

THE CHALLENGER

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The Road to Nationals

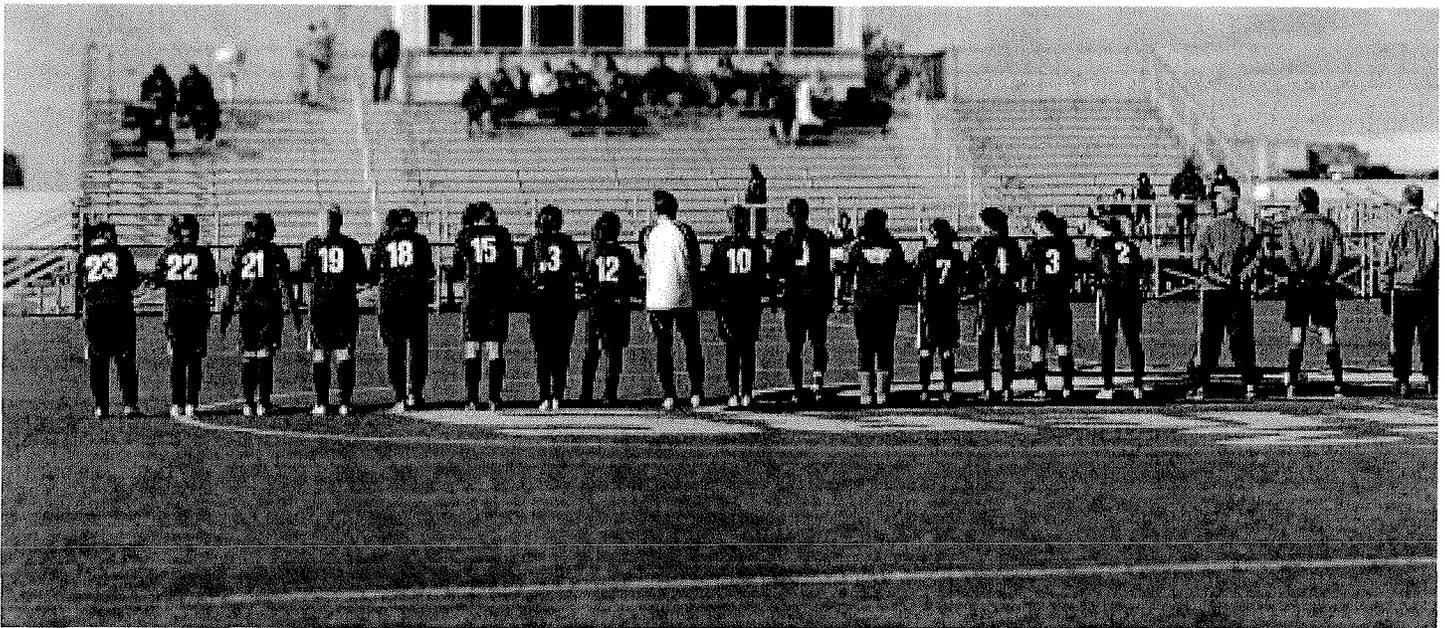
By Harper Hawk Women's Soccer Player Ingrid Palmer



*The Story of a
Spirited Team*

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LADY HAWKS

My name is Ingrid Palmer and I am a player for the Harper Hawks Women's Soccer Team. This year we became National Champions, and this is our story.

Dwayne Cruz has been the head coach of the women's Harper soccer team since the 2001 season. He is the owner of the Arlington Aces and has helped the majority of his players get recruited to play in college. He had a record-holding finish in 2002, when the team made 6th place at the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) national tournament. Since this year no other team under Dwayne has made it further in the national tournament. In previous years, Dwayne has had a few different assistant coaches, but this 2012 season, Dwayne had a new assistant coach, Kaitlyn Klimczak. This coaching staff has a different connection than in previous years. Dwayne was Kaitlyn's soccer coach as a child. She later went on to play women's soccer at University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill, which is often said to be the best women's soccer in the country.

