

Don't overlook these Bulldogs Crosby girls enjoying solid season

By Joe Palladino Republican-American

WATERBURY

The man on the phone had a point to make, and to his credit, he made it gently.

"Well, I guess we're not a headline anymore," he said.

OK Phil, what's on your mind.

"When we won eight games and qualified for the state tournament, it used to be worth a story," he said.

True, but now that you make the state tournament on a regular basis, headlines are tougher to earn. Eight victories for the Crosby High girls basketball team is no longer a surprise. It is expected. But Crosby head coach Phil Lott got his point across, and it was a good one.

Tonight, NVL girls basketball has one heck of a matchup on the schedule as Holy Cross (12-1) hosts St. Paul Catholic (12-0) in a meeting of the league's two best teams.

And lumbering right along, again, are the Bulldogs (9-3). Yes, they have lost to the Crusaders and Falcons, and Watertown (8-4) too. Crosby is not ready to be an NVL champion. But the Bulldogs are there, and that is worth a story.

This is the fourth consecutive season that Crosby has qualified for the state tournament, and you don't need to look a long way back to when that was unthinkable.

This team went from 1-19 in 2011-12, to seasons of 10, 8, and 15 victories. With other programs comes the offseason work, summer AAU, and a quest for consistency.

"It's hard to be consistent with girls who, when the season is over, don't touch a ball again," Lott said. "When they come, they give their all, but we are not what we could be if they played in the offseason."

As Lott points out, "We can't practice the way other teams practice. We do fundamentals, every single day. We have a team made up of girls who never played the game before they got here. They come back and are willing to learn, but our focus is fundamentals."

Crosby has the NVL's leading scorer in Ninoshka Figueroa-Robles. She entered the weekend with a 21.8 ppg. average, but, according to Lott, "She just started speaking English this season. I couldn't yell at her last year. She didn't understand. I am yelling at her this year, though. She can be careless with the ball and she will turn it over, but when teams play man on us, I love it, because she is tough to stop."

In the lineup with Figueroa-Robles are forward Mariah Machado (14 ppg) and 6-2 defender and board crusher Destin Trammell.

"We have three varsity players in the program," Lott said. "I have two starters who play JV, and one doesn't even start JV. We have 28 kids total, but 16 of them never played the game before they came out this season."

And yet, Crosby rolls along, wins games, stays competitive and, occasionally, earns a headline.