

Ravens Building a Strong Foundation

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The effort put forth by Ravenscroft lacrosse players on the field during each game is readily apparent to spectators in the stands, but few fans realize that the work on the field is only a small part of what these young men contribute to the program.

For many of these athletes, the journey to success on the field in the spring begins in the Ravenscroft weight room during the winter months. That is where they add strength, speed and stamina; their souls are enriched through hard work; and a special unity is forged.

"Having added strength on the field helps, but there are other benefits to the program," said Coach Sandy Kapatos. "The first thing is the added commitment we are getting from the boys. You know the old adage, the more invested you are in something, the more important it becomes to you. The weight program is a big deal on that end, especially when they are working together."

The off-season program has been in place for a number of years, but it really took off this winter. The surge in interest was sparked by a player from the Class of 2014. Before he left to become an engineering student at Virginia Tech, Jay Hirl created a small, but devoted, group of workout warriors.

"I saw that Jay just kept getting bigger and stronger, and I just thought, 'I want to do that too,'" remembered current senior Cole Cutter. "I started working out with Jay and Robert (Vaughan, Class of 2014) and McClain (Voelkel, 2015), and it went from there."

"Jay was a really big help. He was the leader who designed the workouts, and he would set goals for us."

Hirl was a four-year lacrosse letterman at Ravenscroft, but it was a football injury that changed his mindset in the weight room.

"After I broke my fibula playing football, I couldn't do a lot of other things. Eventually, I got hooked on lifting," Hirl remembered. "Once I started to see improvement, I didn't want to stop."

"Once you start really gaining strength, you just feel more in control on the field. It can be a little overwhelming when you start out playing as a freshman, but working out helps you get the mindset that you are going to get it done. Eventually, you realize you are the one pushing people around."

"I really think the main thing lifting gave me was a sense of discipline. I developed the mindset that I was going to work out. Even if I had an obstacle come up, I knew I had to find a way not to skip a workout."

Hirl's dedication led to a change in his body, and that became a topic of conversation for the Ravens.

"Toward the end of lacrosse season, everyone knew that I was working out at the Y," Hirl said. "I guess Robert saw the progress I was making, and his college coach (at Hampden Sydney) told him that he needed to gain 20 pounds, so Robert started working out with me. We started talking about it around school, and some of the other guys thought it would be a cool idea. We added one guy, and then another, and we ended up with a group of five or six."

"It's a little embarrassing for just about everyone when they start, but we were all working together. The big thing for me was just concentrating on my form. I would drop down in weight so that I could work on my form. When you do that, you will gradually work your way up. It doesn't take too long before you start feeling good about what you can do."

Hirl helped draw in other players, and then he shepherded them through the early stages.

"Those guys were pushing me to start lifting with them, and I was a little hesitant at first," remembered Voelkel. "Once I got into it, I really started to enjoy it. The first time or two was really tough, but after a few times you start to see improvement, and that just fuels you to keep going."

Voelkel quickly learned that there were also benefits on the lacrosse field.

"I can tell that my shot has gotten a lot faster, and when I'm going against a defender I can tell that now I'm usually as strong as the defender, or sometimes even stronger," he said. "I was just a lot more confident on the field this summer (with the Triangle Select Lacrosse travel program) because I'm stronger."

Voelkel and Cutter have now taken on the mantle of weight room leaders for the Ravens.

"Jay and Robert are gone, but now some of the younger guys are really into it, so we still have a good group," Voelkel said.

"It's just fun getting together with the boys outside of the season," Cutter added. "We have a really good time, and we get a little competitive. Plus, we're all getting bigger and stronger."

Kapatos is thrilled to see his charges working hard, and he hopes that a new tradition has taken hold.

"The upper classmen are setting a great example for the younger guys, which is how it should be," he said. "If we're to continue to be successful as a team, then the weight room needs to play a prominent role in the program during the off season."

"Over the past four years, our boys have been motivated to improve themselves, they've been selfless in their attitudes and resilient in their efforts. I couldn't ask for a more committed group of players. I'm very proud of them and the progress we've made as we continue to build a program culture that leads to continued success."