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Jenna Gordon: Former White Plains soccer star has come a long way

By **JOE LOMBARDI**
THE JOURNAL NEWS

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The success Jenna Gordon now enjoys as a defender on the Villanova women's soccer team hardly could have been envisioned when the former White Plains star joined the Wildcats as a walk-on her freshman year.

"I didn't talk to her much her first year because I didn't know who she was," coach Ann Clifton said, only half-jokingly.

Gordon is the only player on the team who joined the Wildcats sight unseen. But that was then.

Now a senior, she's one of the leading players on a team that is off to a 5-0-2 start - and she's on scholarship, too.

"I think I've improved in almost every way possible, especially foot skills," Gordon said. "I've also focused on seeing the field and seeing the game a lot better. I see it as an entire game now, rather than a personal thing."

The 5-foot-3 Gordon, who is known for her speed, moved to left-side defense following her sophomore year and helped Villanova allow just 11 goals all last season. The 2006 Wildcats went 16-3-2 and advanced to the second round of the NCAA tournament, where they lost to Penn State 2-0 after beating Toledo 5-1 in the first round.

It was Villanova's fifth NCAA appearance in the last six years.

"The Toledo game was amazing," Gordon said. "Our team was really together. We dominated the entire game. Penn State is the kind of game that you look back at and think how the whole game could have changed if we started out playing strong from the beginning."

Gordon is confident about the Wildcats' tournament prospects this season.

"We have seven seniors, and usually we're all starting," she said. "We've grown very close. We're hoping we can make this season what we want it to be. Everybody wants to go on the field and leave everything out there each game."

That's especially true in Gordon's case, according to Clifton.

"Passionate is probably the first word that comes to mind with Jenna," Clifton said. "If there's a fine line between fire and ice, that's what she has."

Clifton noted that while Gordon is a team leader, it's in a "behind the scenes" sort of way.

"If she perceives something is going on that needs to be addressed, she may have lunch with that

particular young lady," Clifton said. "I'm not sure if she's comfortable being an authoritative leader."

But Gordon was quite comfortable during a six-week program to study Spanish in Chile, where she went with teammate Melissa Murowski in the summer of 2006.

"It was a different atmosphere, but interesting at the same time," said Gordon, a comprehensive-science major who is eyeing a career in occupational therapy. "It was great."

Gordon, who is working toward becoming fluent in Spanish, hopes to return to South America soon.

"I may take a year off and travel there," she said.

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JILLIAN LOYDEN

Age: 22

Hometown: Vineland

College: Villanova

Position: Goalie

Height: 5-10

Free kicks: The All-American has a school-record 40 wins in goal . . . Had an 0.45 goals against average last season and a .903 save percentage with 11 shutouts . . . Is 2-0 this season with 0.00 GAA and five saves . . . Has two shutouts this season . . . Two-time Big East Goalkeeper of the Year . . . Had a 1.09 GAA in 2005, six solo shutouts and an .810 save percentage . . . All-Big East first team in 2005 and 2006, second team in 2004 . . . First-team All-State at Vineland High School and three-time All-South Jersey player.

Loyden among the top goalkeepers in nation

By CELESTE E. WHITTAKER

Courier-Post Staff

Jillian Loyden began her soccer career as an 8-year-old in a Vineland recreation league.

Back then, she had no idea she'd one day become a top collegiate goalkeeper.

"I was young and didn't really have that much stuff to do," said Loyden, a Vineland High School graduate, who's an All-American goalkeeper for Villanova University.

"I joined a soccer team and ended up being pretty good. I had a lot of friends who played. I started going to some camps, working out on my own, joined a club team and blossomed from there."

That she did.

A first-team All-State player in high school, the 5-foot-10 Loyden has carved out quite an impressive career for herself at Villanova.

The senior was among 45 players on a preseason watch list for the Hermann Trophy, presented to the top men's and women's collegiate players.

"It's pretty exciting to be recognized as one of the best players in the country and to be up for such a great award," said Loyden, 22. "I'm not really focused on that right now. Hopefully, the way I play the rest of the season will dictate how that goes."

She's coming off a season where she posted seven straight shutouts and had a scoreless goalkeeping streak of 736 minutes and 24 seconds, the 16th-longest such streak in NCAA Division I history.

She completed the season with a 0.45 goals against average, a .903 save percentage, 11 solo shutouts and 16 wins.

To top that off, she was named the Big East Goalkeeper of the Year for the second straight year.

Loyden -- who has started in all 64 career games she's appeared in -- is 2-0 this season with a 0.00 GAA and five saves in 180 minutes.

"She is in a completely different class from most goalkeepers in the country," said Villanova coach Ann Clifton.

Loyden, who was named to the Big East weekly honor roll, moved her career win total to a school-record 40 in a 3-0 win over Virginia Commonwealth on Sunday. She also has 27 career shutouts and needs only three more for the school record.

"It's not really a big deal if I break any records or win any awards," said Loyden, who set single season records for victories and GAA last season. "It's about the team and hopefully we can go far this year."

The Wildcats (2-0) scored six goals in their first two games, with six different scorers, including Erin Hardiman (Absegami).

Loyden would love it if she and the six other seniors on the team left Villanova on a high note.

The fifth-year senior is the last remaining player on the roster from the 2003 Big East championship team.

