Top Women’s Team in Muhlenberg History

Contest 2: 1959 Field Hockey vs. 2001 Softball

1959 Field Hockey
Head Coach: Jean Hecht
Final Record: 4-0

The first intercollegiate field hockey team at Muhlenberg was a rousing success.

The Mules played four games in their inaugural season, winning all four and not allowing a goal. Muhlenberg beat Marywood home (6-0) and away (3-0) and Moravian home (4-0) and away (4-0). No other team in College history has gone undefeated and unscored-upon for a season.

The home field in those days was Hagen Field (current site of Trexler Library), and the team consisted of only 14 players. Although they were few in number, they had great intensity and dedication. The schedule was modest, but at that time many local schools had not yet gone co-ed. Lehigh and Lafayette did not make the transition until the '70s, and Kutztown was still participating in Play Days.

So the four-game schedule was a beginning, and a great beginning it was. The 1959 squad proved that women’s athletics could thrive at Muhlenberg and helped pave the way for all the great women’s teams have come through in the 48 years since.

The team also gave a preview of what was to become the school’s dominant female sport for most of that time. Field hockey lost only two games from 1959 to 1967 and carried an all-time winning percentage of better than 70 percent into the early 1990s.

Hall-of-Famers Carol Emhardt (Kuntzleman) and Ruth Smith combined to score 13 of Muhlenberg’s 17 goals in 1959 and would remain a formidable scoring duo for the three years they played together.

2001 Softball
Head Coach: Ruth Gibbs
Final Record: 25-17
Centennial Conference Champions

The 2001 softball team showed it could work within the system - any system. For the 2001 season, the Centennial Conference instituted a postseason playoff to determine the conference champion, and the Mules, who won the title with the best regular-season record in 2000, repeated by capturing the first CC tournament.

Little came easy for Muhlenberg, which entered the CC playoffs as the third seed and emerged by winning three games in two days by a total of four runs. More than half of the Mules’ 42 games were decided by three runs or fewer, 11 of those by a single run. The Mules won a game in which they were no-hit (against Messiah) and were down to their last out against 1-14 Swarthmore before rallying to win in 12 innings.

The team sported a record of 7-11 at one point, but rebounded to come within one of the school record for wins in a season.

Sent to Salem, Va., for the Atlantic Regional of the NCAA Division III Tournament, fifth-seeded Muhlenberg was one strike away from being eliminated in two games before erupting for six runs in the top of the seventh to knock off third-seeded Christopher Newport, 6-2. The Mules then defeated York, the team they lost to in the first tournament game, before falling to eighth-ranked Salisbury State to finish third at the regional.

Freshman Danielle DeLucia was named CC pitcher of the year after winning all three CC tourney games and ending the year with a 1.27 ERA. She and OF Becki Toth earned first-team All-CC and third-team all-region honors, with 1B Elizabeth Kostelnick also making the All-CC first team.