SPORTS

Puck Stop

A six-foot goalie’s many saves

On New Year’s Eve, the Harvard women’s hockey team suited up for a long-anticipated rematch. Last February, in the first round of the 2019 Beanpot Tournament, the Crimson had stunned Boston College, ranked seventh in the nation, with a 4-1 victory. The Eagles scored 45 seconds into the game, and then never again. That was partly the work of Harvard’s rookie goalie, a lanky then-freshman named Lindsay Reed, who stopped 52 shots that night. A few weeks later, she stopped another 51 in the Beanpot final, an overtime loss to Boston University, and immediately after the game was named the Bertagna Award winner, as the tournament’s top goaltender.

This winter, Harvard traveled across town to Chestnut Hill, undefeated in conference play but still underdogs to higher-ranked BC. And again, the Crimson pulled off an upset win, this time even more decisive: three players came away with two goals each, and the team scored five times before the Eagles were able to bury their first puck in Reed’s net, a point-blank shot midway through the third period. At the end of the game, BC had taken nearly twice as many shots on goal as Harvard, but the final score was 7-1. Reed had made 45 saves.

In becoming a goalie, Reed followed a traditional path: she learned to skate shortly after learning to walk, and one day, while playing pick-up hockey with friends, her older brother stuck her in the net. “And that was it,” she says. “Basically, the rest is history.” She discovered she was good at fending off pucks—really good: a few of the other dads watching that afternoon turned to her father and joked, “You have a problem. Your daughter’s a goalie.” She was seven. “Part of it was, your big brother tells you to do something, and you want to do it and have fun with him. But also, I just loved it. It sounds a little psychotic, like ‘Oh, I like getting hit with pucks.’ But it’s just really fun.”

After that, things moved quickly. The outdoor rink and hockey club in her suburban New Jersey hometown became a second home. Reed had a goalie coach by sixth grade and joined a boys’ travel team soon after that. By the time she reached high school, USA Hockey had started to take notice; she was invited to player-development camps, and as a junior and senior played on the U.S. Women’s under-18 team, helping to bring home gold medals from world championships in Russia and the Czech Republic. In the middle of high school, a growth spurt hit, and she arrived at Harvard in 2018 with a six-foot frame and a massive wingspan. Out on the ice, she’s a striking figure, towering head and shoul-
The energy and intensity that Reed’s teammates describe are impossible to miss on the ice: the diving toe saves, the vaulting leaps, the flash of her glove—or stick, or whole body—across the mouth of the goal.

“Plus, her consistency,” says Katey Stone, the Landry Family head coach. “She’s very reliable back there.” That’s one of the things that first prompted Stone to recruit her. At 19, Reed plays like a seasoned goalie. Part of that is vision and perspective: in high school, during the months when she wasn’t competing on the ice, she played field hockey—not as a goalie, but as a forward. The experience helped broaden her game in both sports, she says. “When you’re in goal, you realize what the forwards want you to do”—opponents as well as teammates. “And you can use that.”

But for good goalies, confidence can be as important as vision or skill. “For me, mental toughness is the biggest thing,” Reed says. “Because you’re back there by yourself the entire time—you almost never get to go to the bench with the others, and so you don’t get the same team culture throughout the game.” It’s important, she says, not to think too much, not to dwell on mistakes or missed chances, but instead to just let discipline and instinct and trust in her teammates guide her. Communicating helps, too, she adds—by which she means yelling down the ice at the top of her lungs. “Talking to your teammates, even if they can’t hear you from all the way back there in the goal, is really important. I like to think that, you know, when they pass the puck, it’s because of my yelling, because I told them to,” she says, with a laugh. “I try to be a quarterback back there.”

This season, Harvard had its best start in more than a decade. After blasting through Dartmouth, Brown, and Yale, the Crimson upset seventh-ranked Princeton 6-2 on their own ice in early November, a game in which Reed stopped 40 shots and Bloomer, one of the top goal-scorers in the country, scored twice; junior forward Becca Gilmore, a national leader in assists, had four. The following day, Harvard won in overtime against Quinnipiac. “That one felt good,” Peper says. “In my time at Harvard, it’s been hard for us to win once the game goes to overtime.”

This season’s team is deep. “Lindsay’s a huge part of it,” Stone says, “but it’s a complementary effort.” In the Princeton game, nine players tallied points on the stat sheet (recording either a goal or an assist). Peper says she, too, feels a level of depth and strength on the team this season that propels her own play. “When you’re playing well, you can usually feel it, like your body feels different,” she explains. “One thing I pay attention to is passing—if I’m hitting people’s sticks, if I’m setting people up right.” Another is her gap—the space between herself and an opposing forward: “You know if you’ve challenged people, if you were able to take the puck from them and turn it the other way.” Reed’s goaltending, she adds, often makes those other plays possible. “With Lindsay out there, you can take some chances,” Peper says. “You never want to hang her out to dry, but knowing she’s there allows you to try some things.”

Harvard’s first goal in the New Year’s Eve game against Boston College looked something like that. A minute and a half into the first period, the Eagles made a rush in the Crimson’s zone; Reed deflected one shot and then another, and then swallowed a third in her glove. In the ensuing faceoff, Peper came away with the puck and, sidestepping a defender behind Reed’s net, bounced it up the ice toward freshman forward Shannon Hollands, who made a pass to Bloomer, already sprinting ahead for a breakaway. When Bloomer lobbed the puck into the Eagles’ net, there were cheers and hugs on the ice, then a string of high-fives from the bench. Reed skated toward center ice to tap the goalie-scorer’s glove in congratulations, before gliding back to her own net and crouching into position, eyes forward, shoulders squared, ready for the next shot.

—LYDIALYLE GIBSON

“The Ideal Sheet”

Matt Gilmore sits straight up on the Zamboni’s elevated seat, his left hand guiding the steering wheel, his right controlling the water spurting out the machine’s back. He leans leftward, his eyes trained on the few inches of space between the vehicle and the boards. Hitting the wall with the five-ton machine would be one of the worst things he could do, but his 14 years of experience ease the concern. “Once you’ve done the pattern for long enough, you can basically do it with your eyes closed,” he says. But Gilmore’s focus is palpable as he handles the Zamboni; a self-described “social butterfly” and popular figure at the Bright-Landry Hockey Center, he’s noticeably less talkative behind the wheel. He doesn’t even seem to notice the half-dozen people who have gathered to observe the legendary vehicle in action.

The quality of the ice affects the quality of the game. Bad ice—chipped, slushy, sticky—can lead to slow skating, errant passing, sloppy attacking, and even broken bones. Highly variable ice conditions are a problem that has plagued the National Hockey League for decades. Some of the world’s best players find their speed and skill squandered on rough ice. Quick, precise exchanges are easiest when the ice is level, smooth, and cold (but not too cold).

On a Thursday afternoon, rink manager Scott Anderson and Zamboni operator Gilmore perform “ice maintenance.” During this three-hour period, they restore the rink to ideal conditions, repairing any spots affected by the gradual wear-and-tear of hockey, figure skating, open-skate sessions, and even broomball—each of which leave different “scratch patterns.” Figure skating produces divots and holes, but hockey produces a more even shave of the ice, with the most wear in the rink’s center.

Anderson and Gilmore begin by drilling 23 holes into the ice at specific locations, to