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Simply the best French the top player in the state yet again

By KEV HUNTER

Staff Writer

Lauren French's strategy was simple going into this season: don't change a thing.

"She continued to do what she did the previous year," Maidens coach Bill Bartle said of his top water polo player. "She led our offense again, all throughout the season, she played outstanding defense, and she was the focal point for opposing teams."

French was nearly unstoppable, scoring a whopping 53 goals in the Maidens' 26-3 season that included a third-place finish at states.

French, chosen as The Reporter's Athlete of the Year for girls water polo, was the player that other teams wished they had, but only North Penn possessed.

"It was amazing to see how sometimes it was she like she was just turning a switch," Bartle said. "The game would be going along, and all of a sudden she would just turn that switch, and she would single-handedly take over the game. I'll never forget the Beast of the East Championship games, where she just took the game over. I was talking to a few coaches, and it wasn't only myself, but also they were just as amazed. She just dominated at certain points."

French's heroics provided a 12-9 win over Wilson in the Beast of the East Tournament Championship, and the Maidens would wind up beating Wilson again in the third-place game at states.

The senior not only led her team in scoring again this season, but also 30 other times, she set up her teammates for goals.

French praised the team's chemistry.

"I think that helps a lot - not only are we hanging out after practices but it seems we're always together," she said.

The team built a trust for one another, and they looked to French as their leader.

"Teams felt if they shut her down, they could control our offense," Bartle said. "Some teams would double, triple and quadruple team her, so that tells

you the type of player she is."

French became the first player ever - male or female - to earn Player of the Year twice in their career. She received that honor, known as the Ms. Water Polo award, last year after guiding the Maidens to an undefeated season and a state title.

She then picked up right where she left off last season, powering the Maidens to a 7-0 start. Souderton gave the Maidens their only three defeats of the season, including a 3-2 thriller in the state semis.

But French was still the best player in the state, earning Ms. Water Polo honors once again, and proving to be an all-around player by also chipping in with the fourth-most steals on the team, with 30.

French said it was the team's overall defense that set the Maidens apart from most teams.

The all-around threat also showed a degree of toughness that matched her skill.

She suffered a broken finger on the Monday before states, but she played in the tournament.

"She was wearing a cast on her hand that week, but she refused to wear it in the games," Bartle said. "It showed the kind of drive she has, to want to have the team achieve its goal of getting another state title. She played very well, and I never even saw her wince."

French has a big swim season ahead of her in the winter, as she will be going for state gold, and she is also set for college, as she accepted a full scholarship to Division 1 Wagner, where she will compete in both water polo and swimming.



MARK C. PSORAS / THE REPORTER

nORTH pENN'S Lauren French (right) was dominant on both ends of the pool.

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