

South Side's Christina Klaum: Newsday's Player of the Year, and she's only a junior

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"She's the type of player that a player like me hates to play against. I feel bad for whoever gets in a foot race with her. She's a nightmare for defenders. She never stops moving."

She also never stops winning. And despite that, never stops striving for more.

Those co-ed soccer lessons in elementary school paved the way for the success Klaum has had in high school. For the second straight season, she led South Side to a state title and earned first-team All-[Long Island](#) and All-State.

That's why the junior forward is a rare underclassman to be named Newsday's girls soccer Player of the Year.

"If I win something, I'm honored, but I don't get complacent," Klaum said. "I'm really driven and goal-oriented. I'm never satisfied."

That she's not satisfied after an unbeaten season that ended with a state title and Player of the Year award should be of particular concern to opponents who struggled to contain her. She broke down defenses, scoring 17 goals, and set up attacks, tallying 11 assists. She uses her speed, vision and ball control to make plays out of nothing.

When Klaum had marking backs shadowing her in the county title game against [Garden City](#), her

Playing soccer against girls no longer provided enough of a challenge. Christina Klaum wanted to improve her game, and to do so, she needed to compete against tougher competition. So, she started playing against the boys.

She was in the third grade.

"Even back then, she kept up with us," Mark Romanowski, a first-team All-[Long Island](#) defender on the South Side boys soccer team, said of those recess matchups with Klaum, his longtime friend and classmate.

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coach Shannon McEntee told her to look to distribute rather than finish. She assisted on the winning goal.

When South Side was nursing a 1-0 lead in the second half of the state title game, Klaum turned on one defender then hooked a shot around another for the goal that sealed South Side's 17th state title.

So, now the questions are: how much better can she get? And what more can she accomplish?

"I just have to set my goals even higher next year," Klaum said. "I have to continue to work on my game and never become predictable. My focus will be to keep pushing myself to the limit in every aspect of my game and keep pushing my teammates past theirs so we can continue to grow and get better each day."

Because of that leadership, along with her ability to motivate (she hangs motivational quotes on her bedroom wall and reads some off to her team before games) and her competitiveness (seen as far back as third grade by her desire to challenge herself against tougher competition), she was named co-captain of arguably the most storied girls soccer program in the state.

"Christina is an amazing player," said Alex Reis, Klaum's South Side teammate and fellow captain. "When you play with the best, it inspires you to play your best."

Klaum has proved that she is one of the best when playing against the girls. But how would she fare at the high school level against the boys?

"She has tremendous skill and she's quick," Romanowski said. "There are plenty of defenders that she'd be able to get by."

Klaum is up for the challenge, just as she was during recess in the third grade.

"From a skill perspective, I could hang with the boys and play a good game," she said. "Provided they don't get too physical considering they are a lot stronger than I am.

". . . I'd show them that, yeah, I'm a girl, but I can still play with you."

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