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## Carl Setterlund: 'Big 3' of Wright, Weckwerth, Foster has Westboro's girls' lacrosse program surging

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By Carl Setterlund

Two teams have traded the title of best girls' lacrosse team in Central Mass. back and forth over the past decade: Westboro High and Algonquin Regional.

That made it fitting the top-ranked Rangers hosted the Tomahawks on Monday afternoon as Westboro solidified the legacies of the star senior trio of goalkeeper **Kaleigh Wright**, center **Olivia Weckwerth** and attack **Nicole Foster**.

The Rangers (14-0) cruised to a 14-8 win, clinching the team's third straight Mid-Wach A title, clearing their last hurdle toward a second consecutive undefeated regular season and increasing their regular-season winning streak to 31 games.

"For us, I think it means all of our hard work has paid off," Foster said.

"I remember watching my sister (**Samantha**) play when she was a freshman with **Jill Horka**, **Anna Petrunich** and **Brigid Bowser**," said Weckwerth, referencing the Rangers' previous "Big Three" that had similar success. "I remember just being like, 'Wow, they're so good, I can't wait to play Algonquin when I get older.' Having that strong competition against your rival, you can't ask for more than that."

Foster, Weckwerth and Wright have been on varsity since their freshman year and led Westboro's resurgence.

The Rangers won four straight Central Mass. titles before Algonquin unseated them in 2012, winning a pair of CMass crowns and ruling the Mid-Wach A for three years until the two split the league title in 2015.

It's been more of a challenge for Westboro to claim a regional title since the unification of Central and Western Mass. into one postseason bracket in 2014, but the Rangers haven't lost to a Mid-Wach A opponent since April 2015.

"I'm just proud of them because when you have a lot of success, you sometimes think it's always going to be the same and fall into place, but we had to work for it," Westboro coach **Colleen Debish** said. "Last year, that team was a lot of kids coming together from the previous year, but these kids had to meet the challenge. It was half new kids on either side of the ball."

It's certainly helps that Westboro may have the best player in Central Mass. at the three most important positions.

Wright has more than 400 career saves — quite a feat since she split goalie duties her freshman and sophomore years — and continues to improve, with a career-high 17 saves in a 15-13 win over Bishop Feehan last week.

Meanwhile, Weckwerth and Foster are nearing milestones of their own.

"Both Nicole and Olivia have been incredible attack players, and there's no question in my mind they're both going to end up with 300 points for their career," Debish said. "We have two games left, and they're both right on target for that."

The versatile Weckwerth is tied for the CMass lead in assists with 40, while Foster is fourth with 61 goals. Both have 72 points.

"Sometimes as a coach, you see a young kid and you say, 'Wow, they're going to be great,' but something happens and the kid plateaus or fizzles out," Debish said. "But these three young women have continued to improve and work on their game and become multi-dimensional in their ability on the field."

All three will look to continue improving their game in college. Weckwerth is headed to Trinity and Wright to Stonehill while Foster will try to walk on at Syracuse.

Debish isn't ready for the Westboro renaissance to be over yet, though, and is taking things one game at a time as the Rangers look to top Wachusett on Wednesday and Tantasqua on Thursday to head into the playoffs unbeaten.

"We've really worked well together as a team this year," Weckwerth said. "One of the main reasons we've been playing so well is that we've all been working so hard. We had this goal set in mind at the beginning of the season."

### **Warriors heating up**

The Tantasqua girls have been one of the hottest teams in Central Mass. over the second half of the season. The Warriors had one of the longest winning streaks in CMass this spring, notching eight straight victories before falling Monday on the road to Western Mass. power Minnechaug.

Apart from playing a tough schedule to start, the biggest difference for the Warriors is that the offense picked up, averaging nearly 14 goals per game during the winning streak. That's nearly five goals more per game than the first half of the schedule, during which time they went 4-6.

Seniors **Camie Hall** and **Joanie Howland** have carried much of the offensive load and helped Tantasqua continue one of the area's longest playoff streaks.

After already playing four tough Western Mass. teams in the regular season, the Warriors may be in position to make some noise and advance to the Central-Western Division 1 quarterfinals for the second straight season.

### **Parity in area**

Mid-Wach A has always been the power lacrosse league in Central Mass. for boys and girls, but one of the encouraging developments of the 2017 boys' season has been the improvement in quality of Mid-Wach B and the Mid-Mass. League.

In the Mid-Mass., four teams will finish with at least 13 wins as Nipmuc and Hopedale took big steps forward this year to join Tantasqua and defending Division 3 state finalist Grafton among the area's elite.

In Mid-Wach B, the league may place a CMass-best five teams in the postseason, pending Marlboro's finale against Shepherd Hill on Wednesday.

One of the ways to gauge how competitive Mid-Wach B is compared to the rest of Central Mass. is to look at the teams' records against nonleague foes. Including Leominster, which is currently 4-13 — but, tellingly, 4-4 outside Mid-Wach B — the six-team league has gone 32-18 against outside opponents.

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