

## Marra-velous

### Bayside ace deals two no-hitters early

BY MARK LELINWALLA

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After Bayside's showdown with Townsend Harris was rained out last Thursday, Stephen Piorkowski moved his Lady Commodores into the school gym, where they practiced for the next three hours.

There, Piorkowski kept his eye on pitching ace Nicole Marra, who stood in the middle of the gym picking off anyone who tried to steal a base.

When the teams meet this Wednesday to play the game - the victor will take an early lead in Queens 1-A - all eyes will be on Marra and Townsend Harris sophomore pitcher Cecilia Ehresman.

So far this season, neither Bayside nor Townsend Harris has had much trouble in league play; at the close Thursday, both teams sported 3-0 records, tied for the division's top spot.

Bayside's early-season success can be largely attributed to Marra's hot start on the mound. The junior has already pitched no-hitters against Jamaica and Beach Channel.

Although Marra played shortstop as a sophomore last season, Piorkowski says she may already be one of the city's best pitchers.

"She has qualities that I can't even teach as a coach," said Piorkowski, who's been at the helm of Bayside's softball program for 16 years. "She has such a strong arm."

But Marra didn't always feel so imposing on the mound.

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Nicole Marra (l.) played shortstop last season, but coach Stephen Piorkowski (below) put her on the mound this season.



"When I first started pitching the ball, it would never go into the glove," said Marra, a 16-year-old from Fresh Meadows. "I used to pitch too many wild pitches, but Coach really worked with me."

Piorkowski began breaking down Marra's pitching mechanics last season. When she returned for her junior campaign, Piorkowski knew he was looking at his ace.

"I own a radar gun and I've clocked her fastball in at 59 mph," Piorkowski said. "She's dying to hit 60."

To ensure that his pitcher and her teammates continue to improve, Piorkowski has his Lady Commodores play a tough non-league schedule. Bayside has already lost 6-0 to Madison, 10-3 to Mary Louis and 10-0 to Archbishop Molloy.

Despite the drubbings, Piorkowski said the experiences will only help Marra.

"We lost 10-0 to Molloy, but Nicole only gave up one earned run," Piorkowski said. "Nine runs were not earned, so we have to have good defense behind Nicole too."

Piorkowski cited the defensive play of Cadie Chu at first base, Danielle Brustmeyer at second and catcher Terry Yip as key factors underlying the team's prospects for continued success.

The Lady Commodores finished last season at 11-3, tying Bryant and Francis Lewis for first place in the Queens A division before falling to eventual PSAL champion Tottenville in the playoff quarterfinals.

"We don't want to tie for the division and we want to go further in the playoffs this year," said Bayside right fielder Angela Mohamed. "Nicole's pitching is huge for us."