The 2012 season had a rocky start. With not enough players and no goalie, the future was not looking bright for Harper. When the first game came around, Harper had a 2-4 loss to Joliet, who would later become this season's biggest rival. It seemed that with each game after the first, more girls would show up to join the team. First myself, Ingrid Palmer, who was persuaded by her friends to join. Then Monica Hinderer, Sancha Ogden, and Mitshi Ishioka from the

Harper women's basketball team decided to play soccer in addition to basketball. This helped the Hawks win their second game 6-0, defeating Triton Junior College. Then Weslie Iza and Liz Tapia, who thought they had retired their soccer-playing days decided to join the Hawks. And finally, Kaila Privatsky joined, who had to find time to squeeze soccer into her busy schedule. This team now consisted of Monica Hinderer in goal, #2 Devan Swank, #3 Mitshi Ishioka, #4 Danyel Bolioux, #5 Kaila Privatsky, #7 Liz Tapia, #8 Marisa Andreuccetti, #9 Bree Nishibun, #10 Ingrid Palmer, #12 Stephanie Chaires, #13 Gabrielle Brosnan, #15 Sancha Ogden, #18 Mikayla Nagle, #19 Jackie Osborn, #21 Weslie Iza, #22 Abby Groh and #23 Caila Bender, making a full team with five substitutes. But it seemed that luck was not on Harper's field this year when injuries began to strike.

Two pulled groins, a few busted ankles, three concussions, a herniated disk, and a case of mono held the Harper Hawks back this season with a 0-2 loss to Trinity, a 3-2 win against College of DuPage, a 0-6 loss to Joliet, a 0-4 loss to Prairie State, a 1-3 loss to Triton (Harper Women's first loss to Triton, ever!). "I didn't let this many goals in during my whole high school career," stated goalie Monica Hinderer after the 5th loss of the season for the Hawks.

After this 'not so great' season laid itself into the record book, an away tournament in Minnesota came up on the Hawks schedule. Just in time for goalie Monica Hinderer to come down with a case of mono and not be able to travel. second string goalie Mikayla Nagel took the spot in goal for the Hawks, landing them a 3-0 win against Century College and a 0-7 loss against Rochester Community College, taking



2nd place in the tournament.

Although it seemed that the Hawks would have a losing record this 2012 season, the girls took it upon themselves to build friendships with each other and form themselves as a team both on and off the field. Weekly hang outs is where it started, either getting a meal together or walking around campus is where it first started. Then it moved up to most weekend nights and the majority of the team would be all in one place, either at a movie, a bonfire, or dinner at a restaurant or a coach's house. Friendships were being formed between all of the players and this strengthened the connections on the field.

When the Hawks returned back to Palatine, a line of games awaited them. The first three were losses, against Moraine Valley, ending in a 1-6, Anoka-Ramsey Community College 0-1, and Robert Morris College 2-5. A shocking win came against the number one seed in the conference, College of DuPage. The Hawks defeated College of DuPage 2-1, and left the conference in confusion. I am not sure what it was, but we

were all determined to prove ourselves to the rest of the conference that day. The final game before playoffs was against Oakton Community College, where the Hawks lost 0-2.

The playoffs were upon the Harper Hawks, who had the third seed. College of DuPage was in the first seed, Joliet Junior College in the second seed, and Triton College in the fourth seed. The first round games were College of DuPage against Triton College, in which DuPage took the win, and the other game was set up to be Harper College against Joliet Junior College. Joliet had defeated Harper twice in the regular season, making them come into the game



with a cocky attitude. This was the most intense game of the season for Harper. The referees seemed to favor Joliet, this got under Coach Dwayne Cruz's skin. A foul called on Hawk #9, Bree Nishibun, led to Joliet having a free kick. However, it was not said what the foul was or why it was called. Coach Cruz proceeded to ask the referee why the call was made and this led to Cruz receiving a yellow card, along with three other Hawk players receiving yellow cards that game, #9 Bree Nishibun, #18 Mikayla Nagel and #3 Mitshi Ishioka. After the referees giving Joliet a total of three free kicks for unspecified reasons, Harper still came out with a 3-0 win over Joliet, which shocked the whole conference, putting Harper in the final game against College of DuPage on October 27th.

The Saturday game against College of DuPage had much on the line. Whoever won the game was going to the NJCAA Women's Division III Soccer Nationals in Dryden, New York over the second weekend of November. Also, the winning team's Coach would receive the Coach of the Year award. Also the winning teams players would be eligible to be nominated for an All-American award at the National Tournament. The odds were not in Harper's favor, being the number three seed while COD was the number one seed in the conference. However, Harper had beat COD twice in the regular season now. According to the Harper Hawks Athletic Department,

"Harper controlled play in the first half and was rewarded when Stephanie Chaires found the back of the net for a 1-0 lead. Jacqueline Osborn scored what was the eventual match-winner six minutes into the second half to make it 2-0. Now, Harper had to play defense." With 17 minutes, left the College of DuPage Chaparrals scored, making it 2-1 Harper held the lead however, beating COD for the third time this season and taking the Regional Champion Title and the bid for Nationals.

