

Fall Sports Teams Rise to the



The varsity football team had its first perfect season since 1956, topping Andover 44-0 and capturing the league title. Boys soccer went 10 straight games without a loss.

It was the athletic equivalent of the perfect storm: Eight Exeter varsity teams had the right players come together at the same time and place, got outstanding coaching and benefited from just enough luck to make a difference. The result was a Big Red juggernaut that rumbled through the 2003 fall season.

When the season ended, Exeter's teams had clearly taken the measure of the opposition. The final tally, including tournament appearances, was 82 wins, 20 losses and 4 ties for a spectacular winning percentage of



.802. Seven of eight teams competed in New England tournaments, and four emerged as champions. The one that didn't—boys soccer—at one point went 10 straight games without a loss.

On November 8, the same day that the other teams were hosting Andover in Homecoming games, boys water polo won its seventh straight



New England championship, girls cross country added its fourth in a row, and boys cross country claimed its first for retiring coach Dave Weber (see sidebar). The girls and boys harriers won championships in the same season for the first time ever. First-year girls cross-country coach Gwyn Coogan '83 gave her predecessor, now her assistant coach, credit for her team's success. "Rick Parris is really the one responsible for the success of this program," Coogan says. "He adores the kids, and they adore him."

The Exeter football team put an exclamation point on the fall, thoroughly dominating rival Andover in a 44-0 victory that warmed the hearts of Exonians who braved a cold, blustery day at Phelps Stadium. Exeter finished the regular season 9-0, its first perfect season since 1956, and then downed Kent 46-34 in the New England Class A championship game. Seven short years ago, Exeter was 0-9 in coach Bill Glennon's first season. "This isn't the phoenix rising out of the ashes," Glennon says. "But as far as the football program goes, it's close."

What happened in fall 2003? "Maybe the stars were right," says boys water polo coach Roger Nekton. Perhaps, but much more was obviously at work. "I think it's a lot of things," says Exeter athletic director Dave Hudson. "We've got a coaching staff of real veterans. When you get that kind of consistency, that's important."

"We've also got a great group of kids, both in the senior class and among the younger students. We stayed healthy for the most part. There's a little bit of luck involved. There were a lot of close games and overtime games."

Hudson also credits the preseason period with helping teams "get out of the box strong. Our teams used to get off to a slower start

Four of the fall sports teams won New England championships, including girls cross country, which captured its fourth title in a row.

A Storybook Ending for Coach Weber

In his 18th and final season as head boys cross-country coach at Exeter, his team rewarded Dave Weber with the New England championship that had eluded them in the past.

"It's a little like a Disney script," says Weber, who knows fanciful writing when he sees it after more than three decades of teaching English at Exeter. Which brings us to the reason he's setting down his stopwatch: He wants to devote even more time to the students in his four English classes. "It's been on my mind for a while," Weber says.

Fortunately, Weber, who began coaching the varsity in 1986, hung on long enough to savor the fruits of his labor. On a chilly day at Loomis Chaffee, he watched as Harry Norton '04 placed second overall and led an experienced Exeter team to the title.

"It is about trying to train and sustain your commitment in a way that allows you to run to the level of your talent," Weber says. "And this year we knew we had the talent."

Weber will always be a champion to the many runners he has coached at Exeter. "Any athlete would be lucky to have Mr. Weber as a coach," said Wyatt Golding '02, who now competes for Yale. "He has been one of the most positive influences on my life to date. He has a genuine love and respect for his athletes and the sport of running."

But what will Weber do next year, when the leaves begin to turn colors and the chill returns to the air? "It will be called having time to teach and breathe," Weber says. "Some of the team is back next year. And I'll be able to be a fan and go out and cheer for them."

—B.R.



The boys cross country team, led by Harry Norton '04, won the New England championship, as did the boys water polo squad, which claimed its seventh title in a row.

before they got rolling.”

Instead of a flurry of 0–2 and 0–3 teams at the start, the records were reversed. Nobody seemed to notice, however, until the season was several weeks along. “I cannot really speak for other teams,” says Mercy Carbonell, who coached the field hockey team to a 9–2–3 record and the New England quarterfinals, “but I do believe in a kind of collective force and stride and spirit that sometimes settles into cultures.” The field hockey squad, she says, drew inspiration from the effort being put out by other teams, and vice-versa. “The way the seasons started to roll kept the momentum going. Teams fed off of each other.” Most visible was an undefeated football team that was winning in every conceivable way—by blowout scores, coming from behind, and by a field goal in the closing seconds. It was a good omen for the entire athletic program. “There’s a tone that’s being set,” Glennon says. “It’s a ripple effect through the winter and the spring seasons.”

