something nice to reach out to them and support them. Even though they weren't playing they were part of our journey too."

North girls played with purple-and-yellow ribbons -- Holland's colors -- in their hair and they gave Holland players ribbons in North's green and gold.

"We wanted them to come to our game because we felt bad about what happened," said senior Nika Berrafato. "We decided to put their colors in our hair and we were happy that they came out."

After North's victory, the Spartans handed out Will North key chains to the Holland girls and the two teams posed for a photo on the Amherst turf, giving Holland at least a taste of the sectional finals they were favored to be a part of.

"We just wanted to do something for them," said North senior standout Alexis Koral. "They're our support, and we supported them too."

Said North coach Doug Kircher: "Hopefully it took a little bit of the pain away. It was great to have them cheering for us."

The North girls combined with Class A champion Williamsville South, which won its first title since 1995, to command nearly half of the 13-member All-Western New York first team; there were three selections from each school.

North was represented by midfielders Hannah Crofut (junior) and Alexis Koral (senior) as well as senior defender Alexis Kroese. South's first-teamers were sophomore forward Carissima Cutrona and senior defenders Kate Edward and Lianne Sprague. xleg

All-WNY invasion

Ever wonder how some All-Western New York teams would do if they actually were on the same team?

In girls soccer, we have a good idea -- and they were one of the best teams in the country.

This year's All-Western New York first team includes eight players from the Buffalo Invaders, arguably the best club soccer team to hail from Western New York. The team is the only three-time state champion from Buffalo, it advanced to the national championship quarterfinals and reached a No. 10 national ranking in the girls U18 top 50 (at nationalsoccerranking.com) before finishing the year at No. 32.

The All-WNY Invaders are: Kenmore West's Lexi and Jenna Panepinto, Nichols' Cat Williams and Zoe Jackson-Gibson, Will North's Koral and Alexis Kroese, Starpoint's Kristi DeLabio and Newfane's Gabby Balseca. And check this out: Two first-teamers from last year -- Grand Island grad Jenna Raepple (Colgate) and North grad Jenny Piaggone (Canisius) -- also played for the team this year.

From the "If it isn't broke, don't fix it" department: Williams and the Panepintos will keep playing together in college when they join Raepple at Colgate next year.

Around the fields

* Western New York's first-team all-state selections were: Katie Andera of Ellicottville (Class D), North's Kroese (AA) and Holland's Candis Kapuscinski (C).

* Section VI saw Williamsville South (A) and Ellicottville (D) advance past the Far West Regionals and onto the state final four, where both teams lost in the semifinals. Williamsville North (AA), Newfane (B) and Frewsburg (C) fell in the regionals.

* All-WNY first-team goalie Stephanie Senn of Grand Island is going to Kent State on a full scholarship.

* Holland placed five players on the ECIC IV first team and three on the second team. Leading the way was Kapuscinski, the senior all-state forward. Also on the first team were forward Olivia Schmidt (eighth-grader), midfielder Abby Schmidt (junior) and senior defenders Katherine Shanahan and Caterina Smith. On the second team were senior defenders Shannon Chowaniec and Alexis Reile along with junior midfielder Jill Faltyn.

* Nichols (17-3) won its fifth straight Monsignor Martin North Division (large schools) title and it played in its fourth straight Catholic state championship game. Last year it became the first team from Western New York to win the Catholic state title; Long Island athletic power St. Anthony's got revenge in this year's final, 4-0.

* St. Mary's won the South title, its fifth championship in the last six years.

* City Honors won its seventh straight Radcliffe Cup as champions of the Buffalo Public Schools. The Centaurs, led by seniors Fiona Hennig, Alison Roach and Jen Shelton and with great input from leading scorer Molly Petrucci -- just an eighth-grader -- beat da Vinci, 6-0, for the title.

All-Western New York Girls Soccer Team

Player, School, Pos., Yr., Fast fact

Hannah Crofut, Wmsv. North, M, 11, Has three Section VI titles in her three years as a starter; 12 goals, 10 assists and 95 average

Stephanie Senn, Grand Island, G, 12, Three-year starter, who will sign with Kent State in February, had four saves in PK win over Lew-Port

Jenna Panepinto, Ken. West, M, 12, Three-time NFL Player of the Year led AA with 23 goals, holds school career points mark (214) and headed to Colgate

Alexis Panepinto, Ken. West, F, 12, Jenna's twin sister, also a five-year starter headed to Colgate, is second in career points (206) with a 99.7 average

Alexis Koral, Wmsv. North, M, 12, Played on three sectional teams, carries 98 average, four-year starter, had 15 assists

Gabriella Balseca, Newfane, M, 12, Led N-0 in goals with 31, two-time Section VI Class B champs, four-year starter, team MVP

Alexis Kroese, Wmsv. North, D, 12, Repeat pick and first-team all-stater led North to two straight ECIC I titles and will sign with Canisius

Kristi De Labio, Starpoint, F, 12, Scored 25 goals, 10 assists, five-year starter, team MVP, considering Canisius

Zoe Jackson-Gibson, Nichols, D, 12, Team MVP, four-time Monsignor Martin champion and four trips to states, including historic '10 title

Carissima Cutrona, Wmsv. South, F, 10, Scored twice in state semifinals giving her 34 goals this season with 11 assists, 96 average

Kate Edwards, Wmsv. South, D, 11, Had 17 assists, including one in the state semifinals, 4-year starter, 95 average, team co-captain, 4th team All-NYS

Lisanne Sprague, Wmsv. South, D, 12, Repeat pick, anticipates well, four-year starter, 97 average, co-captain, led team to state final 4

Catherine Williams, Nichols, F, 12, Two-time team MVP is Vikings' career assists leader (85), second all-time scorer (117 goals) and will sign with Colgate