"The way that you leave the school your senior year is kind of how you're remembered," she said. "We really want a Big East championship. We're looking to have an incredible season." Other S.J. standouts

Men's soccer: Montclair State University junior goalkeeper Nick Mele (Delran) was named NJAC Defensive Player of the Week, leading the Red Hawks to their sixth straight La Quinta Inn Cup Championship with 12 saves in two games. . . .Richard Stockton's Rafael Duarte (Ocean City) was NJAC Rookie of the Week with three goals in his first week of play. . . .Chestnut Hill College freshman Mark Tomljanovich (Atlantic City) scored the game-winning goal in a 3-1 win over Concordia College, while Jesse Long (Haddon Heights) had an assist and Duhan Malali (Absegami) earned the victory in goal. . . .Rowan's Jason Dugan (Ocean City) and Scott Brody (Lenape) were named all-tournament at the Harrison House Invitational. The Profs defeated Baruch 2-0 in the final game of the tournament and Kevin Nuss (Kingsway) made three saves in the shutout win. . . .Villanova freshman Sean Mergenthal (Highland) scored his first career goal in his team's season-opening 2-1 loss at the University of Richmond and added an assist in a 2-1 win over Siena.

Field Hockey: William Paterson's Amber Scott (Palmyra) was the NJAC Offensive Player of the Week after scoring two goals in two wins last week. . . .Montclair State's Jenna Gallo (Eastern) was the NJAC Defensive Player of the Week after being part of a defense that held Morrisville State to one shot in a 9-1 win. She also registered a goal and assist in the contest.

Women's Soccer: Saint Joseph's freshman midfielder Carly Salter (Cherokee) scored her first career goal and the game winner in a 1-0 win over Drexel Friday night in the Hawks' season opener.

Cross Country: Stockton's Abad Akhtar (Atlantic City) was the NJAC Rookie of the Week after placing fourth at the Delaware Valley Invitational (27:42).

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Local college notebook: Villanova's Loyden earns 40th win

By SUSAN LULGJURAJ Staff Writer, (609) 272-7187
(Published: September 4, 2007)

Jillian Loyden (Vineland) broke Villanova's win record when she recorded her 40th victory and 27th career shutout in a 3-0 win in women's soccer over Virginia Commonwealth University on Sunday.

The senior has dominated in goal throughout her career and is now two shutouts shy of tying that school record.

She broke Janel Schilig's (1998-01) win record.

In a 3-0 win over Lafayette, teammate **Erin Hardiman (Absegami)** scored in the 65th minute.

CROSS COUNTRY: Michigan's **Danielle Tauro** (Southern Regional) won the Wolverine Open in 18 minutes, 22 seconds, her first collegiate meet. Tauro runs this Saturday in the Indiana Open in Bloomington.

MEN'S SOCCER: **Marko Tomljanovic** (Atlantic City) scored the winner in Chestnut Hill's first Division II victory, a 3-1 win over Concordia. **Duhan Malali** (Absegami) had 10 saves to earn the win. **Ryan Roberts** (St. Joseph) and **Sean Atkinson** (Hammonton) also played. ... The College of New Jersey's **Nicholas Kiel** (Vineland) scored in a 9-0 win over Medger Evers.

FOOTBALL: Kean running back **Chris DiMicco** (Lacey Township) had a 7-yard touchdown and **Ryan Staton** (Oakcrest) returned an interception 36 yards for a touchdown in a 48-7 win over the United States Merchant Marine Academy. **Brian Williams** (Pleasantville) rushed for 47 yards on seven carries and added 102 yards on kick returns. DiMicco added 59 yards on 10 carries. **Markal Ginyard** (Middle Township) had six tackles and two pass breakups.

Don't forget to check out Lulgjuraj's college sports blog: sportsblogs.pressofac.com/sportsblogs

(Local college highlights can be e-mailed to Susan Lulgjuraj at slulgjuraj@pressofac.com or faxed to (609) 272-7191.)

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Loyden in line for top award

VHS grad, 'Nova GK nominated for Hermann Trophy

By JOSH FRIEDMAN

Staff Writer

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Jillian Loyden and her eye-popping yellow jersey are being watched.

The Villanova University goalkeeper and Vineland High School graduate recently was named to the preseason watch list for the Missouri Athletic Club's Hermann Trophy, which is given annually to the top women's collegiate soccer player.

Loyden's bright yellow jersey, which distinguishes the goalie from other players, should attract plenty of attention from the award committee. The Wildcats senior took some time to answer questions about the upcoming season.

Question: What's your reaction to hearing you're on the watch list for the Hermann Trophy?

Answer: It was pretty exciting. I'm not really concerned with that kind of stuff; it's more of a team thing. It's exciting for the back four and the defense. They get recognition for their work.

Q: Do you think you have a chance to win the award?

A: I don't remember when the last time a goalie won was. (Never for women; Tony Meola, University of Virginia, won the men's award in 1989). I guess it could happen. I'm still soaking everything up. If I don't win, it's not a big deal.

Q: What are your expectations for your senior year?

A: The people we have coming in, we have the potential to win the Big East this year. We won my freshman year. It was a great experience and I want to do it again. I think we can beat anybody in the country. I might be cocky, but I think we are just as good as anybody else. If we bring it, we can beat anybody on any day.

Q: How about that yellow uniform?

A: (Laughing) I love the feeling of it. People make fun of me for it. I have a lot of friends that play in the Big East and they call me "Banana," but it works for me.

Q: What do you miss most about Vineland?

A: Family and friends. I keep in touch with my friends. Being in Vineland, where I grew up, is nice. Every time I come home I run into somebody different.

Q: Are you excited David Beckham is playing in Major League Soccer?

A: It's definitely exciting for the MLS. They're going to bring in a lot more revenue and people are going to be watching soccer because he's in the league. He's the best player in the world, so it would be cool to see a player of his caliber in a game in real life.
