



STATE CHAMPS

THE FILLIES' 28-1 SEASON ENDS WITH THE ULTIMATE VICTORY

by **JEFFREY WESTHOFF**

AFTER REGULATION PLAY and two overtimes elapsed without either team scoring, the Class 3A girls soccer championship game between the Barrington High School Fillies and the New Trier Trevians came down to penalty kicks.

Barrington's Sophia Spinell stepped up to the ball and drove it into the net. "I was relieved," Spinell said, recalling the moment she watched the ball fly through the goal posts. "I've been in that situation before, and I know what it's like to miss that shot."

Spinell was in that situation, against the same team and in the same stadium—Benedetti-Wehrli Stadium at Naperville's North Central College—two years ago during playoffs. That time Spinell's shot glanced off the post and New Trier went on to win the game 1-0. The Fillies had to settle for third place, while New Trier went on to win the championship.

This year the story was different. Spinell's penalty shot on the night of June 3 was the game-winning goal that delivered the Fillies their long-awaited first State championship (while denying the Trevians their fourth



PHOTO: MATTHEW BOWIE

The Barrington High School Fillies Coaches. From left: Chris Rierson, Assistant Coach; Ryan Stengren, Head Coach; and Brian Allen, Assistant Coach and Goal Coach.

straight title). As soon as the final whistle blew, the exuberant Fillies rushed Spinell and their goalkeeper, Samantha Schmitz, who kept New Trier scoreless and was named MVP of the match by the Chicagoland Soccer website.

“That feeling of winning it all was unreal,” Spinell said.

The girls were crying as they yelled and hugged each other, and their coach, Ryan Stengren, understood why. “I think they teared up because they knew how much they poured into it, emotionally and physically,” he said. “You could see all of that emotion pour out of them.”

The state victory was the culmination of a brilliant 28-1-0 season for a team that was focused unlike any other Stengren had seen in his 20 years with the program and 10 years as head coach. “All of our teams have been really good,” he said. “What stands out [about this team] is how committed they were.”

The players admit to their focus. “We all had the goal of state in mind,” said Ashley Prell, a sophomore forward who will return to the team as a junior next year, “but we knew we had to work for it.”

“We knew from the start we had to give everything,” said Schmitz, a junior who will play as a senior next season.



PHOTO: BOB LEE

Sophia Spinell drove the winning penalty kick ball to the net to win the game.



PHOTO: MATTHEW BOWIE

Kevin Barcal of Breakaway Athletic Development (center) holds the Fillies' Super-Sectional Championship plaque following the team's win. This was the last game played on the home field at Barrington High School before heading to the State playoffs. Team members who trained with Barcal are (from left) Ellie Stodola, Chloe Trom, Anna Brodjian, Annika Lutz, Kevin Barcal, Samantha Schmitz, Lauren Caffé, and Sophia Spinell.

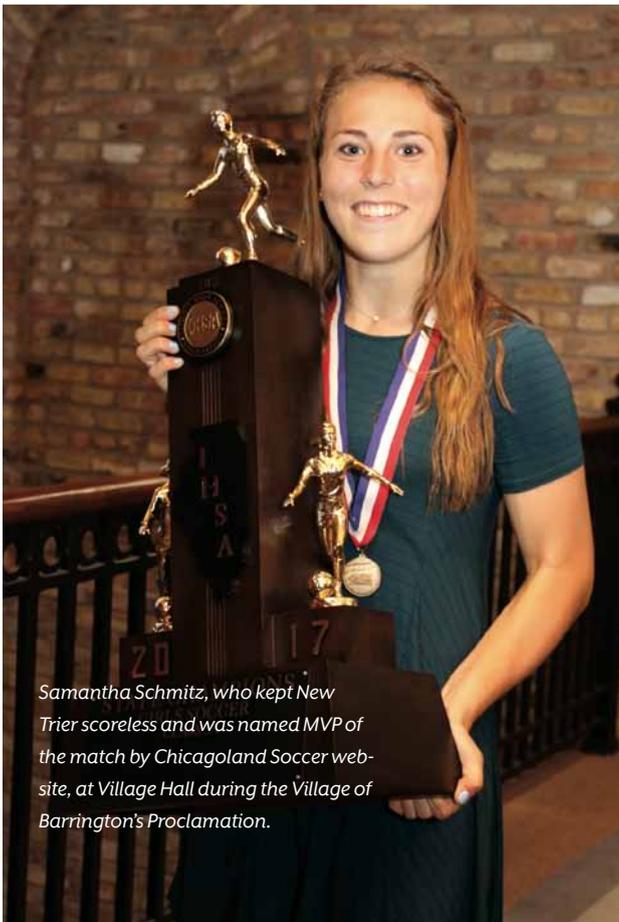


PHOTO: BOB LEE

Samantha Schmitz, who kept New Trier scoreless and was named MVP of the match by Chicagoland Soccer website, at Village Hall during the Village of Barrington's Proclamation.

