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A new discipline

Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse hockey regroups after graduating 14 in Class of 2008

By Brad D. Bates
C & G Sports Writer

After losing 14 seniors from his 2007-08 roster, it's not surprising that discipline is on Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse hockey coach Bob Kotowski's to-do list.

"Some of them were with our program for the last three or four years," Kotowski said of his departed seniors.

"We're trying to get a whole new team to buy into our system of disciplined hockey. Lately, they have bought in, and we're seeing some results."

The type of discipline Kotowski is looking for from his team, which was 5-10 at press time, has his players focused on playing as one unit within a system.

"When coach Kotowski says we need to play disciplined hockey, he means play in his system," senior goalie Ben Pharis said. "When we play a trap system, everyone has to be dedicated to it. A disciplined system is when everyone buys into it and works with it."

What has helped Kotowski integrate a team-wide philosophy are the intangibles the players bring to the rink each night.

"These guys are all good character guys," Kotowski said. "They always have their heads up and are willing to listen to constructive criticism."

A willingness to learn and stick to Kotowski's system has helped the Lancers maintain a level head, despite a 0-6 start to their Macomb Area Conference White season.

Their character has allowed them to look past perceived setbacks, like their 5-1 loss to Utica Eisenhower and 6-0 loss to Utica Stevenson during the MAC Showcase Jan. 16-17 at Macomb Suburban Ice Arena.

"We knew Stevenson was going to be the team to beat in the White, and the first time, they beat us pretty good," Pharis said of the Lancers' 9-2 loss to Stevenson Dec. 3.

"But when we saw what we could do against Eisenhower, who is probably the second-best team in the league, we thought we could play with Stevenson.



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes
Harrison Township L'Anse Creuse senior goalie Ben Pharis stops a shot during the Lancers' 4-4 tie against Warren/Sterling United Jan. 28 at Viking Arena in Hazel Park.

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"It was 2-0 after two periods. But, going back to what Coach Kotowski said about disciplined hockey, we were short-handed half of the (third) period, and you can't win like that," Pharis said.

The Lancers continued to build off the momentum from their games against Ike and Stevenson, culminating with a 10-2 win against Port Huron High Jan. 24.

"We went into those games knowing we needed to do something," Pharis said. "With that mentality, we didn't look back and just played the best we could."

Along with focusing on playing within their system and building off positives, the Lancers have also benefited from ever-increasing chemistry within their group.

"It was rough in the beginning, but once it started jelling, we started rolling," junior defenseman Jack Thomas said. "(Chemistry) just takes time.

"We've been working together three to four days a week, though, so it's getting there. We are finally coming together, and everyone is coming to play."

Discipline, confidence and chemistry have the Lancers feeling good about the future of their program.

"We need to keep building on previous games," Pharis said. "We know what we can do when we work together, and we need to keep going with that."

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