

Brought the energy: Seniors spearheaded Gettysburg field hockey's culture-shifting season



GETTYSBURG FIELD HOCKEY at PennLive's Mid-Penn media day.

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MANHEIM — Gettysburg's Aleah Jacobs, Maria Royer and Izzy Sites finished each other's sentences and echoed one another's words as tears welled in their eyes.

They were the three seniors that initiated the Warriors' run to three straight District 3 Class 2A field hockey tournaments. They were the group that captained Gettysburg to its first Mid-Penn Colonial title since 2016 this fall.

They were the three that each teammate wrapped in a hug following Tuesday's 6-0 District 3 2A first-round loss to Manheim Central.

When Jacobs, Royer and Sites were freshmen, a Gettysburg playoff entry felt light years away. The trio brought field hockey prowess back to the Warrior program through dedication, perseverance and positivity.

The tears that streamed on the Manheim Central sideline Tuesday were a testament to the historical and personal dynamic they formed. It was an impact that transcended any win or loss

"Our three seniors were always giving 100%, even on a day where they maybe didn't feel good or it was a tough day at school," Gettysburg head coach Lydia Westre-Stith said. "They were willing to commit to the intensity that we expected at practice, and that translated to the rest of the players on the team. Because when our three seniors came off the field tonight, the whole team wanted to hug them."

The embraces Jacobs, Royer and Sites fielded Tuesday were the kind of atmosphere the seniors wanted

to foster this fall. The accolades and victories were welcomed, but the caring and uplifting presence was at the forefront of everything the Warriors did.

The family focus nurtured the successful results. Knowing each player had the next person's back made for a freeing play style and a determined approach.

Even amid Tuesday's barrage, the Warriors never rested. The Barons broke loose for two goals in the first five minutes of regulation, but once Gettysburg digested the initial swing, they settled the waters and surrendered the ensuing four scores in staggered sequences.

"Our teamwork has just gotten immensely better," Royer said. "There used to be so much yelling on the field — like negative yelling. But now it's almost all positive and uplifting. We all just want the team to be as good as it can be."

Like any program, the Warriors still had room for growth. But with the seniors' vision, Gettysburg authored a season that hadn't been recorded in a decade.

The Warriors completed their 2026 surge at 13-4-2. Among the 13 wins were 10 league triumphs and two ties. This was also the second time in program history that Gettysburg reached the District 3 tournament three years in a row.

While the Warriors remain on the postseason victory prowl, each tournament berth has been an improvement. Gettysburg was pummeled by Palmyra (9-0) in 2024 and suffered an 8-1 setback to Lampeter-Strasburg last year.

"I think we've brought the energy, and we've brought the intensity to pick everybody up," Sites said. "You gotta work hard, but you gotta have fun at the same time."

"We all just wanted to work together," Jacobs added. "You've been able to see it on the field."

No illustration was stronger than Tuesday's postgame festivities.

Westre-Stith spoke to the team for five minutes and praised her seniors' pride and passion. Once the huddle broke, the Warriors lined up for a picture — smiles all around and arms enveloping each other. Then the seniors received their photo shoot, capturing their final moments in maroon and white.

When the final clicks of the camera sounded, that's when the hugs began. The tears welled in Jacobs, Royer and Sites' eyes — sad that it was over but happy that it happened.

"I don't think that today was the best representation of Gettysburg field hockey, but that's OK," Westre-Stith said. "The seniors still managed to play with intensity and were positive and were supportive of each other on the field. In those really challenging moments where you have games that are just not going in your favor or it's just not the day, it's easy to start yelling at other teammates and blaming each other. But they don't do that."

"The seniors have been pivotal in creating this team culture, and that's why this group is so tight-knit. That's the legacy these seniors have left."

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