The NJCAA Divison III Women's Soccer Nationals was being held at Topkins Cortland Community College in Dryden, New York, the second weekend in November. The Harper Hawks Athletic Department was ready and waiting to send one of their teams to win a national title. Athletic Director Doug Spiwak coordinated the plans as far as hotel rooms, transportation, and budgeting for meals. Our journey to New York began Tuesday, November 6th, 2012, at 3:00 in the afternoon, but what many don't realize is that our real journey began back in August when Coach Dwayne told us that if we worked hard, we would be headed to Nationals. Not one of us believed him. But yet here we were, loading a coach bus full of blankets, cleats, and sweatpants, heading to the East Coast.

The team, our coach, Dwayne Cruz, assistant coach, Kaitlyn Klimczak, team manager, Matt Shepard, trainers Justin Games, Tiffany Jost and Lisa





Rudnicki all got on the bus together. As we loaded, a discovery was made. The bathroom was broken, which would make for an interesting fifteen-hour drive. The drive was a long but exciting one. Luckily the bus was large enough for each girl to have a row to themselves and not be crammed. After seven hours into the bus ride, we stopped for dinner at Olive Garden, compliments of the Harper Athletic Department.

While the trip was still at its beginning, most of the team began to doze off into dreamland, while a few others were reluctant and continued to shout across the bus at one another about nonsense things. We watched movies about teams and sportsmanship. We made sure *Bridesmaids* was also on the agenda. At some point in the late evening/early morning, everyone other than our very loved bus driver, Jim, had fallen asleep. Jim awoke everyone at 6:00 am to inform us that we had arrived at our destination. It was a beautiful ski lodge in the mountains of New York called Greek Peak Mountain Resort.

The resort has a zip line, roller coaster slide, indoor water park, outdoor heated pool and hot tub, skiing, an arcade, and hotel rooms that were two-story. With our 6-10 record, I wouldn't say we had earned it quite yet, so we made up our minds that morning that we would earn our spot here at Nationals. However, our 6:00 am arrival left each of us tired and headed straight to bed until about noon or so when we met for lunch. Then it was back to the bus to head over to Topkins Cortland Community College for an hour-long practice on the turf. Our practice got stressful extremely quickly when the girls began to yell at one another to make better passes and shots. Everyone

wanted to prove ourselves to the other teams so much that we put pressure on each other that didn't come out in a positive way. Luckily our Assistant Coach Katie always had wise words to share with the team. It seemed that every time Katie gave a pep talk before a game, during half time, at a practice, or in a casual conversation each of us girls took it to heart and committed ourselves fully to the game. I don't remember the last coach I had that had such a strong pull on inspiring a team to go for it.

After our practice, the hotel was quickly cluttered with hairpins, makeup, dresses and shoes. We had to all get ready for the soccer banquet that evening and it would be the first encounter with the other teams at Nationals. Many of us thought if we are going to make an impression we should look our best while doing so. Hours went into getting ready for the banquet. Dinner was served, the NJCAA Athletic Director said a few words, including the statement "Some of the teams here don't have records to prove their skill. So this should be an interesting year." This statement rang in all our hearts. We knew who he meant. He was talking about the Harper Hawks.

The next morning we woke up at 6:00 am again and had a carb loaded breakfast. Then it was out to the field to prove our worth to all the other teams who had winning records. Our first match was to be played against Gloucester County College. They were the number two seed in the country, and with our record, we didn't even make the top ten. Gloucester was convinced they would have an easy win. But we proved otherwise by holding the score 0-0 the whole first half. Weslie Iza brought the ball down the right

side of the field and made a cross which was booted into the goal by our Captain, Bree Nishibun, making the first goal of the game and putting the lead at 1-0 for Harper fifteen minutes into the second half. We needed to follow through in order to take the game but in the last fifteen minutes, Gloucester scored twice, making it 1-2 for Gloucester, who took the win. Although two goals made it into the net, our goalie, Monica Hinderer, had twelve saves during the game. After the game, when we shook the players' hands, all the girls were extremely impressed and the coach even told our coaches they were not expecting the competition from us that we brought that morning. Cruz called it "probably the best soccer we've played the entire season," even though we walked away with a loss.

