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A-B delivers

Expectations can be tricky in high school sports. Some squads wilt under the pressure of a preseason No. 1 ranking, while others embrace it.

The Acton-Boxboro girls soccer team chose another path: They forgot about all about it.

"The girls were very excited when the rankings came out in the beginning of the season," said head coach Ruairi Sweeney. "They looked at them, they read the write-ups, but that was it. I don't think they ever looked at them again for the rest of the season."

The Colonials went 19-1 in 2006 before they were eliminated by Winchester in the Division 1 North sectional semifinals on penalty kicks. They returned seven starters from that squad, all of whom remembered how close they had come in 2006. Still, the Colonials would not be caught getting ahead of themselves in 2007.

"That game (against Winchester) is still driving them," said Sweeney. "The girls never looked past what was right in front of them. They really just looked at it as one game at a time."

It was a strategy that paid off, as the Colonials captured the Division 1 state title on Saturday with a win over Shrewsbury. Making A-B's run all the more impressive was the fact that it allowed only five goals all season. The Colonials were even ranked nationally, at one point landing in the top spot before a tie with Newton South knocked them back down.

The Colonials rolled through to the Div. 1 North finals, where they squared off against Winchester and exacted revenge with a 2-0 shutout. With that, they earned a trip to the state semifinals at Weymouth, against Weymouth. While some squads would've complained about having to play such a huge game at the opposing team's home field, Sweeney and his squad weren't about to start squawking.

"That was fine," said Sweeney. "It's a nice field, nice crowd, nice concession stand," he added with a laugh. "I was here two years ago when the boys played here, and I thought it would be great to be back here."

A-B prevailed in overtime, 2-1, over the Wildcats. Sophomore Hayley Brock broke through the Weymouth defense with just under three minutes remaining in the first overtime, then rifled a shot past the Weymouth goalie for the game-winner. It was the third straight game in which Brock scored the winning goal.

"I don't feel like it's my time to step up, or anything like that," said Brock. "We're all just working hard, and I've been the fortunate one the last few games."

As great as this season was, the future seems bright as well. There were only five seniors – Courtney Findlen, Lindsey Raymond, Tracy Potter, Monica Jensen, and Charlotte Davis -- on the team this year, three of whom were starters.

"Again, we don't like to look to far ahead," said Sweeney, as the team was assembling around him to take the bus back home. "They know I'm talking about the future. They don't like that," he added with a laugh.

Still with Brock returning for two more years, and goalie Jessie Wiggins just completing her freshman season, it's hard not to have an eye toward next year.

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"I've got the smartest soccer players on the planet," said Sweeney. "They all play club soccer and in the youth program. They have so much experience by the time they come here. I really feel like I am the most fortunate coach in soccer."

Posted By: **amahoney** | Time: 08:41:20 AM