

**Soccer** from 1B

to become complacent about anything. It's just been an exciting run, and I'm sure it's going to keep going that way."

Tomaro has been working consistently to build up the school's soccer program, which until 2018 was not even a possibility.

This year's two seniors on the team have seen the growth firsthand, and the squad's juniors will be the first in history to have played soccer for the Vikings since the ninth grade.

"Up to that point, kids had kind of moved into high school sports with the thought, 'if I want to play for my school, I have to stop playing soccer...' This year's juniors are the first kids who are going to be able to play all the way through," said Tomaro. "It's kind of the end of the era of 'I play soccer on the side and do something else for my school.' The junior class [has] been the core of my team for a long time."

Fortunately, there will be no shortage of student athletes to continue the program after this point. Tomaro said she has a strong group of 10th-graders this year, along with a large group of ninth graders who are going to see a lot of playing time.

"They're going to be the ones filling in the spots when I have kids graduating in the next couple of years. So, it's really exciting to see them filling in as I have kids going up," Tomaro said. "They're coming in — a lot of them — with a good amount of skill. And it's really exciting to see this program grow."

The steady growth is one reason the school was able to add a JV team to the program this school year. "Right now, we have 17 signed up, but a lot of my returning players haven't actually gotten their names officially in yet," Tomaro said. "So, I think we'll have about 24 players, which is just enough for the two teams that we've scheduled everything for."

Another reason the Vikings will have two teams this year is the result of their winning record last year, according to Tomaro. "It's a whole new world going into varsity. We played all the JV teams in our league last year. So that was good to see the different variety of competitive levels in our league," she explained. "But then we knew toward the end of the season that we were going to be moving up to varsity this year, because last year, we were undefeated; we tied two and won the rest."

As the Vikings rise to meet the level of competition worthy of their steadily growing squad, Tomaro has been doing all she can to prepare the players.

"We knew at the end of the season that we were going to have varsity this year, and so I got permission to take the kids that were interested to a varsity game with Marist," said Tomaro. "We watched their varsity play, and there's a big difference even within that one school between their JV that we had played and the varsity that we went to watch — so it's going to be a bit of a step up for us."

Despite the major shift in level of competition, Tomaro believes the Vikings can handle it. "We're going to be fine, but it'll take a little getting used to from a coaching perspective, and also from the competitor's perspec-



ZEAHNA YOUNG/SIUSLAW NEWS

**Though optional practices like Wednesday's have been taking place since the beginning of Season One, official practices for Season Two begin Monday.**

ive," Tomaro said. "I have confidence in them that they're going to step up to the higher level of play, but I think they might need to see it once or twice before they say, 'Okay, this is what we're aiming for.'"

"This year will definitely be a journey, but I'm looking forward to it."

One thing players have to look forward to this season is a great deal of time on the field.

"Everybody who's playing will get a lot of playing time, which is going to really build the team together as cohesive units, each team," said Tomaro. "And also, those kids that don't have as much experience are going to get a ton of play time, which will be really good for their player development, and increasing that experience just through the play time competition. I'm really excited about that."

Tomaro went on to explain that she's been telling players, regardless of the amount of previous playing time last year, anyone who plays is going to be a big part of whichever team they're on. "Whether they're on one team all the time, kind of helping both teams, going back and

forth, whatever it is — everybody's going to be contributing a lot to wherever they are," she said.

While the soccer program is expanding, at this juncture the team is still technically a boys team, with girls playing alongside the boys until the school has enough female players sign up.

"Until we grow the girls program, they are all welcome to play on the boys team," Tomaro explained, adding: "And let me just say that they are extremely important parts of our team. And they know it and their teammates know it. We couldn't do what we've done without them having been the players that they are."

Tomaro went on to discuss the possibilities for the future of girls soccer at Siuslaw High School.

"I have four girls this year, which in the past two years, we've had three each year — so I'm excited we got a little growth there," Tomaro said. "Hopefully, the next year few years have more girls, and I'm hoping they'll stick with soccer and we can keep growing that program. [Then] the girls can branch out into their own team

which, even the ones who compete well on the boys team, I think they'd like to have a girls team."

In the meantime, after a very long break, players are ready to get back out on the field and compete. "We played fall of 2019. And then this year's fall season got pushed back several months, so we haven't played since well before COVID," said Tomaro.

Luckily, soccer is a sport with a mode of play that adapts well to the new health and safety regulations required by athletes since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Though the summer program was cut short, Tomaro was able to hold a few practices. "We're fortunate that soccer is mostly a sport where people are

spread out anyway, because of the way you want to be moving the ball around the field," she said. "So, aside from asking people not to do high fives and fist bumps, and the ritual of shaking the other team's hand at the end of the game and congratulating them on a game well played, our play doesn't have to change."

In addition to the added change of wearing masks, consistently using sanitizer and practicing social distancing, spectators will not be allowed to attend matches for the time being as Lane County remains in the extreme risk category.

But Tomaro is hopeful that will change in the near future. "If our county goes

down to 'high [risk]' from 'extreme [risk],' 75 people are allowed at outdoor events and then maybe a few spectators could come," said Tomaro. "So, I'm crossing my fingers for this next two weeks. It's going to happen right before our season, so I'm hopeful that we can at least maybe rotate the parents through."

Siuslaw's first game of the season is at home, when the Vikings host Marist High School on March 2. The JV game will kick things off at 4:30 p.m., followed by the varsity match at 6:30 p.m.

Both games will be held at the high school's east baseball field at the corner of Oak and 27th streets.



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