Losing to Gloucester took us out of the top 4 in the country but 5th, 6th, 7th, or 8th were all still available to us. The next game we played the following day in the morning again. 6:00 am wake up calls seemed like normal days for our team. We played Anne Arundel Community College and we had to win this game in order to at least tie with how far any other Harper Hawk Women's Soccer Team has made it at the National Tournament. The whole game the score remained 0-0. It went into overtime, during which we scored but were followed by Arundel scoring, tying the game 1-1, and taking us into double overtime. During double overtime, Devan Swank, our right forward came sweeping into center field and shot the ball into the goal, ending the game immediately and giving us a win. Devan had scored both goals in the game against Arundel while Monica Hinderer had eleven

saves in goal.

Our final game was played on Sunday against Holyoke. We went into the game with positive spirits from our last win over Arundel. Holyoke was the number three seed in the conference and also had a spirit of thinking that we didn't deserve to be here. We came out with a loss, 1-2. Bree Nishibun scored our goal while goalie Monica Hinderer had seventeen saves. Even our injured player, Marisa Andreucetti, played the last two minutes of the game for memory's sake.

According to the Harper Athletic Department, "The team will go down as the second-best team in head coach Dwayne Cruz's 13-year tenure." The 2002 team had the same outcome in their games at the National Tournament but had a better conference record. Dwayne stated after our season had come to a close, "They really stuck by each other as a group. For us, it was a family and really stuck to that. This group was really close-knit. Going 4-10 in the regular season, they were a Cinderella group. And they built something out of it."

Being a part of this team at Harper has made me enjoy my time here at the school. I think that being involved in your school is an important part of making the best of the years we have attending college, even at a community college. I have built friendships with players, coaches, and Harper staff while being a player on this team and it is something I will always cherish and never forget. My thank you goes out to Harper for giving me the opportunity to reach for goals I didn't know were reachable.



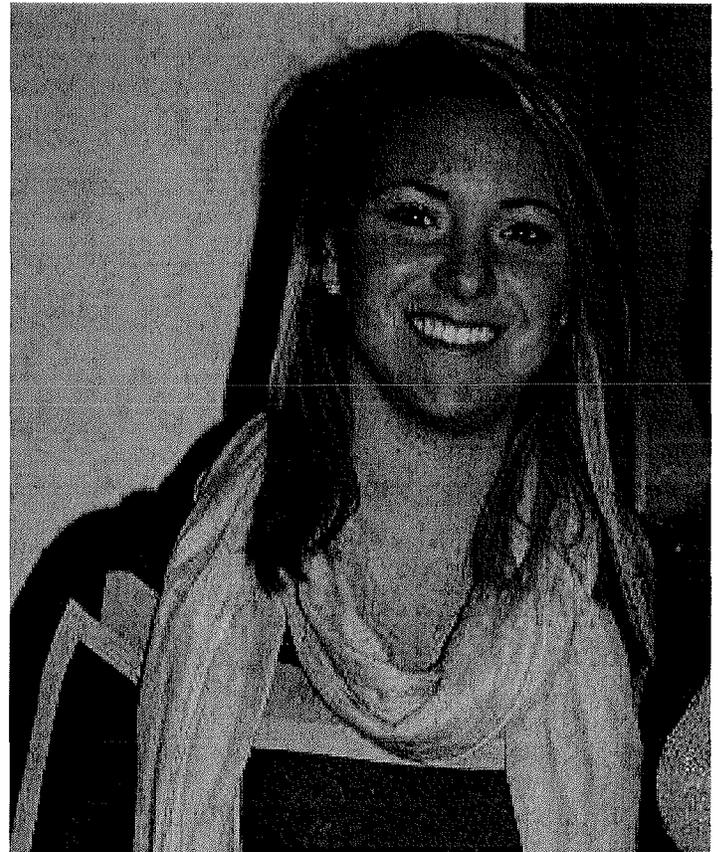
MEET OUR COACHES

Dwayne Cruz was our head coach for the season. He has been the head coach at Harper for thirteen years now and has had two 6th place finishing teams at Nationals, once in 2002 and now this year in 2012. He is also the head coach and owner of The Arlington Aces, which has been known for growing many kids into star soccer players on their high school and college soccer teams.

It is easy to learn a lot from Coach Dwayne; he is a natural born coach both on and off the field. Dwayne tries to teach his players how to handle themselves well in stressful situations. He is constantly challenging us in conversation and training us to keep calm.

