HILL-MURRAY Pioneers

Program Info

Nickname: Pioneers
Conference: Classic Suburban
Section: 4AA
Record: 22-6-0
State trips: 1975, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 83 Champs, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91 Champs, 92, 93, 97, 99, 2000, 02, 06, 07, 08 Champs, 09, 10, 12
Coach: Bill Lechner

Stat Leaders

Scorers	G	A	Pts
Jake Guentzel	22	50	72
Zach La Valle	25	34	59
Charlie Sampair	29	19	48
Andy Faust	16	27	43
Blake Heinrich	11	23	34
Willie Brown	17	15	32
Conrad Sampair	10	11	21
Sam Becker	4	12	16
Dan Cashman	3	9	12
Tyler Funk	4	6	10

Goalies	W-L-T	GA	SV
John Dugas	16-5-1	2.21	.906
Travis Neubeck	5-1-0	2.14	.933

Playoff Roster

#	Name	Pos	Gr
1	John Dugas	G	11
7	Dan Cashman	F	12
8	Zach Mills	F	9
9	Logan Sharp	D	10
10	Brandon Thompson	F	12
12	CJ LaChappelle	F	11
14	Charlie Sampair	F	12
15	Conrad Sampair	F	12
16	Blake Heinrich	D	11
17	Jim Tich	F	11
18	Willie Brown	F	10
19	Andy Faust	F	12
20	Jake Guentzel	F	11
21	Zach La Valle	F	11
22	Dan Dolan	D	11
25	Ryan Black	D	11
26	Tyler Funk	F	10
27	Sam Becker	D	11
28	Davis Zarembinski	D	9
33	Travis Neubeck	G	11

Can they win?

The Pioneers' offense really has to ignite if they want to bust any brackets. Getting past phenomenal goaltender Kyle Koop and Maple Grove in the first round will be tough but Jake Guentzel and company have enough skill to put pucks in the net against anyone.

-- Walker Orenstein

By Walker Orenstein

Ranked first in the state and in its section, Hill-Murray was upended in double overtime by White Bear Lake in last year's Section 4AA championship game, a startling result that ended the high school careers for a talented group of seniors.

To say last season didn't meet the Pioneers' expectations is an understatement.

Besides the loss, the storied program took even more hits with the departure of starting goaltender Tim Shaughnessy and leading goal scorer Ben Bahe, among other seniors. Transfers and early departures to junior leagues also depleted the team, leaving the Pioneers with just four seniors and one returning defenseman.

All of this added up to significantly lowered expectations for Hill-Murray and coach Bill Lechner, who is in his 15th season guiding the program.

Given a second chance however, the No. 9-ranked Pioneers broke through Section 4AA by beating Roseville to earn a trip to the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. They will play No. 2-seeded and No. 3-ranked Maple Grove (24-2-2) at 11 a.m. on Thursday, March 8.

So what was the difference? How did they make it this year and not last time?

"Well, you gotta have some luck," Lechner said. "We started off really young, started off with some guys who were at the football state tournament so they weren't with us yet, took a couple dings early. I admire these guys that they've stuck with it, worked hard to achieve, and started pecking away."

As Lechner noted, the beginning of the season didn't look incredibly promising for the Pioneers. They took a couple of lumps early. Their 4-4-0 record to start the season was mostly a byproduct of the newcomers on the defensive end.

Extremely thin at the blue line, Lechner switched juniors Sam Becker and Ryan Black from forward to defense, and the Pioneers made the best of the situation.

"Ever since the beginning of the season, they've been getting better and better every day," senior forward Charlie Sampair said. "I was a little worried at the beginning of the season for them, but they've come a long way and I think we're going into the state tournament in great position."

Although the Pioneers weren't exactly forgotten, having distance from the spotlight gave the team room to grow, and by the time they got a little seasoning, the Pioneers turned on the heat.

Winning seven-straight games to end the regular season, Hill-Murray hit its stride, mostly by piling up goals.

"We think we're very deep at forward …" Lechner said. "There's some guys that can fly around the rink and are very skilled."

That flashy offensive attack is led by Sampair, one of 10 Mr. Hockey finalists. The offense spins with the punch provided by Sampair, defenseman Blake Heinrich, forward Zach LaValle, and the skillful passing of forward Jake Guentzel, who has racked up 50 assists, third most in the state.

Hill-Murray averaged six goals per game during the regular season.

"Last year was such a disappointment," Sampair said. "I'm just so glad we got it done this year."

Blake Heinrich

Road to the X

Date	Opponent	Score
Dec. 1	Benilde	2-3 L
Dec. 3	at Burnsville	2-5 L
Dec. 8	Henry Sibley	12-0 W
Dec. 10	St. Thomas Acad	2-1 W
Dec. 15	Mahtomedi	3-1 W
Dec. 17	Wayzata	4-5 L
Dec. 22	White Bear Lake	7-2 W
Dec. 26	Minnetonka (Schn)	3-7 L
Dec. 27	Blaine (Schwan)	4-2 W
Dec. 28	Burnsville (Schwan)	4-3 W
Jan. 7	at South St. Paul	6-1 W
Jan. 12	at North St. Paul	3-0 W
Jan. 14	Tartan	6-0 W
Jan. 17	at Eden Prairie	3-5 L
Jan. 21	at Henry Sibley	14-0 W
Jan. 26	at St. Thomas Acad	5-2 W
Jan. 28	at Mahtomedi	7-3 W
Jan. 31	Eagan	2-4 L
Feb. 2	at Richfield	16-2 W
Feb. 4	Simley	11-3 W
Feb. 6	at Lakeville South	5-3 W
Feb. 9	South St. Paul	8-2 W
Feb. 11	North St. Paul	5-4 W
Feb. 14	at Tartan	5-1 W
Feb. 18	Moorhead	6-1 W
Section 4AA playoffs		
Feb. 25	Tartan	6-0 W
Feb. 29	Stillwater	4-0 W
Mar. 2	Roseville	3-2 W

Coach's Corner

Bill Lechner is in his 15th season as the head coach at Hill-Murray. He won a state title with the squad in 2008 and also won one in 1983 as a Pioneers' assistant coach. The Cretin-Derham Hall graduate has a 312-101-15 record with Hill-Murray and also serves as the activities director and baseball coach for the school. Under his direction the boys' hockey team has made it to state 10 times.