Decoff was the perfect fit

**BY JAMES GREENE**
ABBORATE SPORTS EDITOR

The Women’s soccer program moved forward by leaps and bounds this year by winning the Patriot League Championship and advancing to the NCAA Tournament for the first time ever last Fall. After a slow 2-8 start that included a humbling 9-0 loss to Boston College in the first ever meeting between the two programs, plus two difficult losses to Top 25 schools, Holy Cross turned their season around, winning eight of their final eleven games. Their final two victories came in the Patriot League Tournament, both a 1-0 shutout victories over Bucknell and Colgate, respectively, to capture the school’s first league championship. More importantly, to capture the school’s first league championship. More importantly, the team advanced to the big stage. One of the team’s main strengths has always been goaltending, and Tiffany Decoff provided plenty of that not only this year, but in her entire four-year career at Holy Cross.

Decoff has earned quite a pile of notoriety for herself with the Crusaders, but don’t ask her about her stats. “You can ask my dad about the stats,” Decoff said with a laugh. “I don’t really look at them.”

Perhaps she should take a look. The Danvers, MA native started her HC career by starting in 14 of her 17 contests and making 25 saves, the most in her career at Holy Cross. 25 of those saves came in a 1-0 defeat of Brown University. She started all 17 contests the next season and led the 16th ranked defense in the nation, and also led the Patriot League with an 88.2% save percentage. She continued to impress in 1999 as she started in all 19 matches and shutout her opponents in her final 10 games, ending the season with 12 shutouts overall. Those are both school records. Perhaps her greatest accomplishment is her place within the NCAA record books, holding the third longest stretch of shutout minutes in history at 1005:58.

But Division I athletics is a different beast and Decoff learned that quickly. “The training changes at this level,” she said. “The competition was higher.” As for academics, she had an idea of what to expect. “I knew I was in for a tough workload, but I liked the individual contact between students and professors. You’re not a number in a lecture hall.”

A three sport star at Danvers, Decoff dropped basketball to concentrate on soccer and softball at The Crusader. After struggling through her freshman season in a big way her freshman year, batting 260 with 12 RBIs in 47 games. After struggling through her sophomore season she chipped in with 84 assists at third, and this year as tri-captain she is second on the team with 76 assists at the hot corner.

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Being a two sport athlete has its advantages, but sacrifices are part of the life. Decoff wished to spend time abroad in Spain to pursue her interest in the language. Because of her athletic commitments and the school’s lack of semester-only overseas programs, she was unable to go. “That is probably my biggest regret, not being able to go abroad. I pitched three different proposals to [administration] and they all got shot down. That was frustrating.” She continued, “But it worked out in the end. Spanish is one of my passions.”

Despite strong stats in her spring sport, Decoff’s notoriety comes from her tenacious abilities as a goalkeeper. “The goalie is either a hero or a scapegoat,” she said, with a slight flavor of intensity. “You’ve got to be loud back there, you’ve got to communicate with the whole team. I do whatever it takes to get to the ball before it crosses the line. Goalkeeping is second nature to me.”

That is exactly what she is famous for. In 2000 Decoff posted shutouts in six of HC’s ten victories, and her two shutout wins in the Patriot League Tournament gave her 29 for her career, etching her name in conference lore. She closes her career tied with Army’s Anna Callinetti for most career shutouts of any Patriot League player. Not bad for the co-captain and Second Team All-Patriot League member.

The program came a long way during Decoff’s tenure. “We barely had practice uniforms,” she commented, referring to the conditions she faced as an incoming freshman in ’97. But now the team has built it’s reputation by playing the tough teams. And what about winning it all? “I can’t put the feeling into words,” she said. “I was so proud of the team. We were history in the making.”

After speaking fondly of her time at Holy Cross, Decoff spoke about the co-captain and Second Team All-Patriot League member. Pat Dury captured the hammer throw, senior Pat Dury captured the hammer throw, and sophomore AJ Thibault dominated third. Dave Pulokadominated the discus and placed third in the shot put.

The Holy Cross men had strong finishes in the 800 meter run. Bill Kenney, Pat Mahoney, and Matt Karatkiewicz placed fourth, fifth and sixth respectively. Other top finishers included Nic Bruteca (placing sixth in the 400 meter dash), Dave Skeadas (placing fifth in the 100 and 200 meter dash) and Joe Robertson (placing second in the pole vault and high jump).

The ladies were led by veterans Jess Kieliszak, who placed first in the 400 meter run, and Melissa Cuningham, winner of the 800 meter run. Beth Coughlin had a strong 3700 meter run, placing fourth.

The freshman duo of Ashley Boyle and Julie Gillis proved unstoppable in the 1500 meter run, placing fourth and sixth. These youngsters are truly an asset to the team and their talent will only be augmented in the years to come. Other solid performances included Liz Liotta, placing sixth in the high jump and triple jump. Nicole Distefano placed second in the pole vault, and Andrea Madden placed fourth the shot put.

Six of the women have qualified for the New England Championship. Kieliszak placed in the 400, Cunningham in the 800, Emily Hogan in the 10,000 and 5,000, Marcia Flaherty in the 10,000, Ashley Boyle in the 1500 and Alison LeBeau in the pole vault.

Only one meet remains until the Patriot League Championships, which will be held here at HC. The heat is on. Better bring your shades to this one, as track’s best and brightest will strut their stuff on home turf.

Weather heats up and track team ignites

**BY COURTNEY PAQUETTE**
CRUSADER SPORTS STAFF

Whatever snow remained on the track prior to last week’s track and field events was certainly melted by the heat and intensity of the competition.

Wednesday and Thursday saw competitors dueling it out in the men’s decathlon and the women’s heptathlon. Both grueling competitions are only attempted by the most finessed athletes. Dan Conti ’03 captured the decathlon, winning the 110 meter hurdles and placing second in the pole vault and the 1500 meter run. He also qualified for the IC4A Championships held May 19-20 at Princeton University. Senior Shauna McLaughlin placed sixth in the woman’s heptathlon. Both events showcased some of the most talented athletes on the east coast.

And the competition only got more intense. The men’s and women’s teams of Central Connecticut, Vermont and Maine put their talent to the test against Holy Cross. Conti obtained another first place win in the 110 meter hurdles. Senior Pat Dury captured the hammer throw, and sophomore AJ Thibault dominated third. Dave Pulokadominated the discus and placed third in the shot put.

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