

# Girls soccer matchups to watch

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MSJ freshman Emma Blodorn (11, left) readies to strike the ball during a matchup with West Rutland at Abatiell Field in Rutland. At right is West Rutland's Emma Sevigny (8).

File photo by Jon Olender

Soccer was one of the sports not altered much from its normal state during last fall's mid-pandemic season.

Sure, players donned masks, which almost certainly affected fitness during a match, but everything else about their game was fairly in tune with what it has always been.

That makes their transition back to the regular slate this fall a bit easier than a sport like football, who had its game completely changed in 2020.

Girls soccer teams in the *Rutland Herald* coverage area ran the gamut last year, some contending for a title, while others were laying the groundwork for their next title run.

With a new season upon us, there are many more storylines that will take shape and fun matchups to be had.

Let's take a look at some games that stand out on their schedules.

**OV vs Proctor, 9/3**One thing taken away during the pandemic was the Josh Cole Memorial Tournament in Ludlow.

That is back this year and an early season matchup between rivals Proctor and Otter Valley could be a highlight of the tournament.

The teams didn't meet last year, when Proctor went undefeated and won the Division IV championship and Otter Valley was a bit up and down going 4-6 with a tough schedule.

Something that intrigues me about this match is goalie play. Linnea Faulkner gained valuable experience against high-level competition in goal as a freshman. Proctor, on the other hand, will be breaking in someone new in net with Rachel Stuhlmueeller's graduation.

### **Colchester at Rutland, 9/7**

Last year was the first time since 2013 that Colchester didn't have a winning record. The Lakers are always a strong club and even in a down year they made the Division I semifinals in 2020.

Rutland was also in the state semifinals last year, losing to CVU.

The Ravens and Lakers meet in a quality early season non-league contest on Sept. 7.

Rutland lost some key pieces from its 2020 club, but returns plenty to be a contender in D-I.

Adding more flavor to this one, Colchester coach Jeff Paul is a Rutland High graduate.

### **Arlington at Proctor, 9/17**

For the first time in three years, Proctor and Arlington didn't meet in a high-stakes playoff game last year.

The Eagles bowed out in the playdowns, while the Phantoms rolled to a state title.

Many of the stalwarts from the heyday of this rivalry a few years ago have graduated, but there are some still around. Those girls will surely impart upon the younger group the importance of this game.

### **BBA at Rutland, 9/21**

These schools epitomize rivalry by always playing highly-competitive games against each other, no matter the sport. Girls soccer is no different.

Their game at Alumni Field last year went to overtime with BBA coming out on top.

If Rutland is looking for a tough early season challenge, this game will provide it. The Bulldogs have been the class of southern Vermont soccer for a long time. They haven't had a losing record in the regular season since 1995.

Rutland always needs its "A-game" for this matchup.

### **Springfield at GM, 10/6**

Green Mountain and Springfield were contenders in their respective divisions last fall.

The Chieftains have plenty of young talent coming back that could help them build off a successful 2020. The Cosmos will have a lot more holes to fill from graduation, but if turnout from last year is any indication, there are many girls itching to take a spot.

Two schools only eight miles away coming off good seasons, sounds like a nice rivalry concoction for me.

### **MRU at West Rutland, 10/7**

The 2020 season was one of development for Mill River. More often than not, their opponent would have the upperhand and the score differential wouldn't be pretty.

With a lineup that lacked much varsity experience, they knew some struggles could be in store.

The one team they did beat was West Rutland, a very strong club in Division IV.

The teams meet for the lone time on Oct. 7 in Westside. The memory of the 1-0 loss to the Minutemen the year before could be on the Golden Horde's mind.

### **West Rutland at Proctor 10/9**

These neighboring rivals always put a little extra energy in for this game.

Proctor lost a handful of seniors, especially on the defensive side, but it has the scoring punch that could make up for any inexperience on the back line.

West Rutland's big defensive loss comes in the form of sweeper Elizabeth Bailey, but the Horde still have one more year of keeper Serena Coombs.

Both clubs have the potential to be elite in D-IV again and this one will be a fun one to watch as they jockey for playoff positioning.

### **MSJ at Poultney, 10/18**

Mount St. Joseph was a team that surprised many last year. With a couple key additions, MSJ went from a team often near the bottom of the D-IV standings to one near the top.

Poultney is hoping to be one of those surprise teams this year. The Devils graduated just one senior and have plenty of young talent who gained lots of experience last year.

These two teams played a tight 2-1 game early in the abbreviated 2020 season. This game, the second time they'll meet in a nine-day span, should be another one of those competitive contests.

### **OV at Fair Haven, 10/21**

Fair Haven was dominant in this rivalry series last fall, but the teams could be on more equal footing in 2021.

The Slaters are contending with the large amount of turnover from their 2020 D-II semifinalist. With girls like Brittney Love and Lily Briggs, the cupboard is in no way bare, but there will be big roles to be filled.

Otter Valley is losing fewer seniors and returns an elite striker in Elena Politano, their leading scorer who scored twice against Fair Haven last year.

This could be a recipe for a more competitive rivalry this fall.