

H-F hockey team overcame adversity on road to Hayes Cup play

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The Homewood-Flossmoor High School ice hockey team overcame adversity this season to take second place in Hayes Cup competition.

The Vikings entered the competition with a record of 15-9-0, with three of the losses occurring in tie-game shootouts. The team was ranked the top seed among five teams in the suburban division of the Illinois High School Hockey League.

The first playoff competitor for the Vikings was the Chicago South team made up of players from Chicago high schools. H-F beat them in the first round to advance to the Hayes Cup. The Vikings waited two weeks for the lower bracket to finish and then played Chicago South again for the championship, according to H-F head coach Wayne Perry.

The Hayes Cup is the best of three games. H-F beat Chicago South 4-2 on March 10, then lost 5-1 on March 12. The Vikings came into the third game on March 13 with high hopes and were tied after the first period but couldn't hold on, losing 5-1 to take the runner-up title.

"The team did a great job this year," said Perry. "We had a lot of factors going against us. We had a team that overcame those challenges throughout the season."

The team last won the Hayes Cup in 2018. In 2019, the team won the Team Award for Sportsmanship, and Perry was named Varsity Coach of the Year by the Illinois High School Hockey League.

Then COVID hit; hockey play was limited, and there was no Hayes Cup competition.

The Vikings team looked forward to the 2021-22 season, but when the H-F Ice Arena was shut down abruptly in November due to the icemaking system failure, it seemed like the deck was stacked against them. The convenience of a rink



Provided photo

The Homewood-Flossmoor High School ice hockey team won second place in the Hayes Cup Competition in March.

next to the high school would have given them practice time three or four times a week.

Instead, Perry went in search of rinks that could give the Vikings practice time once a week. The team used Oak Lawn Ice Arena, Southwest Ice Arena, The Cube in Hammond, Indiana, and Ice Valley in Kankakee. "We were just trying to find practice slots throughout the season," he said.

"I think we overcame that mentally, and when we'd practice one or two times a week, we were able to go out there and do what we needed to get accomplished and make the best of it," Perry said. Even the team jerseys were late to arrive, but they were suited up in red and white by the time of the playoffs.

The team will see three seniors graduate, but Perry says he has a strong core of sophomores and juniors who will move up to leadership roles. "The sophomores, they did everything for us. They kept our team in games, played hard offensively and defensively," and brought "a pos-

itive attitude to every game," the coach said.

Sophomore Jack Keigher took honors as the skater with the most total in points from goals and assists. Perry says Keigher is "a great player." The coach was excited to have Keigher join the team this year after his golf season.

Jacob Sline, another sophomore, was the main goaltender who "brought his next level hockey experience and kept us in games all season," Perry said. "In Game 1 (of the Hayes Cup), Jacob kept us alive to win. He will continue to dominate the next two years in our league."

Sophomore Timmy Van Etten, another multi-sport player, "worked hard on the ice. He was more of a grinder. You could ask him to do whatever and he would do it for the team," Perry said.

Perry will be sad to see his seniors graduate. Charlie Knetl was the most valuable player and "just a stunning defenseman with ability to go ahead and put that puck in the net. He's such a great skater. I looked to him on defense

to make great plays and also get back in the offensive zone to make things happen," Perry said. Knetl was the leading goal scorer for the Vikings.

Senior Joey Boldt "improved from his freshman year to senior year. He contributed by working hard in both offense and defense and playing mostly wing, but at times had to play center for us," the coach said.

The team's alternate goalie, senior Gabbie Kral, worked hard. "When she had her chance, she really stepped up and gave us opportunities to win games," Perry said.

Makenzie Russell, a junior, "is such a smooth skater and does a great job," Perry said. "I'm looking for her to take over the reins as the captain of the team."

Rounding out the hockey team are Kaitlin Garrity, Matthew Lively, Anthony Mancha, Jacob Garrity, Chase Kral, Logan Kral, Terrell Lowe, Luke Romans and Oliver Wachtel.

Working with Perry are assistant coaches Mike Larson and Dan Deverick.



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