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Class, skill set Hencke, Herrick apart

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Mark Justesen

Rachael Hencke (left) and Morgan Herrick (below) have taken different roads, but hard work has elevated each of them into all-state players and Division 1 college basketball recruits. The two fierce in-season rivals work out together on Sundays and have nothing but the utmost respect for each other.



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Grafton - Cedarburg High School and Grafton High School are separated by just a few miles, beginning the connection between two schools that are quite similar despite notable differences. The Bulldogs of Cedarburg began the season as the state's No. 1 team in Division 1 girls basketball, while the Black Hawks of Grafton finished the season as the No. 2 team in Division 2. The Bulldogs play in a beautiful new field house, while the Black Hawks call the cozier Grafton High School gymnasium their home.

And the Bulldogs were led this past season by do-everything senior Morgan Herrick, the Player of the Year in the North Shore Conference and a second-team all-state selection by the Associated Press, while the Black Hawk leader is third-team all-state junior Rachael Hencke, another first-team all-league pick. The duo seems to be very different both as players and as people, but has a lot more in common than would be expected.

"There's so many good girls in this state," Hencke said, "that to just be considered one of them is pretty cool."

"I've been working real hard on my game, and being recognized for that really means something," Herrick offered.

To fully appreciate their relationship, the similarities and the differences between these two great athletes, you have to start with their coaches.

Their teams are engaged in the best-running rivalry in the North Shore Conference.

The Hawks and 'Dawgs shared the conference title last year (along with Whitefish Bay and Nicolet), and their two showdowns in the recently completed season were decided by just 12 points - both won by Cedarburg, one on a buzzer-beater.

Therefore, it would seem logical for there to be a rivalry between Cedarburg coach Dave Ross and Grafton's Bob Maronde to match their teams on-court rivalry.

Their coaching styles differ greatly. Ross often removes his sports jacket early in the first half of games, and his voice is typically worn-out throughout the season. Maronde, on the other hand, is generally calm, likes to tell a story or two, keeps his coat on and could be spotted enjoying a banana on the bench as his team wrapped up its state title.

"I've had him for three years now and he really knows his basketball," Hencke said of Maronde. "He knows how to handle us girls. He knows how to motivate us. Little stories and little quirks ... he knows how to balance us out, when to work and when to have fun and celebrate."

To put it simply, it is easy to tell just by watching them on the sideline that they are not cut from the same mold.

Yet each is perfect for his team, and their players reflect their personalities.

Those differences have created a foundation of respect, culminating with Ross being there to congratulate Maronde in Madison on Saturday afternoon.

"Our family actually went down to watch the state tournament and our particular interest was to watch Grafton in hopes that it would get that Gold Ball," Ross said of his trip to Madison last weekend, even though he was at the Alliant Energy Center in the less-desirable role of spectator. "Over the years, when you coach against Coach Maronde and his teams, I think

there's a mutual respect of the programs and the kids. It's always special when you know people that are involved in such an achievement."

The relationship carries over to their all-state players. On the surface, Hencke and Herrick have very little in common. Herrick is more intense and vocal, like Ross, and a competitor that is clearly the team's leader on and off the court. Hencke, like Maronde, is more laid back, preferring to lead strictly by example.

"She does have really great leadership," Hencke has observed of Herrick over the years. "She's kind of like the coach on the floor, telling the players where to go, and she's the playmaker."

"Morgan is more (of a player) that will pull the team together and tell them, 'This is what we need to do, where Rachael just has a different approach,' " noted Ross. "I think (Rachael) hides it a little bit. I think it's inside her, where the fuel is burning. She plays very smooth. She doesn't get too high or too low.

"She always knows just what to do," Herrick said of Hencke's follow-my-example leadership style. "She's cool and calm and never gets worried about things because she knows that things are going (to turn around).

"If the team's down, she's going to carry them to victory. She's going to score those points, she's going to take the ball in her hands and make sure that her team doesn't lose."

Hencke notes that her leadership style is reflective of the nature of her Black Hawk teammates.

"Everyone on our team is pretty laid back," Hencke said. "We have confidence in what we can do."

And everyone has confidence in Hencke. Nicknamed "The Human Eraser" by Maronde, Hencke's strengths begin on the defensive end where she is a shot-blocking specialist. In a trait uncommon among basketball players, Hencke actually prefers defense to offense.

"Offense is fine and good and whatever," Hencke explained about her preference for defense. "But I guess it just comes from loving basketball."

Ross, among other coaches, has taken notice.

