Building a girls soccer powerhouse at Gaither

By Kyle LoJacono
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Last season, the Gaither girls soccer team snapped a five-year playoff drought and made the regional finals for just the second time in the school’s 27-year history.

The deep postseason run not only gave the returning Cowboys (3-3-1) confidence in their ability to compete at the highest level, but also a hunger to take another step forward with the program.

“I know the girls are ready for the season,” said third-year Gaither coach Trevor Scott. “We had a really good summer and had at least 20 girls at every session. They’re ready to show they can compete with anyone.”

The Cowboys won at Venice 2-1 and defeated Gulf Coast 1-0 in double overtime at home in the regional tournament before losing on the road to Seminole 3-0 just one win away from the Class 5A final four.

“It was tough to have the season end there, but it was good for the girls who are coming back because they know what it’s like,” Scott said. “They won a regional game on the road, they played really tough teams, so I think that experience will help this year.”

Senior midfielder Kaycee McGuire said being so close to states pushed everyone to work harder in the offseason.

“It was really amazing because we were the underdogs,” said McGuire, who led Gaither with 10 assists last year. “To get so far when we weren’t supposed to felt really good. We were all really sad when the season ended. … You look back and see that it was tough to just have one more game? Just one more step!”

Scott, a 2004 Gaither graduate, said that attitude of expecting to win is something that was not present a year ago.

“They had a lot of doubts coming into the season because it was a long time since 2004,” Scott said. “They had a new coach each year for a couple years, so I think it helped to have the same voice pushing them. They got to work together and that consistency helped, but a lot of it came down to the seniors pushing each other and the younger players wanting to win for them.”

Gaither will have to find players to fill in for four graduating seniors, including Lauren Moore and Carly Cepelak who are playing at the University of Tampa and Lincoln Memorial University, respectively, on soccer scholarships.

Moore led the Cowboys with 13 goals while adding five assists. Cepelak added one score, but was a big member of the Gaither defense.

The Cowboys also lose Caity Chandler, who played almost every position on the field last season while adding 10 goals and two assists.

“We also lost Jessica Carter at goalkeeper, who didn’t play in goal as much, but she was always ready for practice and pushed Amanda High as our starter,” Scott said. “You need to have players like that to keep everyone else working to get better. … You can’t ever replace everything a player does, but I can see new girls stepping up. They’re doing things I didn’t see them do last year on the field and in leadership roles.”

High, a sophomore, returns as the Gaither starting goalkeeper. She had 77 saves and eight shutouts while allowing just seven goals last season.

“I was only a freshman, so I had no idea what to expect for all of the year,” High said. “It was really cool to set some high standards to live up to.”

Gaither’s defense was a strength last year, and the team allowed only nine goals on the season. Scott said he will lean on defenders Angela Anderson, a junior and senior Lexy Bubley, who transferred from Steinbrenner.

Forward Taylor Meek’s 12 goals last season are the most of any returning player. The sophomore said she feels she needs to “step up” her game as a sophomore. She also added playing alongside Moore helped her become a better player.

“She worked really hard and she tried to make sure we worked together,” Meek said. “Scott said ‘She’d get me the ball to score and I’d do the same back. She was always so nice and tried to work with everyone.’”

Gaither plays at Chamberlain on Tuesday, Nov. 29 at 6 p.m.

—All stats as recorded to MaxPreps.com by coaches.

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- You or a family member have had two separate breast cancers at any age.
- You or a family member have been diagnosed with breast and ovarian cancer at any age.
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- Colorectal cancer in multiple generations of your family.
- One or more relatives in your family, of any generation, with colorectal cancer diagnosed at age younger than 50 years old.
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