

Lahser spikers enjoy strong start

BY MARTY BUDNER
STAFF WRITER

Bloomfield Hills Lahser's volleyball team has built a foundation of success the past three seasons under coach Margie Vasile.

Competing in Division II of the Oakland Activities Association, the Knights sandwiched a second-place finish between a pair of division championships over that period.

"They've registered winning records in each of those seasons, including a sterling 52-2-1 overall mark last winter. Because of that success, Lahser was elevated to Division I this year."

Considering the move up, plus the fact Lahser has only four seniors on its roster and is missing some players who elected not to come out for the team this year, things are going quite well entering the 2003 portion of its schedule.

In fact, the Knights have not missed a beat.

Counting Monday's straight-game victory over Birmingham Groves, Lahser is a perfect 3-0 in Division I. The Knights remain undefeated on the season with a 12-0-1 overall record.

"The fast start has impressed Vasile."

"I've been very impressed with how much success we've had so far considering how young we are," said Vasile, whose team also consists of three juniors, five sophomores and one freshman.

"But we have some talent here and they're a very determined group."

The senior captains include Alka Pandan, a 4.0 honor student headed to Harvard who plays the left side of the floor very well, and Laurel Stucky. The other two seniors are Stephanie Powell and La-Lea Hill.

"Alka is one of the most consistent players on the court," said Vasile.

"Powell was cut from last year's team but came back and made the team. She shows a lot of determination."

All four seniors played key roles in Lahser's 15-10, 15-5 road victory over Groves.

Stucky had nine kills and Hill contributed five kills. Sophomore Ananda Salvia had seven digs and sophomore setter Megan Carter was credited with 20 assists.

"Considering it was our first game back from vacation, we played fairly well," said Vasile. "We know we can play better, but this was a good match tonight."

"The road ahead figures to get tougher for the Knights, who also defeated Seaholm and Farmington in Division I action this season."

The division's other teams include always tough Troy Athens and Rochester Adams, as well as Troy and Clarkston.

The Knights host Clarkston this evening.

Vasile believes the Knights can piggy-back a Division I title this season on top of its Division II crown from last year.

"I think with some good luck and some good team play, there's no reason why we can't win this year," said Vasile.

"We just need to bring the chemistry of the team alive and play hard. The players know how important it is to work as a team. They know they don't have a guaranteed spot on the floor. They have to earn it."

"I think it will be more of a challenge this year," she said. "But we're definitely going to give it a try."

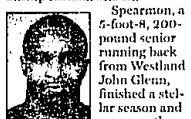
Spearmon relishes NCAA football title

BY BRAD EMMONS
STAFF WRITER

FOOTBALL

He certainly finished what he started.

Grand Valley State University's Reggie Spearmon still carries the tag around his neck, a reminder of the motto the Lakers logged with them throughout an entire 14-0 NCAA Division II championship football season.



Spearmon

(Ga.), 31-24, for the title on Dec. 14 in Florence, Ala.

"We lost last year in the final minute (17-14 to North Dakota) and you could say it meant more because we were expected to win it this year," said Spearmon, the Lakers' leading rusher for the year with 1,500 yards in 291 carries. "We had a plan coming in and we did what we needed to do."

Yes, the Lakers and Spearmon finished what they started.

"When we got to the field we were able to take care of business," said Spearmon, who scored a total of 25 TDs and had 30 catches for 309 yards this season. "Even though we lost last year, we had some great guys who came back and wanted to win it all even though it's hard to get back to the national final two years in a row."

Spearmon, although limited to 29 yards in 14 carries, had a 9-yard TD run in the first quarter against Valdosta. He also had one catch for 9 yards.

"They were putting eight men in the box and every time we pulled the tackle they came in there blitzing," said Spearmon, an All-Great Lakes Intercollegiate Conference first-team pick.

It was a game Grand Valley seemingly had in the bag, only to have Valdosta rally and tie the game late in the fourth quarter, 24-all, with 3:09 remaining.

It was deja vu all over again.

Spearmon let the previous year's championship final seep into his mind.

"You get crazy thoughts, flashbacks, it was a bad feeling,"

Spearmon said. "But we pulled together on the sideline, went back out there and drove down the field."

Yes, the Lakers took just 2:01 to regain the lead and the national title, marching 70 yards capped by Curt Anes' 10-yard TD toss to Dave Kircus, who is Spearmon's roommate along with fellow Laker running back Brent Lesniak.

"When they were keying on me and that left Dave (Kircus) open," Spearmon said.

Coming out of Glenn, Spearmon had nearly 4,500 yards rushing and 51 TDs. But he admitted he wasn't the most diligent worker.

"I was kind of lazy, everything came kind of easy," Spearmon said. "I wished I had worked harder."

At Grand Valley, Spearmon knew he would only play if he could block and catch passes out of the backfield.

After gaining 329 yards on the ground as a freshman, Spearmon's totals increased to 990 yards as a sophomore and 1,028 yards as a freshman.

This season he put up his best numbers, averaging 107.1 yards rushing per game.

Over the summer he stayed in Allendale, working with the running backs coach Todd

Kolster.

"The first two years I was kind of lazy, the third year I worked harder and the fourth year I wanted to go out with a bang," the Glenn grad said. "I got in better shape and I got stronger."

For his career, Spearmon ranks among the top 10 rushers in Grand Valley State history (3,467 yards) with 46 TDs.

Not bad for a guy who basically ran just two plays — Thunder and Blast.

"We changed our offense two years ago, it's like Northwestern's," Spearmon said. "We changed to a shotgun. You have to block in order to play. You have three different reads, check left, check right. It was hard to adapt, but eventually I adapted to it well."

"We also saw on the films that nobody was guarding the guy in the backfield, so we focused on throwing to the running back, flat screens to get us in different positions."

The highlight of Spearmon's senior season was a play against the University of Indianapolis. He was running a sweep to the corner of the end zone when a defender lined him up.

"It was fourth-and-one, the guy had me squared off and I

jumped over him," beamed Spearmon.

Spearmon would like to continue his football career. In July, he'll attend a pre-training camp in Chicago. He has also talked with the NFL Indianapolis Colts about a try-out.

"Reggie's pretty quiet, he's not really vocal," said Kircus, who broke several of Jerry Rice's NCAA pass receiving marks. "Reggie does all his talking on the field. He's a hard-nosed player. A north-south runner who is good on his feet. He's got good agility. He can make a move when he has to."

During his spare time he likes to read and ride his motorcycle.

"My girlfriend (Candace Roy of Chicago) got me reading books, I just finished reading the Summons," Spearmon said. "I've been riding for five years. I have a Crotch Rocket. My older brother rode cycles."

Meanwhile, Spearmon plans on graduating sometime next year. He is majoring in business management with a minor in communications.

And when it comes to academics, Spearmon plans to finish what he started.

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