

FTC senior balances field hockey, school



By **Joe Mason** October 5, 2023



Caroline Niebling never played field hockey before arriving at Franklin Towne Charter. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Caroline Niebling loves sports.

So much so that when she was a kid, she tried just about everything.

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Even ones you wouldn't think a girl from Queen Village in Philly would ever attempt.

"I did everything when I was a younger," Niebling said. "I played soccer, gymnastics, cross country, basketball, and I did things like surfing and horseback riding. I tried everything.

"I used to take classes in West Philly for horseback riding, my sister and I took classes for maybe two years. But they were weekends, it wasn't super competitive, it was a lot of fun. Just another thing to learn. Surfing, I would do that down the shore. Usually we go to Sea Isle for the month of July. It's not the whole summer, but we took classes down there. Definitely surfing is harder. Horseback riding is just something where you can't be scared, you just have to sit on the horse and bounce around a lot. Surfing is so much balance. It's definitely harder."

Niebling has tried a lot of different sports, but it wasn't until she arrived as a freshman at Franklin Towne Charter High School that she became a field hockey player.

In fact, the senior Warrior plays three sports she never competed in before – field hockey, cheerleading and lacrosse. While she loves all three, the fall sport is her new favorite.

But she probably loves it more because of the team and school she represents.

"I started playing field hockey because my athletic director (Spencer Parcels) told me I should play, I didn't even know what it was," she said. "I didn't know much about it, but I think all of the prior experience helped me because it taught me how to be an athlete, run fast, I can attach myself to a sport and do it. Growing up like that, you learn to do things and it helped you become an athlete.

"I loved it. I didn't consider doing it on my own, but I knew I wanted to do it as soon as I started playing. It's the team, it's a wonderful team and the coach is always so nice. We came from being the underdogs, we didn't even have a team the year before that."

Franklin Towne, like many schools, didn't compete during the pandemic. But since then, the school has rebuilt the field hockey program from a lesser light to one of the best teams in the Public League.

Last year, not only did Franklin Towne make the playoffs, but a goal by Niebling in double overtime of the Public League semifinals sent the Warriors to the Public League championship, where they fell to Northeast.

This year, things are going pretty well.

The Warriors are 1-1-2 in Public League play, the lone loss coming at the hands of last year's champion, Northeast.

Franklin Towne has a lot of work to do before the playoffs begin, but Niebling has high hopes for her squad. In the perfect world, she would once again help the Warriors make the finals, just as she did last year when she scored the winning goal in overtime.

"It was honestly an accomplishment," Niebling said. "None of the other fall sports got there, we were surprised we made it, but it was fun representing the school. We put everything into it, and we were so happy. The semifinal game, we went into double overtime against Rush. I scored the only goal, and that helped us win. That was the most amazing feeling."

This year, she's doing her part on the field while also doing everything she can away from the game to help her team.

"As the captain, I'm responsible for helping and training the freshmen," she said. "I spent so much time with our goalie, I always have equipment, I give the girl rides. I always keep the goalie equipment there, I keep it there so I can have it for her. I love doing it, everyone brings it to my car afterwards, I don't have to carry it.

"They are so good, they are good with everything. Everyone learns every game and every practice. Everyone improves so much their first year, especially when we can spend time with them. You can spend time with them individually and as a team. I never was on a team like this, never had a connection like I do with this team. And our coach is amazing. I put so much pressure on myself and I'm hard on myself, but I'm so happy she thinks I was good enough to be a captain and she puts that much trust in me. I take it very seriously."

She would love to leave Franklin Towne with a Public League title before she heads to college. If possible, she'll play field hockey, but she knows her courses will be challenging. Eventually, she wants to be a lawyer.

"That's what my mom does and I look up to her," Niebling said. "I think I'll be pretty good at it. I was raised by a lawyer, so I know what to do."

Just as mom and teammates at Franklin Towne are important to her, she also credits her siblings with helping her. She has a twin sister Julia who attends Franklin Towne with her. She also has an older brother Teddy, 21, and a younger sister Lilly, 14, who attends GAMP.

Since family is important to her, it explains why she loves her school.

"It's an interesting school. I have so much fun there. I love the athletics more than anything, that's my favorite part. It's a great school. We have a lot of fun people there, it's very inclusive. There are amazing people there. It's a very spirited school. The amount of work the teachers put in is crazy. We have so many people who care about us.

"The teachers at the school, I don't know, it's weird to say, but they care so much about the kids. It's an inclusive environment where everyone really likes each other. It's a fun place to be."

And winning there would make it that much more fun.

"I think we can be good again and I know we can make it to the championship," she said. "I think we can win, I know we can. I think we can win the whole thing. I think this could be our year.

"Last year, scoring to send us to the championship, that was the most exhilarating thing ever. And the Phillies also going to the championship was very connecting for us. All of us love our Phillies, it was crazy, it was happening to the Phillies and us. It was a great motivator. Now it's happening again and it's great, too."