

Oct. 2 JoJo's/Fish4Scores.com Athlete of the Week

Barlow's maturity and toughness makes her one valuable Hornet

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Oct. 2: The Hamilton West girls' soccer team entered this past week in a free fall with five straight losses, and was in serious danger of having its season blown up before September was even over.

Enter Sammi Barlow.

The sophomore midfielder assisted on one goal and scored the second in the Hornets 2-2 tie with West Windsor-Plainsboro South on Monday, then had a goal, assist, and the shot that ignited the third goal in a come-from-behind 3-2 victory over Nottingham Wednesday.

The Hornets fell to Princeton to end the week, and whether Barlow's efforts salvaged the season remains to be seen. But one thing is certain, she certainly helped keep it alive.

"The tie was definitely a confidence booster for us," Barlow said. "Knowing that South was a good team, tying them was a great feeling.

"The comeback against Nottingham proved that we never give up and we're always up for a fight. And in the Princeton game, we put up a good fight, they were just a good team."

For her efforts in those games, Barlow is the JoJo's Tavern/Fish4Scores.com Athlete of the Week for the week ending Oct. 1.

"A win and a tie were something we desperately needed," coach Anthony Tessein said. "She really put the team on her shoulders and carried us this week. She was involved in every goal we scored."

Pretty much the best week of her brief high school career?

"Most definitely!" Barlow said. "The tying goal against South helped my confidence a lot. "In the Nottingham game, I just played my heart out like always and did what had to be done. This feeling is great."

And it's fitting, as Barlow's efforts are comparable to a kid in New York City growing up to star for the Yankees (her father's favorite team, we regret to say).

"She bleeds Orange and Black," Tessein said. "When she was in middle school, she would come to every home game. I was ready to play her in eighth grade. She would be at a game and I'd turn to her and say 'Hey you want to get a jersey on and be ready to go?' She has been chomping at the bit to play here."

Barlow began playing in the Hamilton rec league at age 4 but did not play travel ball until joining the Hibernian Xcel at age nine. Two years ago she went down to her own age level with the Hibernian Fusion.

Coming through the ranks, Sam was a center-forward. But her desire to give unto others began an evolution of sorts.

"As I got older I decided center midfield was my thing," she said. "I'm a player who likes to distribute the ball to others and make the plays happen."

It was no surprise that Barlow started for the Hornets varsity as a freshman. What was a surprise came at the end of the year, when it was discovered how tough and gutsy she really was.

“She battled a knee injury all last year,” Tessein said. “She was cramping up, going through all kind of craziness. At the end of the year we found out she had a slight meniscus tear. She played the whole season with a knee injury and never complained. She was limited in what she could do but she started every game she could.”

Barlow does not appear to be bothered by her injury this season, as she has shown the ability to control games during stretches.

“I’ve exceeded where I thought I would be at this point in my career,” she said. “I’m just happy I’m helping my team.”

Tessein is even happier she will be helping it for another two-and-a-half years.

“We’re excited she’ll be around,” he said. “At such a young age she’s already a leader. Even last year she was a leader.

“The core of our team is juniors and sophomores so we’re excited for the future. But at some point, I want the future to be now.”

With players like Barlow around, the future is getting closer.