"If somebody made an error, Rachael could correct it," said Ross, whose

team lost in the sectional final to eventual tournament champion Milwaukee Vincent. "If somebody got beat off the dribble, Rachael's blocking the shot. Rachael's also just an excellent rebounder. She's got a nose for the ball."

That nose for the ball came in especially handy in Grafton's sectional final victory over New Berlin Eisenhower. Hencke's block of Kelsey Sperka's game-tying shot attempt sent the Hawks to the state tournament.

While Hencke patrols the paint, Herrick makes her presence known defensively on the perimeter. Her athleticism allows her to guard anybody on the court, while her instincts allow her to be a menace in the passing lanes.

"Because of her size, her speed and her strength, Morgan can play any position," Ross said of Herrick's multiple talents. "If we needed her to play guard, she just became the best guard on the court. If she played forward, now she's the best forward on the court. And it's offensively and defensively."

Herrick the offensive machine is a playmaker and a finisher all at once. Her versatility is evident, according to Ross, because she can bring the ball down the floor, start a play as the point guard and finish it off in the post. Proof of her offensive wizardry is that Herrick graduates as Cedarburg's all-time scoring leader, easily the only player to have passed 1,000 points in program history.

Herrick may be the more polished offensive talent, but nobody made bigger baskets this season than Hencke. While increasing her scoring in the postseason from about 14 to roughly 18 points per game, her biggest contributions came in the closing moments in the Hawks post-season romp. She netted a clutch pair of free throws in the victory over Eisenhower, and hit the tying bank shot in the championship game that sent the Hawks to overtime.

"I just found a spot and shot it," Hencke modestly reflected of the biggest shot in the history of Grafton High School basketball.

Hencke also praises teammates like Sarah Eichler, a fellow first-team all-conference choice, Halie Ziegler and Lindsay Wilde, saying they are the reason she does not get overly concerned about scoring points.

"I know if I didn't score or if I didn't have a good game and we won, I know someone else had a good game."

That competitive spirit and willingness to do whatever it takes to win is

shared by Herrick. Ross points to the senior's drive to succeed and ability to do it are the things that will be toughest for him to replace next season, when the post-Herrick era begins.

"(If something needs to be done), the expectation is that Morgan's going to take care of it," Ross said. " 'Morgan, go get the rebound. Morgan, go get the steal. Morgan, make that happen.' You don't fill those shoes, you need more of them."

Nobody knows that better than her sister Meghan, a junior who finished the season on the team's disabled list.

"I think anything Morgan does," the younger sister explained, "if she's playing Candy Land, or on the volleyball court, she's the most competitive person. It just runs through our family."

Winning is just the first thing linking Hencke and Herrick. While there are many differences in the individual styles and strengths of their games, the results speak for themselves.

There are other things that link their names together beyond just postseason honors. It all starts with their work ethic, which has drawn them together.

"We actually train together on Sundays, so I've become friends with her," Hencke said.

"I kind of pride myself on my free throws," Hencke said after the Eisenhower victory, providing a glimpse of the improvements she has made to her game after spending long hours all summer and after practices in the gym during the season. "Last year, and my freshman year, I wasn't too good from the line. All summer, I worked on it and worked on it. This year it's like all my hard work is just paying off now."

For her part, Hencke was interested in Cedarburg's postseason run, and was disappointed when informed that the Bulldogs had lost to Vincent on the same night that the Hawks had punched their ticket to state with their comeback victory over Eisenhower.

Of course, those are the building blocks to a solid friendship that's likely just getting started, no matter which Division 1 schools they end up playing for.

"I think throughout college we'll remain pretty good friends," Herrick predicted.

North Shore Conference

First team

Morgan Herrick, sr., Cedarburg; Sarah Eichler, soph., Grafton; Rachael Hencke, jr., Grafton; Laurie Nosbusch, jr., Homestead; Kara Biscobing, sr., Milwaukee Lutheran

Second team

Kathleen Hannan, sr., Nicolet; Lindsey Greenlee, sr., Cedarburg; Danielle Lewis, sr., Germantown; Lindsay Wilde, jr., Grafton; Lizzie Boeck, sr., Milwaukee Lutheran

Honorable mention: Dana Vielmetti, sr., HOM; Ashley Stemmeler, soph., HOM; Tori Lythjohan, jr., CED; Lindsey Hamann, soph., CED; Colleen Krechel, sr., Port Washington; Julia Baranek, jr., PW; Michelle Baranek, jr., PW; Stephanie Scott, sr., GER; Halie Ziegler, sr., GRA; Megan Turckes, sr., ML; Maggie Bultman, sr., ML.

Player of the Year: Megan Herrick, CED