Boys soccer coach Bill Dennehy says Exeter is never far from such remarkable results. “If you look back, we always have a few good teams,” Dennehy says. “Generally, we have good kids, so we’re always one or two players away from this kind of thing in any given year.”

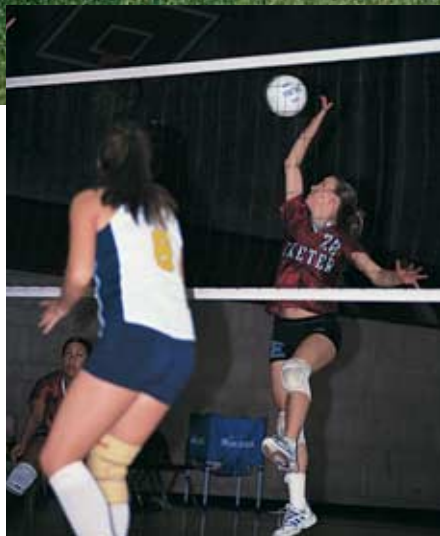
Nekton believes that the presence of three- and four-year players may have made the difference this fall for a number of teams, including his. “We don’t have a large post-graduate program,” Nekton says. “You’ve got to have kids who have had some experience.”

Will a season such as this one help Exeter attract even more talented student-athletes in the future? “Kids are kids,” Dennehy says. “The ones we’re looking at, they’re looking at other schools, too. There’s no secret to it. They want to go where

people are successful. If they're athletes, they want to see who's doing a good job. Of course it will help." Nekton adds: "We'll see whether it goes that way next year. That's hard to tell."

Fall coaches will doubtless remind their athletes next year of the heights they reached in the 2003 season. "We'll use it as a springboard for next season," says girls soccer coach Hilary Coder. Says Hudson: "The kids' confidence and expectations rise a bit. It's always a good thing to come back off a strong year and realize you're going to be a competitive team. And in terms of the health of the program, I think it speaks well for that."

No one is in a rush to look past the fall season, however. "It's been one of the most successful falls, across the board," Hudson says. "You're always kind of riding the roller coaster. This year's group was on the top of that ride, and it was real fun to watch." ●



The girls soccer, field hockey and volleyball teams all qualified for New England championships. "Teams fed off each other," says field hockey coach Mercy Carbonell.

TOP AND MIDDLE, JIM DENHAM; BOTTOM, EMILY REILY

Varsity Football
New England Champions!

Record: 10-0-0
Robert C. Mason Football Trophy,
MVP: Matthew Polhemus '04
Coach: Bill Glennon
Captains: Chris Mottau '04,
Matt Polhemus '04, Tom
Rubel '04, Ryan Wright '04

Boys Varsity Water Polo
New England Champions!

Record: 18-4-0
Daniel E. Fowler Memorial Award,
MVP: Joseph Metcalf V '04
Coach: Roger Nekton
Captains: Joe Metcalf '04,
Sam Taft '04

Varsity Field Hockey

Record: 9-2-3
Kathy N. Nekton Field Hockey
Trophy, MVP: 2003 PEA Field
Hockey Team
Coach: Mercy Carbonell
Captains: Katie Ammons '04,
Cordy Elkins '04, Kirsten
McKnight '04

Volleyball

Record: 10-5-0
Ashley Birkholm Chase '95
Volleyball MVP: 2003 PEA
Varsity Volleyball Team
Coach: Scott Saltman
Captains: Roxane Duka '04,
Maddy Hartzell '04

Boys Varsity Soccer

Record: 7-3-4
Ransom Hooker Soccer Trophy,
MVP: Thomas Jenkins '04
Coach: Bill Dennehy
Captains: Eli Covington '04,
Ryan Grace '04

Boys Cross Country
New England Champions!

Record: 8-0-0
MVP: Harry Norton '04
Coach: Dave Weber
Captains: Harry Norton '04, Josh
Reinhold '04, Reid Singer '04

Girls Varsity Soccer

Record: 11-5-0
MVP: Margaret Suydam '04
Coaches Award: Amelia
Wesselink '04
Coach: Hilary Coder
Captains: Maggie Suydam '04,
Amelia Wesselink '04

Girls Cross Country
New England Champions!

Record: 9-1-0
MVP: Kalina King '04
Coach: Gwyn Coogan
Captains: Alicia Cooperman '04,
Kalina King '04