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MCT Field Hockey Preview: Midfield play will be key for Hopewell Valley, Lawrenceville

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By Anthony Coleman/The Times

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Jenna Rovner, right, stepped up for Hopewell Valley in the semifinals.

All season long, Alicia Wagner and Colby Hussong have been doing their part as the top two scorers on the Hopewell Valley High field hockey team.

However, in reaching the final of the Mercer County Tournament, which is at 2 p.m., Monday at Rider University, the top-seeded Bulldogs are getting contributions from others.

Tess Brzezynski has 20 points on the season, 14 of them have come in the last seven contests. Jenna Rovner, who hadn't scored a goal since Oct. 1 vs. Nottingham, tallied the game-winner in overtime vs. Robbinsville in the semifinal.

For Lawrenceville, Eliza Becker (23 points) and Nikki Rivera (18 points) comprise perhaps the second-best midfield combination in the county, thus get most of the press when it comes to Big Red field hockey.

Players like Megan McLaughlin (team leader with eight goals) and Sara Culhane (22 points) have quietly produced solid seasons for the third-seeded Big Red.

KEY QUESTIONS

Which goalie will be the sharpest?: Expect this game to be dominated by midfield play. Shots on goal will be at a premium, so which goalie is on her toes will determine the winner. Lawrenceville goalie Galen Ogg has only seen 88 shots in 15 games (5.9) while Hopewell Valley's Kristin Olszuk has faced 73 in 16 contests (4.3). That's about roughly how much action the goalies will see. The better goalie in her limited amount of action should win.

What unsung hero steps up?: Wallace, Hussong, Rivera, Becker, McLaughlin. Those names will draw the defenses' attention. So what "unknown" will shine? Hopewell Valley's Grace McCabe (26 points)? Lawrenceville's Maddie Jones (15 points)?

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Colby Hussong, Hopewell Valley: The junior is doing it all for the Bulldogs, and her No. 1 jersey will be seen all over the field. Against Robbinsville, she was five yards off the end line, playing defense and clearing the ball. Almost in a blink of an eye, she was in the offensive circle, attempting a shot on goal.

Nikki Rivera, Lawrenceville: Eagles head coach Andy Reid would love Rivera's high motor. The shortest player on the field, Rivera will probably be the fastest as well. She may not be the best player on the field, but No. 11 always stands out and makes an impression. Also watch how well she and No. 15 (Becker) work together.

WRITER'S PREDICTION

Hopewell Valley has scored 79 goals and allowed just 12 while Lawrenceville has put in 37 and allowed 18 - not that those numbers will matter much come Monday. The Big Red have been ranked second in The Times' Top 10 all season for a reason. The Big Red, 2-1, over Times-area No. 4 Hopewell Valley.

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