Although no one on the team believed him when he said we would be at Nationals in November, he really pushed us in order to make it happen. Including putting the pressure on us when we played College of DuPage on his birthday, saying "I have never lost a game on my birthday." We decided to make ourselves determined and win for Dwayne and to make a name for ourselves.

DWAYNE CRUZ



KAITLYN KLIMCZAK

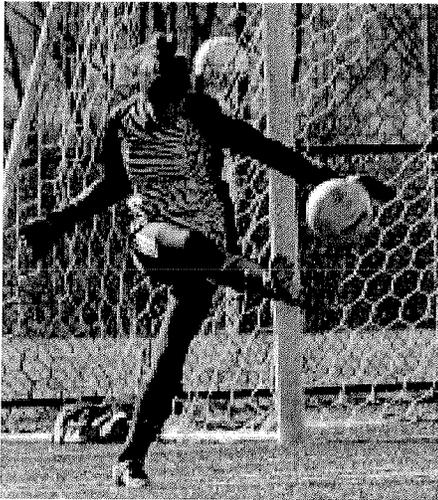
Kaitlyn Klimczak, also known as Katie, was our team's assistant coach this season. Katie was a player on Dwayne's team as a child and eventually played soccer at The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, which is said to be the best women's soccer in the country. She graduated in 2012.

She brought more to the team than what you would think an assistant coach would. Katie was the inspiration behind each of us as players. Before each game, Katie would tell us a story about her soccer-playing days and get us pumped up and laughing. She constantly reminded us that the sole reason that we play soccer is because it is fun, and that if we have fun and work hard we will be successful. When games became a challenge, Katie always had wise words of wisdom that were always taken to heart.

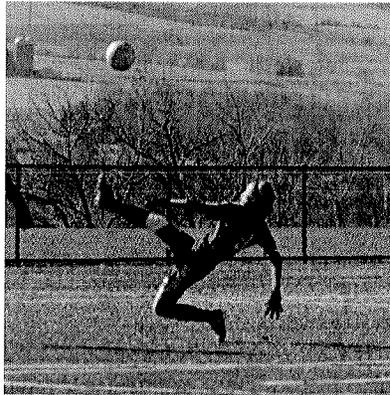
Katie pushed us further than we thought possible. And even though we hated how hard she pushed us, we all loved her so much we wanted to succeed for her.

ACHIEVEMENTS

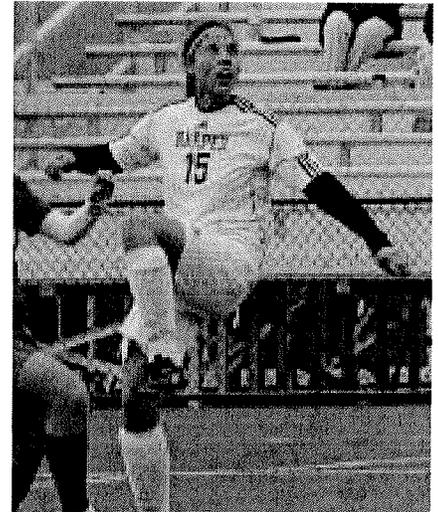
MVP: Monica Hinderer



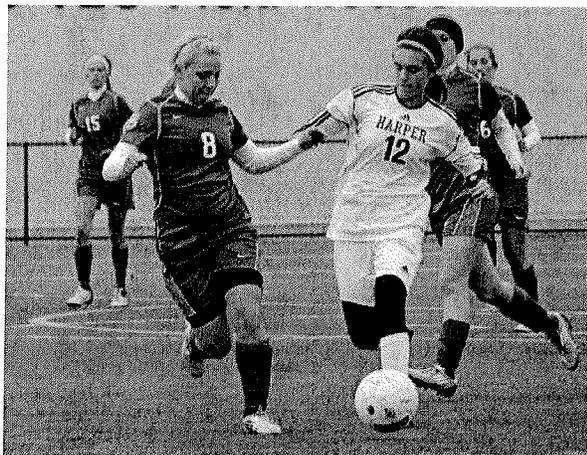
Defensive Player of the Year: Bree Nishibun



MIP: Sancha Ogden



**First Team All-Conference:
Stephanie Chaires**



**Offensive Player of the Year: Devan Swank
National All-Tournament Team: Devan Swank
First Team All-Conference: Devan Swank**



**Second Team All-Conference:
Caila Bender, Weslie Iza, Mitshi Ishioka**

