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Sports

High School Girls' Hockey Notebook

'There's so much more to hockey than scoring goals.'
At 10-1-3, NDA-Hingham girls are all-in on defense

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Chase Harmon puts it best. "There's so much more to hockey than scoring goals," said the Notre Dame-Hingham junior forward.

The Cougars have fully embraced that mentality. Sure, they score plenty of goals. But they're simultaneously one of the state's most bought-in defensive groups.

It's a recipe that cooks up success. The Cougars (10-1-3) are the top-ranked team in the MIAA's Division 1 power rankings, ranked No. 2 in the Globe's Top 20, and to this point, have played the statistically second-hardest schedule in the MIAA (based off the strength of schedule score used in calculating the power rankings).

How has one of the state's most successful programs kept the train going with 11 departures and a first-year head coach?

In Harmon, they have one of the state's best 200-foot forwards. In Ella Faherty, one of the state's top defensive-minded blue liners.

Following the torch of their lead-by-example defensive powerhouses, the Cougars have embraced bringing their energy across the whole sheet of ice.

"It's a really cool dynamic where you have this super strong leadership with a bunch of new girls," first-year coach Bill Burke said. "They don't know any other way than to practice like Chase Harmon practices, or Ella Faherty, or Kaitie Ryan, or Erin Kral. They walk in, and that's just the way we practice."

The impact of these leaders is so crucial that when a team parent learned that Harmon was absent for a game against Canton minutes before puck drop, her



PHOTO BY FINN GOMEZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

With her long reach and smooth skating, NDA junior defender Ella Faherty is one of the state's best. "If I could play her 46 minutes, I would," said coach Bill Burke.

response was an instant gasp and to cry out, "No!"

Faherty, a junior who stands 5 feet, 11 inches, is not just an impossible task to get by defensively, but also a smooth skater who effortlessly dekes around opponents.

"If I could play her 46 minutes, I would," Burke said. "Whatever I ask her to do, she just says 'yep,' and she owns it . . . She's a terrific leader. As for the younger kids, they love her."

She's trained skills and stick handling with Lovell Hockey to help maneuver the puck to teammates and escape trouble. She plays minutes mostly with younger



PHOTOS BY JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Notre Dame-H junior forward Chase Harmon (11) from one end of the ice to the other.



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Notre Dame Academy forward Abigail Gropman (18) celebrated a goal in Monday's 4-2 win over Canton.



Bill Burke says his Notre Dame Academy girls' hockey team is all-in on their defensive approach.

players since Burke can trust her so much, and even with the added pressure, she comes through.

She's also embraced being, often, the tallest player on the ice.

"It's awesome to be 5-11," Faherty said. "It's really lucky when I'm coming down on a two-on-one and I'm able to get a stick on a poke check, and being able to use my body to defend the puck is extremely helpful."

It hasn't gone unnoticed by her teammates.

"She's always been such an amazing

player, but as we've gotten older, she's become so much more confident," Harmon said. "I've just loved seeing her grow on and off the ice."

Similarly crucial in their own zone are two seniors, Ryan and Kral, a returning Globe All-Scholastic Honorable Mention in goal.

Harmon has embraced the challenge of covering the entire sheet of ice.

"As you work hard, and work on those smaller things, like backchecking, the goals will come," she said. "I just love helping my teammates and working 100 percent down and back on the ice."

She plays with two of those younger players – sophomore Abigail Gropman, the team's leading goal scorer with 10 goals, and eighth-grader Abigail Burke, who has a team-leading 11 assists. Harmon has seven goals and seven assists in 13 games.

"She plays the entire game with so much heart and intensity," Faherty said. "She's the first one back on a backcheck, and the first one to the net on a rebound."

Her influence has helped them embrace battling on the defensive side of the puck, which Burke sees in his daughter.

"Because she's around Chase all the time, she's now backchecking, blocking shots," Burke said. "Any young kid would probably want to model their game after Chase Harmon."

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