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(Photo by Janet Paxton)

caption:
PERSONAL TRAINER: Princeton High athletic trainer Shannon Koch gives a PHS football player some personal attention in dealing with an injury. This summer, Koch has stepped up to the pro ranks, working as a trainer for the Somerset-based Sky Blue FC team of Women's Professional Soccer (WPS).



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PHS Trainer Koch Having Big Summer Working With Sky Blue FC of the WPS

Bill Alden

It was an opportunity that Shannon Koch felt she must pursue. Seeing that the Somerset-based Sky Blue FC team needed an athletic trainer for the first season of the Women's

Professional Soccer (WPS) league, Koch applied for the job.

Aided by her background working with the New Jersey Wildcats of the W-League, the longtime Princeton High trainer got the position.

Catching on with Sky Blue made for a busy spring for Koch, necessitating a juggling act as she fulfilled her responsibilities at PHS.

"It was a little stressful working two jobs at the same time," said Koch, who was covering Sky Blue practices at its training site at the Players Development Academy in Zarephath.

"I was very fortunate; I had Sky Blue in the morning and didn't need to be at school until the afternoon."

Things have been a bit of a rollercoaster ride for the Sky Blues as the team is on its third coach since starting the season in April.

"We have had a little bit of drama," said Koch with a laugh in reflecting on the team's coaching carousel.

"The first change came as I was joining the team and it went smoothly. The second one was unexpected; I think a lot of the players were hurt by that one. Their spirits are good. They are playing hard and they are practicing hard. It is a very strong group; they have deep bonds."

Koch, who has been a trainer at PHS since 2001, has worked hard herself to keep up with the professional game.

"The game is at a faster pace, there are only three substitutions," explained Koch, who has covered most practices and home games with an assistant handling rehab sessions and road games.

"I must have supplies ready to work quickly. Sometimes you have to go across the field because they bring the player off to closest side when they get hurt. In one game, we had a couple of players that needed stitches at the same time; we had our hands full."

Working with the Sky Blue has helped Koch become more expert in her field.

"I have picked up a lot of knowledge, working with people like Dr. Tim Hosea," said Koch.

"I am dealing with things I don't see in high school; there are different treatment methods. There is a little more pressure to get the players back quickly. They are older and they know their bodies. We can push them harder than you push the high school kids."

The team has done a good job of attracting support from local kids.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the number of fans we are getting; we had more than 6,000 at our first two games," said Koch, who will be on the sidelines this Saturday as Sky Blue faces the Washington Freedom in the WPS playoffs at the Maryland SoccerPlex in Germantown, Md.

"I think we have had at least 3,000 for every home game. The youth teams line the field before the game. Players are staying 30-45 minutes after the games to sign autographs."

Koch has enjoyed her stay with the Sky Blue. "The experience is so exciting; we have never had soccer higher than college or the national team," said Koch.

"It is neat being a part of the pro league. I have met some amazing people, both coaches and players. I have made friendships with players that will last a long time."

Koch is clearly making the most of her opportunity to get in on the ground floor of women's pro soccer.

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