Stengren believes his players had an extra dose of motivation this season because they did not want to relive last year's playoffs and their unexpected elimination by Huntley in the super-sectional. "If that didn't happen," he said, "I can't honestly say if they would have been as driven."

Stengren discovered how driven his players would be when several team leaders approached him in October, four months before the season began, and said, "Whatever you want us to do, we will do."

"There was a 100 percent buy-in in everything we did, from the top player all the way down to the last player on the bench," Stengren said.

Another reason the team was so focused on the state championship was that fully half of its 20-player roster were seniors, including Spinell, and everyone knew this was their last shot at a title. "This group of seniors—they've been so close, so many times," Prell said. "We said we have to get it this year, we have to go all the way."

Stengren and the team's manager, Dick Spinell, Sophia's father, turned to Kevin Barcal, an athletic trainer and founder of the Lake Barrington-based Breakaway Athletic Development. Barcal had privately trained many of the Fillies' players, including



PHOTOS: BOB LEE

The State Champion Fillies gather at the Barrington Fire Department for their celebratory fire-truck escort to Barrington High School after they returned home from the winning game.

Sophia Spinell, since they were in grade school. Barcal agreed to preseason training for the Fillies, focusing on strength, speed, endurance, and injury prevention.

The key to injury prevention, Barcal said, is “to make sure you train your body for the sport you are going to play.” Soccer is a game of sudden sprints, quick stops, and collisions with other players. “We did a really good job of making sure the girls were ready for any sort of game situation,” he said.

Stengren credits Barcal’s training for keeping the team mostly injury free. “We were pretty healthy for playing 29 games in three months,” Stengren said. “I think that had a lot to do with the work he did.”

Prell believes Barcal’s endurance training also benefited the team. “The season is so long and such a grind,” she said, “and working with him, we were able to punch through the grind.”

Most of the Fillies players trained with Barcal twice weekly from November through January, then Barcal visited with the team weekly during the season. Stengren would tell him what skills he thought the girls needed to work on. “We were always tweaking throughout the season,” Barcal said.

Most of the girls, particularly the seniors, had played together since second or third grade in Barrington’s FCX Soccer Club.





PHOTOS: BOB LEE

Principal Steve McWilliams with Head Coach Ryan Stengren and the Fillies Seniors. A thoughtful make-shift graduation ceremony at Barrington High School was provided after the Barrington Fire Department escorted the State Champs to the school. Parents and teammates cheered on as the 10 seniors had their graduation ceremony the night after their big win.



“That’s where they were groomed and trained in their younger years,” Dick Spinell said.

“Since we’ve been playing together for so long, we know what to expect from each other,” Sophia Spinell said, “and those expectations allowed us to push each other even harder.”

Prell added, “You didn’t have to work on the chemistry as much; it just came naturally.”

As the season began and the team scored one win after another, Stengren made sure the players never felt complacent. “We were never content,” he said. “We took it one half at a time, each game.”

Schmitz agreed: “We took every team seriously and focused on that team on that day only.”

As the season bore on and the playoffs neared, the players impressed each other with their level of commitment. “The best example is the seniors,” Prell said. “I mean, missing graduation, missing their boat trip. ... That kind of leadership showed their commitment, and we knew we had to put the same amount in.”

Sophia Spinell said the seniors decided to pass on their class boat trip, which would have lasted from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m., because it “would mess up our sleep schedule.” Stengren didn’t know about the seniors’ decision until they informed him. “That blew me away. That’s never happened before,” he said. “That’s how focused and committed they were to get where they got to.”

