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## Knights, Maidens cruise

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,TOWAMENCIN — The state tournament is starting to come into the picture for the North Penn boys and girls water polo teams.

If Wednesday was any indication, the Knights and Maidens both showed that they should stack up pretty well once states rolls around, as each squad earned a dominant win over visiting Germantown Academy.

The North Penn boys defeated the Patriots 13-7, while the Maidens jumped out big early and then got some of their reserves some playing time in a 7-4 victory.

The Knights were coming off a tough 8-7 loss to area rival Wissahickon, but responded by putting together one of their best efforts against GA, with Craig Hennessey firing in four goals.

"It's the confidence booster that we needed," Hennessey said of the game. "Hopefully we'll be able to step up our game that much more."

The Knights

graduated most of the key players that had won back-to-back state titles - the team also won three of the past four crowns, but this team has started to come together.

"We started out as a lot of individuals, just goofing around a lot, but as the season has gone on, we've started to work together better and become more of a team," Hennessey said.

Hennessey gave the Knights an early 1-0 lead over the Patriots, then Jack Else doubled the lead to 2-0. Adam Myzal's goal extended the margin to 3-0 by the end of the quarter.

"Getting out to a fast start was important - we haven't always been able to do that this year," Knights coach Brian Faikish said.

Goals by Else and Hennessey blew it open at 5-0 early in the second, and Else later completed a hat trick to help boost the lead to 9-2 by the half. The Knights had a certain crispness to their game that takes time to develop.

"We're kind of in that middle part of the season where states is kind of right around the corner, and we put some things together that we had been working on in practice, and the guys played a good game today," Faikish said. "In the Wissahickon game, even though we lost, we learned that we improved in some of the areas we had been working on."

Strong goaltending by C.J. Millionig helped the Knights keep the Pats scoreless for most of the half. North Penn simply closed things out after the break, with Matt Ortlieb scoring to run the lead to 10-2.

The Knights have caught on quickly in what has been a month-long crash course.

"At the beginning of the season, we were a pretty inexperienced team as far as varsity time," Faikish said. "They had a lot of junior varsity time and they were a good J.V. team last year, so the goal this year was to get better every game. We knew we were gonna have some growing pains in the beginning, and the key to the season was to get past them. Can we learn from them so that we can play our best polo at the end of the year? That was the goal."

The Knights recovered from a 3-3 start to the year to put together a 9-4 stretch. They will take their 13-7 record to Upper Merion on

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Tuesday, and then the team will travel to the Big Red Tournament the following weekend, taking on some of the squads they could see at states.

"If we can start playing a lot better, and get the perfect game, we can definitely get a high finish in the state - top three hopefully," Hennessey said.

"You have to get to the dance - you just have to get to the state tournament," Faikish said. "Once you get there, it's kind of like the baseball playoffs, once you get there, it's anybody's game. That's been our goal all year - make it to the tournament, and then play our best polo once we get there."

The Maidens picked up right where the Knights left off, winning the second half of the doubleheader in commanding fashion.

"Our starting line played very well, and I think our counter was very active," Maidens coach Bill Bartle said. "That helped us get out to a lead early."

Sam Deana knocked in a rebound for a 1-0 lead for NP, then Shelby Rinker, Caley Britton, and another goal by Deana, boosted the advantage to 4-0 by the end of the quarter.

The Maidens had six different goal scorers in the 7-4 win.

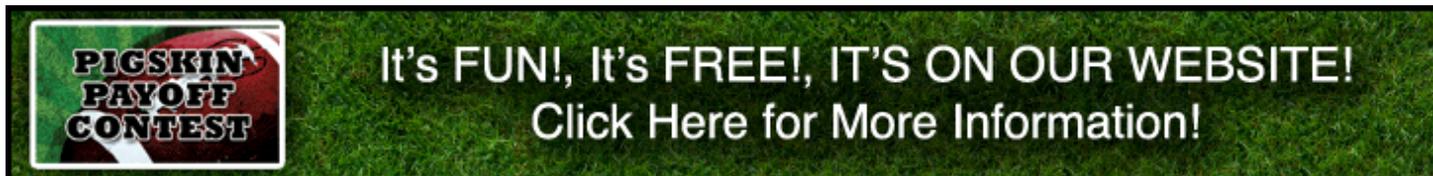
"We're more balanced than we have been in the past," Bartle said. "We do have our strengths, but we can rely on a number of girls, which opens up some of our more powerful scorers."

North Penn also showed its tight defense, blanking GA for most of the first half. The Maidens improved to a stellar 18-1, and a perfect 18-0 against Pennsylvania teams - their only loss was an overtime game against Upper Arlington of Ohio, at the Beast of the East Tournament.

This Maiden team is shaping up very similar to the state title team of 2006, and this one may be more versatile. The Maidens always enter the season hoping to win it all.

"That's the main goal," Deana said. "We think about that all the time."

The North Penn girls are in action again at Upper Merion on Tuesday.



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