

Lady Cougars able to overcome rough start

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'Back in March, Apex lost back-to-back games against Green Hope and East Chapel Hill.

In both contests the Lady Cougars held a lead late only to let it slip away.

Those two one-goal defeats became a turning point for a team that had set its sights on a state championship.

And the players' reactions to those losses convinced coach Jessica Trombley that Apex might just experience a very special season.

"We had a rough patch early in the season," said Trombley. "We lost two games but they

were to two great teams. The problem is we had the lead in both games but lost it in the final minutes.

"The reason is because we were out of shape. After those losses we really stepped up our practices. In fact, our practices almost became just like a game. What was great is that the girls wanted the tougher practices and they wanted to improve."

Senior Jessica Thurston credited the coaching staff of Trombley, Jay Faulhaber and Rob Bromley for the team's improvement.

"Our coaches expected more from us than we did," said Thurston. "They really pushed us to be our best and never let us settle for anything less. They deserve so much credit.

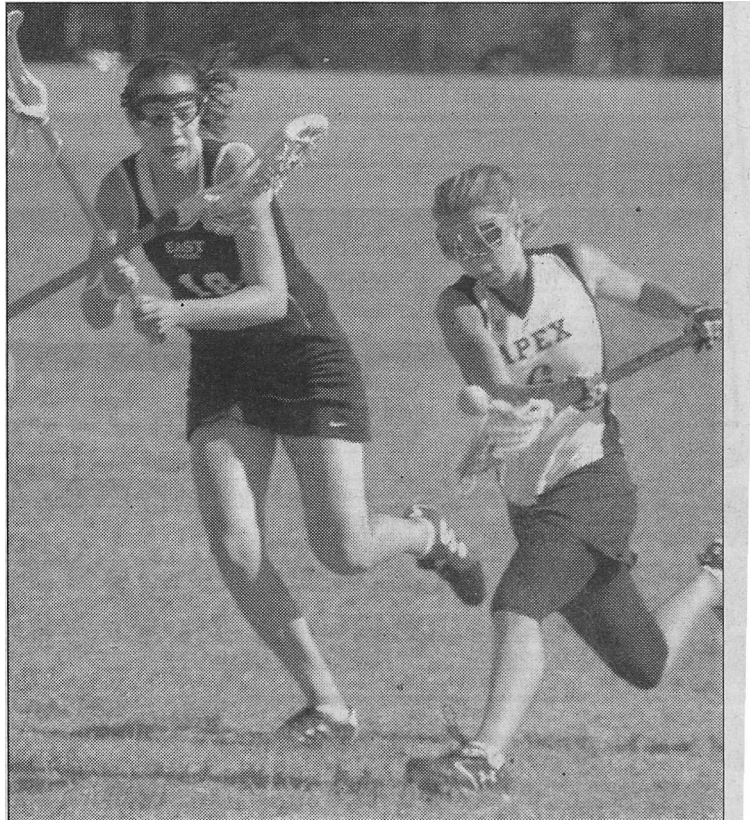
"We went through a rough spot but after (the losses) we realized we could do so much in practice and it started to click as a team."

The Lady Cougars ended up winning 13 of their 14 games en route to the state championship.

"From the beginning of the year we knew we could win it," said JoEllen Billotte. "We knew we had the skills. We talked about it but we also stayed focused on each game."

It's the second state championship medal for the Thurston family and, ironically, both titles came at the expense of East Chapel Hill.

In 2005, Thurston's father, Chip, was assistant coach of the boys' team when they won the 4-A crown.



Junior Sasha Vedock scored three goals against East Chapel Hill and was named the game's Most Valuable Player.

"It's pretty cool," said Thurston. "They also beat East Chapel Hill that year and I remember being so happy for my dad. I never thought I would get to experience it.

"Now, my dad is so excited for me. As happy as I was for him this one feels a lot better. Experiencing a state championship as a player is much better than as a coach's daughter."

Winning a state title, said Trombley, gives all future players a tangible goal.

"I think this sets the bar higher," said Trombley. "From here on out players at Apex know what can be achieved.

"I only think the program will get better because girls will look up to these players and realize that if they work hard they can win a state championship, too."