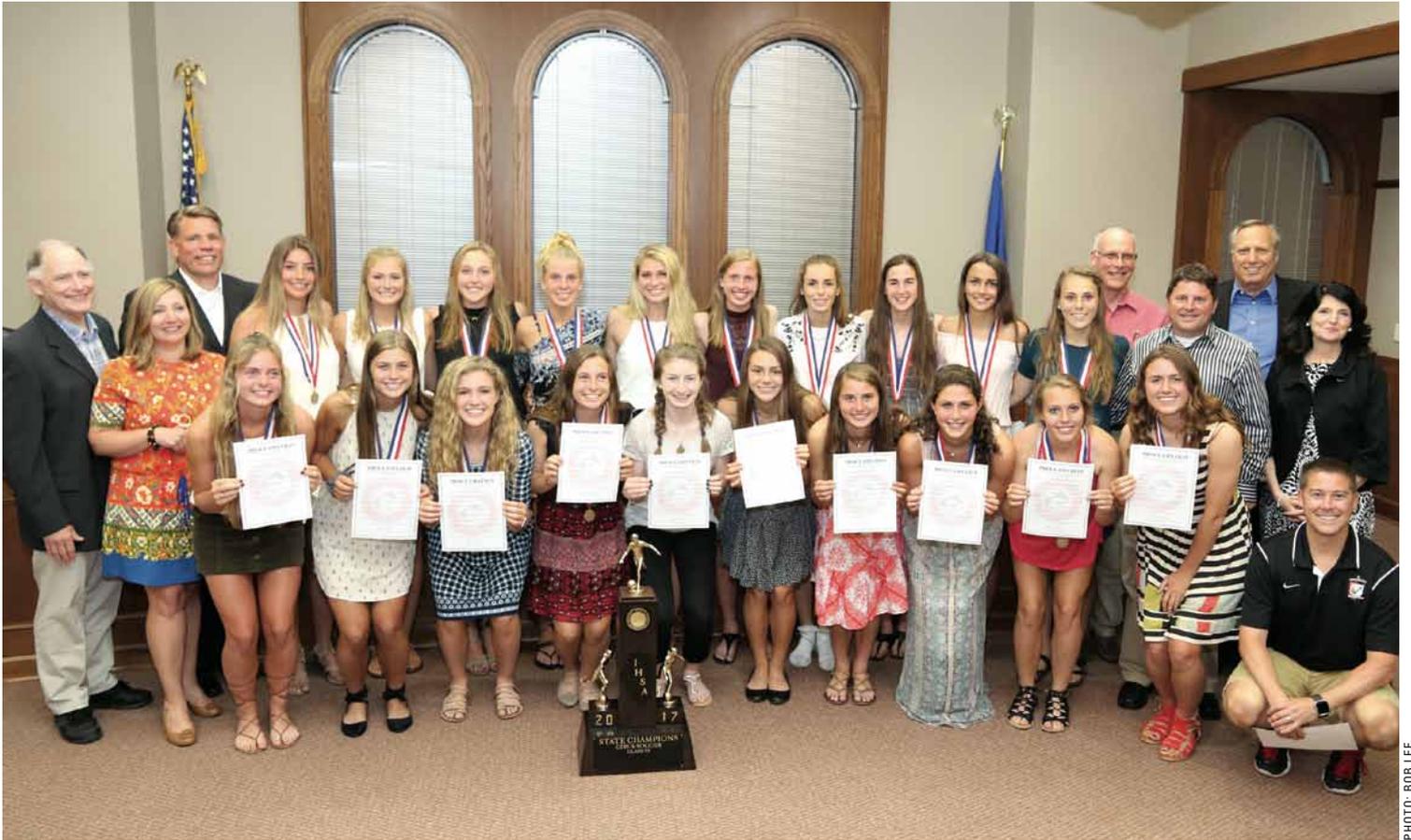


PHOTO: BOB LEE

A Proclamation declaring June 12, 2017 as the Barrington Fillies Girls Soccer Day was presented at Village Hall by Village President Karen Darch and the Village Board of Trustees.

The seniors also had to miss their graduation ceremony (with its surprise visit by country music star Brad Paisley) because it coincided with their 1-0 victory over Downers Grove North in the state semifinals. “We all would much rather be playing for the state title because we knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime thing,” Sophia Spinell said.

After the championship game—and after the team rode through the village on Barrington fire trucks with a police escort—the team gathered in the BHS gym, where a mini-graduation ceremony was held for the seniors. “It was special,” Sophia Spinell said. “Our families were there, and we got to be there with our teammates as well.”

Waiting for the team in the gym were BHS Principal Steve McWilliams and Athletic Director Mike Obsuszt, as well as Barrington 220 School District Superintendent Brian Harris and School Board President Brian Battle and Vice President Penny Kazmier. “To have all those people there was great. Everything about that night was awesome,” Stengren said. “The way the district and community handled it was perfect.”

The players also were happy with the reception. “It was so cool to see how the community was so invested in us,” Schmitz said.

About a week later the team was honored by the Barrington Village Board, which proclaimed June 12 Barrington Fillies Girls Soccer Day in the village.

Following the State championship, the soccer website Top Shelf named the Fillies the No. 1 high school girls soccer team in the country for the season and USA TODAY Super 25 Spring Girls Soccer Rankings also ranked

the Fillies No. 1 in the United States.

“It’s a nice little add-on to the season,” Stengren said. “It was like adding whipped cream to your ice cream.”

Schmitz was more effusive. “That’s such an insane honor,” she said. “We all were so shocked.”

While Stengren praises his players for their victorious season, others make sure he gets his share of the credit. Dick Spinell called him “the hardest-working, most dedicated coach I’ve ever seen.” He said Stengren is just as committed to winning as his players. “They complement each other perfectly.”

Players praised Stengren for how he related to them. “He just really cares about all of us as people,” Schmitz said, “not just as soccer players.”

Even though he has coached for 10 seasons and has no plans to retire (he recorded his 200th victory as head coach this year), Stengren said this squad will be special to him. “I’m always going to remember this group, because they’re always going to be the first.”

Stengren reeled off some of the team’s impressive statistics. They ended the season with a 20-match winning streak. They gave up only six goals all year. They achieved 24 shutouts. And of course, they became the program’s first team to win a state championship.

“They got there successfully because they worked year-round on trying to be the best athletes they could be and the best soccer players they could be,” he said, “and I’m just so happy they were rewarded for it.”

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