

2009-2010

WILDCATS

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HOCKEY YEARBOOK

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Wildcats: Hungry for a Championship



By Melissa Parrelli

Becoming a member of a college hockey team is a dream for many young players these days, but having the chance play on one of the best teams in the country, in one of the top leagues, is the pinnacle of a student-athlete's career.

Well, Hockey East is that "top" league, and New Hampshire is one of those "best" teams.

The Wildcats, who ended the 2008-'09 season with 20 wins, 13 losses and five ties were among five Hockey East teams ranked in the top 20 for the majority of the year — more than any other conference. Not only did the team wrap up its season with a visit to the NCAA Northeast Regional, but the 'Cats catapulted themselves into the finals with a few heart-stopping, memorable performances.

In the opening round of the NCAA's, the third-seeded Wildcats won a, 6-5, overtime thriller against second-seeded North Dakota when Thomas Fortney tied the game with 0.1 seconds left in regula-

tion. This year's co-captain Peter LeBlanc followed with the game-winner 45 seconds into the extra stanza, marking the first NCAA win for the club in the past four years.

Then who could forget the Wildcats gritty showcase against eventual national champion Boston University in the Regional Finals? UNH's hockey team seemingly outplayed the Terriers in all aspects of the battle despite succumbing to an upsetting 2-1 loss in the final seconds of the game.

Even though the Wildcats did not get their ticket punched to the 2009 Frozen Four, the team will carry the momentum over to this season, having a good chance to skate to another NCAA title run.

But scoring this kind of "goal" in life — solidifying a spot in a Division I lineup — is not all glitz and glamour. Securing a coveted role on a team like this seems to depend on work ethic, attitude, and inevitably talent.

Talent is a characteristic certainly not lacking among this year's juniors at UNH. Last year, offense was the forte for this class as they

accounted for roughly one-third of the team's goals, assists overall points. But having a natural gift is only a part of the puzzle that paves the road to victory; it's the players' confident attitudes and determination that make being a Wildcat such a respectable status.

"The juniors are talented group because typically what happens with them as sophomores is that after the first year, skilled players get comfortable and start playing with confidence," said head coach Dick Umile. "You know the Mike Sisos, the DeSimones, the Paul Thompsons; that line generated a lot of scoring opportunities last season, so as sophomores they really stepped up. I think that's all part of the maturity in developing confidence. They're all skilled players."

Five juniors dot the Wildcat roster for the 2009-'10 season. Mike Siso, last year's Most Improved Player who totaled 31 points—the second most on the team—with a team-high 19 goals and 12 assists, will be returning to play.

Phil DeSimone will also contribute, coming off a productive year with 18 points (7G, 11A).

Former-sophomore standout James van Riemsdyk—who led the team with 40 points—opted to play professionally, so there is undoubtedly a void to be filled by the new incoming freshmen. There will be eight rookies joining the club, five of which are forwards.

"Once again, we are extremely excited about this year's group of recruits," Umile said. "This group in particular possesses a variety of skills that will help us get better right away. I truly believe these young men will make an immediate impact on the ice, but will also have a major impact within the UNH community as a whole."

So what was the key to last year's success, especially among the [then] sophomores?

"Well, I think it's safe to say that a large part of the class is a key factor to our team's success throughout the year," explained DeSimone. "As soon as we came in as freshmen we were pretty tight already just because it's such a big class and we make up a good part of the team."

"It's good getting along in regards to the rest of the team as well because a lot of us as freshmen were a little bit older, a few years out of high school, more mature, getting an extra year or two of juniors. When we came in we kind of skipped some of that stuff that maybe a younger kid would have had to go through and bonded right away."

The camaraderie among the teammates stems from all of the time they practice, play, study and socialize together. From the weight room to the dorm room, these guys know each other well.

"Last year I lived with [Mike] Beck, [Paul] Thompson, [Greg] Manz, Siso and [Matt] Campanale," said DeSimone. "It's fun; we lived a bit off campus so the driving got a little annoying, but it's nice to go back from practice and hang out in our apartment. We played video games a lot, especially 'Call of Duty.'"

Obviously their class' abilities on the ice translate off the ice too. "Our class has the most self proclaimed, world's best 'Call of Duty' video gamers," Siso said.

When asked who was the best, DeSimone answered without hesitation, "Me! But I guess we're all pretty even. We really get into it."

Despite DeSimone's claim, the true "Call of Duty" champ will



another surreptitious fact about a classmate:

"Paul Thompson is the messiest kid I've ever seen in my life," DeSimone said. "I mean, I'm not the cleanest, but I'm definitely not as bad as him. We have to keep the locker room clean or else we get yelled at, so that is forced to be clean. But when we'd get home, boy, you should've seen his room."

Maybe Phil's roommate didn't have time to tidy up his space because he was preoccupied with other things. Siso gave more insight as to what fans may not know about Mr. 'Clean': "Paul Thompson is a NASCAR junkie."

No matter what goes on outside the rink, the players' individualities blend nicely come game time—and that goes for the team as a whole. Off ice chemistry is a crucial aspect for a team to develop because the trust enables players to bring confidence to the rink.

Siso added, "I just come to the rink every day and push myself to get better and push my teammates. I think I have matured a lot since freshman year."

And DeSimone needs to have an impact on every shift. "I have to produce and give the team a chance to win every night," he said. "I played well, but I just need to produce more. It was a little bit frustrating last year because I think I should have been finishing and producing a little bit more than I was, but you can't let it bother you because it will get the best of you."

And instead of allowing the emotional ending to the last season to affect them in a negative way, the remaining Wildcats are even more determined to reach the top as they've already had the taste of victory in the NAAs, but this time don't want the same sour ending. With a clean slate this season, contending for an NCAA title is surely not out of the question for a program comprised of such skilled players possessing poised attitudes.

"We need to win a national championship," said DeSimone. "I don't think it's that far away, just a few steps away. If we keep working and going in the right direction then by this year, or next year, I think we could for sure."