

## It's easy as A-B Colonials start on top

By Bruce Lerch / Girls Soccer | Sunday, September 16, 2007 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | [Other High School](#)

Despite losing seven seniors to graduation, including the likes of Dual County League Player of the Year Natalie Crutchfield (playing at **Boston College**), Acton-Boxboro looms like a dark shroud over the Division 1 soccer picture. Not just the North section, mind you, but overall, the Colonials are just about everyone's pick as the team to beat.

The Colonials went 19-2 last season, losing to Winchester in the North semifinals on penalty kicks. In its quest to win a third straight Dual County League championship and advance deeper in the postseason, coach Ruairi Sweeney does have the luxury of seven returning starters, led by senior captain Monica Jensen on defense. Junior Cassie Wagner returns up front as the leading scorer in the DCL a season ago.

Among possible challengers, one might be inclined to look to the South at a Whitman-Hanson team that returns nearly everyone from an 18-3 campaign.

"We aim to be the best team every time we set foot on the field," Floeck said. "A lot of people have some high expectations for this team, but we can only control how we play each game as it comes. We'd like to contend for the league title in our last year in the (Atlantic Coast League), we'd like to contend for the state title. All we can do now is face each game and the rest will take care of itself."

Captain Emily Ballard is the lone senior starter and showed her leadership skills last year by dropping back to defense after starting at forward her first two seasons. The Panthers appear to be loaded on offense, with 75 of the team's 86 goals scored last year returning. Junior captains Devin Petta (team-high 26 goals last season) and Kristine Mewis (21 goals) will lead the attack.

"Devon and Kristine can really do it all," Floeck said. "They are such complete players, so tough to defend. They can both finish from anywhere on the field, and they can create for others, too."

Another interesting team out of the South could be Braintree. After claiming two straight Div. 1 state titles, the Wamps will play eight freshmen in what coach Fred Marks hopes is a quick rebuild.

"I expect we'll have a tough first month until the group has had enough time playing together," Marks said. "If we develop into a cohesive team, we'll end up all right."

Senior captain Kalie Whitehouse moves up to forward, alongside fellow captain Erica Bernasconi and sophomore Siobhan Flaherty. Senior captain Lauren Ellis will run the defense.

Winchester coach Chris Scanlon is thankful to have gotten his 500th career victory out of the way so that his group can focus on the real task at hand - winning another state title. Kaitlyn McHugh, Stephanie McCaffrey and Kayla Austin will provide the offense in front of third-year goalie Michelle Troisi. Four-year starter Meg Sullivan joins Chrissy Ockerbloom and Melissa Lin on the back line.

Defending North champion Masconomet (18-3-2 last year) will look to goalie Annie Burns to try to produce another strong season. She will help try to break in three new defensive starters for coach Paula Yanakakis. Erica Skinner will help as the designated stopper. The Chieftains should have a strong midfield, led by Cait Clark, Danielle Staub and Kara Connors.

One more contender from the North could be Andover, if coach Meghan Matson can get her new defensive backfield playing together in timely fashion. Fortunately, she will have senior captain Erica Leber to help blend her new teammates into the fold.

Div. 1 should be competitive this year, and look for Newton North, Framingham, Needham, Duxbury and Marshfield to all make some noise.

Last year's state finalist Cardinal Spellman returns an experienced defense and goalie for the team's third season competing at the Div. 2 level. With junior Catherine McManus in goal behind seniors Megan O'Connell, Stephanie Zina and Christine Bevins, the strong defense will give the Cardinals time to work on replacing the offense that graduated.

Dedham also should contend in the South, thanks in part to a tough Bay State Conference schedule and the nine starters back from last season. The Marauders bring back their top three scorers in Erin McGaffigan, Nicole Savi and Patrice Vettori. Senior Krista Bradbury is back after missing all of last year with an ACL injury, as is Madison Farrell on defense.

In the North, Saugus looks to fill the shoes of seven graduated seniors from a team that went 14-4-4 last year.

Expect Arlington, Wellesley, Dighton-Rehoboth, Walpole, Medway, Danvers, and Belmont to factor into the mix.

Coming out of Div. 3 will be a Newburyport team that could be among the best in the state, regardless of division. The Clippers

will get plenty of offense from Laura Muise, Jillian Kinter and Margaret Mahoney, who topped the Cape Ann League scoring leaders last year.

Norwell was the team that ended Newburport's run last season, ending up 18-1-5 as the state runner-up. Sacred Heart brings back All-Scholastic Jessica Gray at center-midfield, flanked by co-captain Nikki Newell.

Look for teams from Dover-Sherborn, West Bridgewater, St. Mary's and Lynnfield to contend, as well.

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