

# Pick up sticks

## Youth field hockey sprouts in Northport this fall as 18 local fifth graders form travel team

By JASON KARP

If you ask Northport High School girls soccer coach Tom Fazio, girls basketball coach Rich Castellano or girls lacrosse coach Carol Rose what makes their team a top contender year in and year out, chances are they'll tell you its because of the youth leagues that instruct and nurture up-and-coming athletes.

Don't be surprised if field hockey coach Gina Pellicani joins that list in the future considering the newly minted Northport Youth and Field Hockey Club (NYFHC) that sprung in September with a resounding interest from girls ranging from elementary school all across the district.

"It's a huge thing for our program," Pellicani said. "We are so happy these kids are getting to know the sport."

Inspired by reading a story about the Garden City field hockey team winning the New York state championship last year, Mike Modeleski asked his daughter Julia if she wanted to try the new sport instead of playing soccer. Her answer: "yeah sure." With coaching experience dating back to the mid 90's, including football, lacrosse, and then soccer for the last four seasons, Modeleski turned to some of his daughter's former teammates to help fill out the new roster.

"We asked some girls that had played soccer and also we just asked the girls that we knew didn't play soccer," Modeleski said. "We have had an overwhelming desire for girls who wanted to play."



**NO MISSING TEETH ON THIS HOCKEY TEAM:** The inaugural Northport Field Hockey Club team is: (bottom row, from left to right) Maggie Fox, Allie Holden, Victoria Gaeth, Lauren Riccui, Dayna Peters, Amy Courter, Brigid Connor, Julia McGinley, Rose Ozimkowski, (second row, from left) Meghan Smith, Angela Vivona, Brooke Matus, Charlotte Leon, Laura Kenny, Kristen Nicholai, Erin Ferro, Kayla Blaszczyk, Sophia Onufrik, (top row, from left) coaches Kathy Smith, Lora McGinley, Mike McGinley and Jen Schuman.

-Don Vicital photo

With players but no league, Modeleski turned to Northport Field Hockey Booster Club president Patty Gardiner for insight on what to do next. From her lead, and a few extra hours on the internet, Modeleski discovered the Long Island Field Hockey Association (LIFHA) which started a fifth-grade youth league five years ago. Needing at least seven players to join the fifth grade league housing teams from Carle Place, Seaford, Walt Whitman, Cold Spring

Harbor and Garden City, the NYFHC amassed a roster of 18. Plenty to play, but since none had any previous experience, they first needed to practice.

Since its inception the NYFHC team has attended two clinics. First was an early season clinic held by Pellicani and the varsity players which Modeleski called a great start because of the drills he and his wife, Laura, were able to learn. Second was a clinic

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# Building a program from the ground up

held by the players of Adelphi University team, Sunday, October 4, which not only put on an instructional exposé, but also help conduct a round robin tournament for all the teams in the LIFHA league. Since then the NYFHC team has practiced every Wednesday night at Northport High School. Modeleski said the community has been very accommodating, including the high school players who come down to help coach, Gardiner who brings goalie equipment (her daughter Chelsea is the varsity teams starting netminder), as well as Northport High School Athletic Director Drew Cronin who allows the team to use the field under the condition of insurance clearance through LIFH.

"We just go until its dark," Modeleski said about practice. "Word is really spreading. People are saying to Patty Gardiner, 'I didn't know Northport had field hockey at this level?'"

The NYFHC made it official Sunday, October 11 with its first game, a 3-3 tie on the road against Cold Spring Harbor. Modeleski said the Northport team played great and held a 3-1 lead heading into the fourth quarter. All 18 girls saw equal

playing time on offense and defense while the squads' three netminders took turns defending the cage.

"Girls were all over the place, goalies were out diving; it was very exciting," Modeleski said. "The girls are so eager to play and we have some good athletes. They all just picked up the game real quick."

If mother nature allows it, there will be four more games this season. Considering the enthusiasm of this year's team, and the overall feedback Modeleski is receiving from the community, he and the other members of the NYFHC board of directors – composed of Modeleski as the president, his wife Laura as the vice president, Gardiner, Lora McGinley, Kathy Smith and Jen Schuman – have their eyes on expanding next year. The hope is to field a pair of sixth grade teams and add an additional fifth grade team, which is the youngest level players can compete at in the LIFHA. There is one rule Modeleski applies to all players that join, though. "We make it so they have fun and that they will want to come back next time," he said.