

Althoff's Megan Pawloski named 1A-2A player of the year

BY DAVID WILHELM - News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE -- The honors continue to pile up for Megan Pawloski, but don't expect the senior-to-be at Althoff to change her stripes.

Pawloski, a St. Louis Scott Gallagher player since she was 10, the FIRST female soccer player from Southern Illinois to win the STL Post Dispatch POTY and an all-state performer who has been voted the News-Democrat's Class 1A-2A Player of the Year, won't divert from her humble constitution.

"My mom (Lisa) has always told me, 'Be grateful for everything and never take anything for granted because it can be taken from you.' One play and you could get hurt and it could all be gone," said Pawloski, a fleet-footed forward who had 43 goals and 19 assists this season, pushing her career totals to 102 and 39.

Pawloski was the Class AA Player of the Year last season. If she wins another Player of the Year in 2010, she will join Triad's Jessie Bayne as the only player to win it three consecutive years. Bayne played at Illinois, to whom Pawloski has given an oral commitment.

"It's always a surprise," Pawloski said of the award. "I'm glad the coaches recognized me. It feels good when you work hard to get an accomplishment. There were a lot of good girls out there. It feels good when (coaches) notice you."

Before Pawloski enrolls at Illinois, there's work to be done. With the state going to three divisions, Althoff entered this season as a strong contender to win the Class 2A championship.

But after a three-overtime 2-1 win over Quincy Notre Dame and a 4-1 victory over South Seven Conference rival Carbondale in the Triad Sectional, Althoff lost 4-3 to Chatham Glenwood in the Springfield Super-Sectional and finished 23-3-2.

"We had a great season," Pawloski said. "We only lost three games. (But) it's always a disappointment when you don't make it to state or accomplish your goals."

"But we have a lot of good girls coming back next year. I think, right now, my biggest challenge and my team's biggest challenge is to win the state championship. We're going to face some good teams. Hopefully, we can step up when it counts."

Crusaders coach Juergen Huettner would love to see it happen --not just for the type of player Pawloski is, but for the type of person she is. "We all know what she can do on the field," Huettner said. "She plays as hard the last two minutes of the game as she does early in the game (and) she's a natural goal-scorer. "But what's impressed me is she's always put the team above herself. She's always very grateful, humble about her ability. She knows she gets stuff done because she's surrounded by teammates that get her the ball. She always mentions she couldn't do it without the team. She's very coachable and very humble. She never walked around like a superstar. She walked around like she was just part of a good team."

Pawloski, true to form, downplayed her statistics.

"I just went out and played," she said. "I had a great team around me and they made me look better. I never really look at (soccer) as a numbers game. I just try to score goals so my team wins."

Pawloski's speed and ball skills make her a handful against any defense. She's hoping to make gains in the strength department for next season, which will make her an even more formidable presence as a senior and beyond.

"There's definitely some things I want to work on," she said. "I need to get stronger and I need to get better in the air. I kind of want to work on those things before I get in college. I'm trying to work on that in St. Louis Scott Gallagher practices."

Huettner knows he'll see a more polished player next spring. "Megan is one of those players who will always improve, because that's just her nature," Huettner said. "She'll always look to add something to her game. She's always going to be one of those players saying, 'What can I do better?'"

"You always can improve. Megan is open-minded about improving and I think she'll add another notch to (her game) next year. And in terms of leadership, I think she'll step up as a senior and then take another step up in college when the game is faster-paced."

As talented as Pawloski is and considering what she has accomplished, it would seem she would prefer to bypass her senior year and jump to the big-time. Not so. The shiny state-championship trophy is never far from her mind.

"I think every year, I'll get stronger and just get better on the ball, with better footwork," Pawloski said. "I can't wait to do that in college, but I'm looking forward to one more year in high school. I want to win that state championship."

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