

ROCHESTER LOURDES

By Loren Nelson

Josh Spaniol knew the numbers weren't good. But he worked the calculation anyway.

It's hard, after all, not to look at the train wreck.

"I think we came up with 92 percent of our scoring from last year graduated," said Spaniol, the first-year Rochester Lourdes coach.

As if that wasn't bad enough, Spaniol lost standout junior goaltender Nick Heimer for an extended period midway through the season with a left shoulder injury.

No, things weren't going well for the Eagles, who weren't scoring, didn't have their No. 1 goaltender and were off to a 4-4-2 start to their season.

"If you were going to tell me two months ago I was going to be in these shoes, I would have said you were crazy," Spaniol said.

Look at Rochester Lourdes now. Heimer is healthy and playing well, freshman Alex Funk has emerged to shoulder a large chunk of the scoring load and Spaniol has the Eagles playing an airtight defensive style well-suited for the playoffs.

Add all that up, and you have a team not only in the state Class A tournament but one that has a chance to engineer an upset or two.

"I ran into a few our kids today," Spaniol said on Sunday. "They are still buzzing right now. Our program is very excited to get a taste of what we had last year."

Last season the Eagles gave eventual state champion Breck its toughest game of the state tournament before losing in the quarterfinals. Lourdes went on to win the consolation championship.

This year Lourdes opens with a quarterfinal game against No. 4 seed Warroad at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, March 10, at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

The Eagles did not play the Warriors during the regular season, one of the few high-powered Class A programs not on Lourdes' schedule.

"I don't know much about them," Spaniol said. "But I know they will be like we are in that they will be physical. And that they like to play defensive hockey, too."

The Eagles' regular season schedule included the top two ranked Class A teams in the state for most of the season, St. Thomas Academy and Breck. Lourdes lost to Breck 2-1 and St. Thomas Academy 5-3 in a game that was closer than the score indicated.

"We played two of the top teams in the state very tough," Spaniol said. "That's what gave our players the opportunity to believe in themselves and their abilities."

Funk, one of the state's best freshmen, has a team-high 15 goals to go with 14 assists. Another Lourdes freshman, Jason Samuelson, has 13 goals and 15 assists to tie for second on the team in scoring.



Heimer



Vesel



PROGRAM INFO

Nickname: Eagles
Conference: Independent
Section: 1A
Record: 17-8-3
State trips: 2000, 01, 02, 03, 09, 10
Coach: Josh Spaniol

STAT LEADERS

Scorers	G	A	Pts
Alex Funk	15	14	29
Rory Vesel	5	23	28
Jason Samuelson	13	15	28
Brandon Chezick	11	15	26
Alex Kurth	9	14	23

Goalies	W-L-T	GA	SV
Nick Heimer	10-6-2	2.39	.870

FULL ROSTER

#	Name	Pos	Gr
1	Mark Greve	G	12
2	Connor Nellans	F	10
3	Ryan Nicolay	F	10
4	Jason Samuelson	F	9
5	Alec Brandrup	D	11
6	Andy Benner	F	11
7	Brandon Chezick	F	12
8	Landon Farrell	F	10
9	Alex Dewitz	F	12
10	Louis Hanson	D	11
12	Karl Krecke	D	9
16	Reed Bjork	F	11
17	Alex Kurth	F	12
18	Eric Potvin	F	10
19	Sam Slightam	D	11
20	Alex Funk	F	9
21	Rory Vesel	D	11
23	Brian Wasz	F	11
24	Nick Schoeberl	D	12
30	Nick Heimer	G	11

ROAD TO THE X

Section 1A Quarters, 2/25
Lourdes 2, Northfield 1

Funk 1 goal, 1 assist

Section 1A Semis, 2/27
Lourdes 4, New Prague 1

Funk 1 goal, 1 assist

Krecke 3 assists

Section 1A Finals, 3/4
Lourdes 3, Red Wing 0

Wasz 2 goals

Heimer 16 saves

Photos / Tim Kolehmainen

THE EAGLES WILL WIN THE STATE TITLE IF...



Loren Nelson: Everything falls into place. And by everything we mean goaltender Nick Heimer has to have the three greatest games of his life and Lourdes' diaper dandies, Alex Funk and Jason Samuelson, can continue to provide just enough of an offensive spark.