

Local Goalkeeper School Gains Attention

By JOHN KEMMETER

of The Gazette

What started as a father helping coach his daughter's Portage County Youth Soccer (PCYS) teammate has developed into a unique goalkeeper school that is getting attention from around the state and the country.

Eric Wiberg runs Wiberg's Wisconsin Goalkeeper School (WWGS), which attracts dozens of youth and high school soccer goalkeepers from across the state to his weekly training sessions in Stevens Point throughout the year.

Last fall he also launched a Web site for the school, www.wibergwgs.com, which features high-quality video clips of the school's goalkeepers in action.

It is believed to be the only goalkeeper Web site of its kind in the world, where coaches are just a click away from viewing a number of college prospects at the same site.

"I have just heard wonderful things from college coaches, that they can look at a variety of male and female keepers on our Web site," said Wiberg.

"It really makes it easy for these kids to be seen by hundreds of college coaches across the nation and thus be exposed and recruited by these coaches," said Wiberg.

Wiberg started coaching goalkeepers four years ago when he decided to work with Cassie Glodowski of Waupaca, who at the time was a PCYS teammate of Wiberg's then 13-year-old daughter.

A few months later, he also began working with Abby Crotteau, who is currently the starting goalkeeper on the Stevens Point Area Senior High girls soccer team as a freshman.

"Four years ago I had these two keepers," said Wiberg. "And then all of a sudden I started to meet other kids, and they would ask."

What began with kids from Stevens Point and Waupaca expanded about two-and-a-half years ago with others coming from Wisconsin Rapids and Wausau to join in the goalkeeper training.

Now the WWGS has a consistent group of 30 to 40 keepers from the central Wisconsin area that regularly attend the weekly training sessions, as well as others from as far north as Bayfield, as far west as Onalaska and also some from the Madison area.

"The core of the program is the weekly training session," said Wiberg. "Almost every week of the year we have at least one weekly training or group session, and many times, especially from January through May, we'll have two sessions a week," Wiberg said.

When the weather is cooperating the training sessions usually take place at the PCYS complex on the east side of Stevens Point, although last weekend they were at SentryWorld due to inclement weather.

"What we work on is just technique, technique, technique," said Wiberg. "There are so many techniques that a goalkeeper must have. You have to get so many quality repetitions that doing the technique becomes as natural to you as breathing air; you don't have to think about it," said Wiberg.

"We also try and introduce the kids into a lot of decision making situations in practice. I've heard parents or coaches say when they look at a player on the field, 'oh boy, that goalkeeper doesn't have the instincts'. And to that I say, garbage.

“What we have to do as coaches is show that player that situation a hundred times in practice,” said Wiberg.

Wiberg also has a pair of co-coaches in Becca Heine, who was a college keeper in Ohio, and Meredith DeCaluwe, who just completed her playing career as a keeper at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

“It’s wonderful to have two additional coaches like that, that bring a lot to the table,” said Wiberg. “I could not do this all by myself. I’m fortunate to have Meredith and Becca helping co-coach, and we work with keepers from nine to twenty-two years old, and we certainly work with a lot of the high schools in central Wisconsin,” said Wiberg.

Someone else Wiberg works with is Marquette University men’s soccer associate head coach Stan Anderson.

Last summer Wiberg persuaded Anderson and his staff to come to Stevens Point and host a three-day goalkeeper camp, which 37 people attended in its first year.

This year Anderson, who runs one of the most-highly attended goalkeeper camps in the nation every summer in Milwaukee, will return for the second annual Camp Shutout Road Show from Wednesday, June 18 through Friday, June 20, at the PCYS complex.

Wiberg said they are looking to double the number of participants from last year’s camp.

“The camp provides excellent training,” said Wiberg. “It gets our kids exposed and seen by a top college coach. Word of mouth is so important in college recruiting and if he sees a particularly interesting or good kid at a camp, even though they may not need them at Marquette, that word spreads around.”

What has also helped get participants in the WWGS exposure among college coaches is its Web site, which features clips of individual goalkeepers in action.

“We do not show game clips,” said Wiberg. “A college coach may go to a game and you might be lucky to see that keeper make four saves in a game. What we do is, we show thirty seconds to one minute up close video clips of a keeper forming the whole gamut of keeper techniques.

“There’s so many techniques that they’re trying to see, that college coaches simply have to click on the video and they can play it over and over. They can pause, and goalkeeper is the one position in soccer that is uniquely suited to video analysis. It’s very difficult to do a video analysis on field players for various reasons, that’s why they have to be seen at length and scouted in live action games.

“But goalkeepers, you can get a tremendous sense of their footwork, their power, their explosiveness, their size, their courage. All that can be shown on videotape. Not game footage, but the videotape we film out at the PCYS complex and then put on the Web site,” said Wiberg.

So far the Web site, which launched in September of 2007, has been beneficial to the athletes.

“Cassie Glodowski from Waupaca received six Division One scholarship offers alone from coaches simply seeing her on the Web,” said Wiberg. “Not even watching her play in person. And Palani Apuakehau, who is the senior keeper from Wisconsin Rapids, also received a college scholarship,” said Wiberg.

Besides the Web site, what has also helped the WWGS expand is the lack of a similar program in other areas of the state that specializes in soccer goalkeeper training.

“They will not find this weekly technique training year round anywhere else in the state,” said Wiberg. “Even in major metropolitan areas like Chicago or Minneapolis, they do not have a program like this.”

That should allow the WWGS to continue to grow, which is something Wiberg didn’t expect when he first started coaching the goalkeeper on his daughter’s team.

“The first year I was just happy to train Abby and Cassie,” said Wiberg. “And then I thought, ‘you know, they are doing so well,’ I realized I could help and influence more kids than Abby and Cassie.

“PCYS has been very far-thinking and done a lot of things that are unique in central Wisconsin with the goalkeeper program and with select teams. So we’re actually, through these various things PCYS has going on, reaching out to many of the other clubs in central and northern Wisconsin and they are sending players over to us to take advantage of these opportunities. And it’s just good for everyone, because a rising tide lifts all boats,” said Wiberg.