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Sports

Eureka Lacrosse Leaps Up

Read how this club turned the corner from a "Division Two doormat to Division One public powerhouse."



Allan Gardner, Neighbor

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Matt Ward vividly remembers the Eureka Lacrosse Club Varsity team in 2008 when he was a freshman. "There was a lot less dedication and drive to get better or compete," he said. That team finished 4-9 overall, and second to last in Division Two in Missouri Lacrosse competition.

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Matt and his dad, John Ward, knew what to do. Matt convinced his best friend, Ryan Gardner, to quit baseball and play lacrosse instead. They are neighbors in Crown Pointe Estates, a Wildwood subdivision, and were friends since kindergarten.

Meanwhile, John was instrumental in securing Jon Silva to take over coaching the club for the 2009 season.

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Things changed for the better then. Dramatically better.

Silva installed all new systems and attitudes throughout the Eureka Lacrosse Club, with a regimen of long, tough practices and late night chalk talks. He brought in a committee of his lacrosse brethren to help develop this now up-and-coming high school lacrosse club. No one in the Missouri lacrosse community expected much from Eureka going into the 2009 season, and that turned out to work in the team's favor.

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Building Momentum in 2009

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The hard work and new attitude paid dividends right away as Eureka won three consecutive early season games, all in overtime, and bolted to a 7-1 record. In game No. 9, Eureka traveled to Kansas City to play at Pembroke Hill, and lost by one goal after trailing by five. Then they won six games in a row to finish with a sterling 13-2 record in the regular season.

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The 2009 playoffs proved to be exhilarating, as Eureka knocked off Clayton 10-9, then a very talented Fort Zumwalt West team 12-11 to earn a rematch with Pembroke Hill for the Division Two State Championship. In that game, Gardner scored a hat trick to give Eureka a 5-2 lead heading into the fourth quarter—but it was not enough, as Pembroke Hill came back to win 6-5.

In one short year, Eureka had improved from 4-9 to 15-3, and finished second in the state in Division Two.

Gardner (30 goals, 30 assists) and Ward (18 goals, 16 assists)—the newly dubbed Crown Pointe Connection—scored 33 percent of the team's goals during the breakout season. They got plenty of help from junior face-off specialist Matt Vollmer (34 goals, 18 assists), fellow sophomores Henry Tellini (25 goals, 14 assists) and Alex Hepper (17 goals, 8 assists), defensive stalwarts Dan Funk, Justin Horschig and Paul Paschke and goalie Anthony Paschke.

For Silva, the astounding turnaround in fortunes for the program wasn't enough. He opted to become the first Missouri Lacrosse program ever to leave Division Two and jump

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Rockhurst High School, Mary Institute and County Day School (MICDS), Saint Louis University High, Chaminade College Preparatory School and De Smet Jesuit High School.

Silva said the timing was right to move the Eureka Lacrosse program to the upper division after the varsity team demonstrated success in Division 2 in 2009. "We needed to challenge ourselves, and not be complacent. Eureka Lacrosse was growing and the coaching staff knew the only way to be the best and grow the program was to play the best teams in the area."

So Eureka stepped up to D1 with their entire starting varsity offense intact from 2009.

Any doubts about Eureka's ability to compete at D1 were quickly dispelled, as the team burst from the gate for a 6-0 start. Their first loss was 4-5 at SLUH, the defending state champions, in a game that saw Eureka hit the post no fewer than five times. Their confidence was growing.

After a tough loss to perennial power Rockhurst 6-10 at home, Eureka won a thriller at Chaminade 7-6, then went four overtimes at CBC and won 10-9. They finished their first season at D1 with a record of 10-3, and the No. 2 seed in the playoffs.

2010 Continued with Excitement

The 2010 playoffs proved as thrilling as 2009. First up, Eureka avenged their loss to SLUH with a 7-4 win paced by four goals from Senior Matt Kraus. In the semi-finals, Eureka beat Chaminade again; this time 8-6, to setup a rematch with Rockhurst in the D1 State Championship game. In that contest Eureka trailed 3-4 at halftime, then fell behind 3-7 late in the third quarter. Gardner paced the big comeback with a second half hat trick to slice the score to 6-7 before Kraus hit the post. Alas, in the end, the well-funded and very deep Rockhurst squad beat the undermanned public school Eureka Wildcats, but not by much 6-8.

"Our team was low in numbers, with only a few substitutes, but we had great team chemistry," said Silva.

2011 Punctuated Success

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Heading into 2011, Keith Templin took over as head coach after serving as the defensive coordinator in 2009 and 2010. Tim Ganey served as the offensive coordinator for the third consecutive season and Mike Silva came back to coach the defense.

"The secret is out," Templin said. "No one will be fooled. People know that we're a decent program, and we can win."

Eureka got off to a hot start again as they went 5-0 in March. Clearly this club had turned the corner from D2 doormat to D1 public powerhouse. Eureka, led by 12 seniors, turned in another stellar season with a 12-5 record before falling to MICDS in the first round of the playoffs.

Gardner and Ward both broke Matt Vollmer's team record of 34 goals set in 2009. Ward had 44 goals to go along with 18 assists. Gardner scored 46 goals and dished 45 assists, 20 of those going to Ward. The Crown Pointe Connection scored an astounding 53 percent of Eureka's goals on the season. Those performances netted both Gardner and Ward selection to the All-State team. Gardner also was named an Academic All-American.

They say records are made to be broken. For Eureka lacrosse players and fans, the bar has been raised very high.

Editor's Note: Allan Gardner serves as director of competition for the Eureka Lacrosse Club, as well as the proud father of Ryan Gardner, who is featured in this article.

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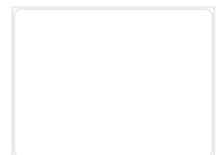
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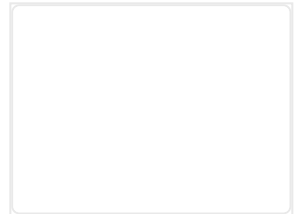
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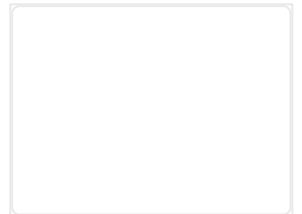
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