

Aug. 31 Field Hockey

With a wealth of experience to call on, Jen Cicale takes over Northstars

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Aug. 31: Jen Cicale can say something that most field hockey players in Hamilton Township can't.

Field hockey is in her blood.

Ever since she was a young girl attending her father Barry's practices at Hamilton High West, Cicale has been a field hockey junkie. That's the exception rather than the rule for township girls, who have few youth programs to expose them to the sport prior to high school.

But with a wealth of experience and knowledge to bolster her, Cicale takes over this year as head coach of the Nottingham High varsity program. She is now part of the family business, as her dad is the former head coach of Hamilton West's field hockey, softball and boys basketball programs.

"My dad coached everything I played," Cicale said. "He expected you to be there and you're gonna work hard when you are there. Once you get them committed they want to be part of something."

"I want these girls to see what's going on here and say 'I want to be part of this program.' It was very serious when my dad coached, you didn't miss games, didn't miss practices. Those are the things I took from him."

Cicale showed up at her dad's practices in fifth grade, playing with a stick on the sidelines. As she got older, she would actually play with the girls during practice.

"Is that illegal?" Cicale said with a laugh. "Oh well, too late now."

Jen knew she belonged by ninth grade.

"I remember when I was a freshman, the seniors would make fun of me," she said. "But we would have these 1 v 1 drills against the senior girls. I had seen this for years and at that point I could actually beat them. I was like 'I'm ready.'"

She certainly was.

Cicale played four years of varsity hockey, making All-County as a senior. She also played basketball and softball but said she could never thrive in softball because she was afraid of ground balls coming at her. Basketball was something to do in between hockey and softball.

She then went to West Virginia University, which had no field hockey. After transferring to William Paterson, she graduated in 2007 and had served as Hamilton JV coach during that time.

After getting out of college she coached JV for a year at Robbinsville, went to Trenton after that but got caught in a wave of layoffs.

She has returned this year as a health and physical education teacher at Nottingham and takes over the field hockey team for Lindsey McKenna. Nottingham went 3-12-1 last year and reached the state tournament for the second straight season.

Cicale comes in with a definite idea of how she wants to approach things.

"I'm very big on dedication," she said. "It's very important to be dedicated and be there, if not

it hurts the team. Everyone has to be dedicated at every practice. Everyone has to be on same page.

“Another thing I’m big on is conditioning. The game is an hour long of running. You have to be able to run. If you don’t have an opportunity to get to a 50-50 ball that’s 20 yards down the field, you’re not going to win that ball. The minute you get tired is the minute you lose focus and lose your skill.”

So, the Northstars have run. And how has that worked out?

“They’ve completely embraced the running thing,” Cicale said. “After two or three days of hard runs I thought they’d drop and say ‘I’m not coming out there and doing all that running.’ But they’re right there with me on it.”

As a first-year coach, you can’t ask for a better way to start.