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MISS NIX'S GOLDEN PITCH

By Kathleen Harte Simone, Philafieldhockey Founder & Editor

September marked another opening day for Linda Nixon, Springfield Township High School's Head Coach in Glenside, Pa., steering the Spartans in what she hopes will be a successful season. It was Nixon's 50th opening day. Yes, 5-0, at the helm of the program that has seen ups and downs, but is "all good" according to Nixon, affectionately known as Miss Nix by her players, players' parents (many of whom she's coached) and fans alike.

I arrived at practice when the players were just wrapping up their warm-up laps around the patchy field – soon to be replaced by smooth turf that Nixon "Cannot. Wait. For." (More on that later.) With practice plan in hand, a big smile on her face, Nixon cheered on the players, while keeping a mindful eye on those fall-

ing behind. Jokingly, I mentioned that it was great to "see her again" and that I had played for Plymouth-Whitemarsh in the early '80s. She laughed and noted, "Well, I hope we beat you!" Nixon's competitive remark, with a smile, perfectly epitomizes her coaching style. She coaches to win and she coaches for the love of the game. "I keep coaching because I love hockey and because the girls here have always been really nice to work with," said Nixon. "I've hardly had any that don't work hard. Really, they have been great. I'm happy!"

Springfield's program, under Nixon, has developed numerous players who have advanced to the college level, earned scholarships and continued on to coach high school and college teams. The Spartans have earned numerous accolades

over the years including a state title in 1993, but Nixon doesn't wallow in past seasons' successes or failures. "When the season is done, it's done," added Nixon. "It's time to put it away." Nixon is focused on the here and now and on the 2017 squad. "I'm expecting a lot from the individual players," said Nixon. "And we'll see how much they're willing to give. That's how it's been – mind over matter. I just want them to be the best they can be. They know that."

The Springfield Spartans are one of two grass teams in all of Suburban One, a league in the Philadelphia area consisting of three divisions (American, Continental and Nation-

al) and Nixon is thrilled, to say the least, that the team will be on artificial surface, hopefully as early as fall 2018. This, she says, will definitely help to bring back the program to its glory days.

"We've been successful, just not over the last six years or so. It takes us a while to get used to the turf surface at away games, and by the time we do, we could be down 2-0," commented Nixon. "So the turf is a really big deal for us."

Nixon's passion for sports, particularly field hockey, spans seven decades. She played for Central Bucks West High School in Doylestown, Pa. where she was named "Most Athletic Girl" of her senior class, and continued her athletic career at Ursinus College where she played five sports: field hockey (captain), softball, tennis (captain), basketball, and swimming (captain). Nixon was named to the Ursinus Hall of Fame. In her senior year, Nixon earned a spot on the U.S. Women's National Team and represented

the United States in tours to Argentina, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, New Zealand, Scotland, Trinidad, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. After her career with Team USA, Nixon coached for USA Field Hockey's developmental programs and assisted with statistics at USA tournaments.

While I was at the field, trying to take a few photos of Nixon in action, it was evident that she is still very actively engaged in daily practices. "I move around a lot!" Nixon was directing drills, pacing up and down like an enthusiastic first-year coach, repeatedly yelling "go, go, go." Her players clearly respect her, taking direction quickly and staying focused.

"She's like one of those coaches who obviously has tons of experience, but she's still always trying to bring new things to the game, try different formations or teach new moves," said Hannah Grothusen, senior tri-captain, who is also coached by numerous club coaches, outside of school, less than half Nixon's age. "She's by no means stuck in the past. It's as if she's a coach that came right out of college."

Fellow senior tri-captain, Ellie Hamilton chimed in, "She's good for the old school pep talks for sure and her voice is very distinct and respectful. She's always very positive. She knows how to get the team going, that's for sure."

Nixon preaches a message of "commitment to excellence through attention to detail." This message, reverberated day after day, year after year, decade after decade, has inspired generations of athletes to become better players and people. And above all, it seems that Nixon has instilled a love for the game, the sport, the team and the Springfield Field Hockey legacy.

"She's taught me to love field hockey. I just know that if there's one thing she's taught me, being here so long, is to love the game," said Emily Henry, goalkeeper and tri-captain. "I was thrown into goal in 8th grade and didn't really like it, but after (playing for) Miss Nix, I just love it. She's just incredible." 

