

Crimson Queens of the Rink

The women's hockey team ended January with a perfect 14-0 record in the ECAC, and a 17-1-0 record overall, earning them the top ranking in the nation. The icewomen have consistently frosted their opponents with devastating offensive flurries and a defense that has allowed just 0.83 goals per game. Harvard's sole loss came against the UNH Wildcats, alma mater of veteran Crimson head coach Katey Stone, on December 14. At their next game, in early January, the icewomen knocked off Cornell, and then—in quick succession—Colgate, Boston College, St. Lawrence, and Clarkson before a two-week, exam-period layoff. Back on the ice January 27, the Crimson dispelled any speculation that their hot touch might have gone cold with a decisive 4-0 shellacking of tenth-ranked Dartmouth.

In the net, goalminder Christina Kessler '10 has proved she's a keeper. Sidelined by injury for much of last season, the sophomore standout has garnered a .957 save percentage in the 17 games she has played this winter, including shutout wins against Yale, Brown, Clarkson, Boston College, and Dartmouth, among others. The Dartmouth shutout, her eighth of the season, set a new Harvard record, and solidified her standing among the best goalies in the country.

On the other side of the blue line, the Crimson has plentiful scoring power in Sarah Vaillancourt '09, a member of the gold-medal-winning Canadian women's team at the 2006 Olympics in Torino. Vaillancourt led the team in scoring with 11 goals. Close behind her in the count, with 10 pucks in the net—and watch-



Clockwise from left: sophomore netminder Christina Kessler; senior defender, tri-captain, and Olympic bronze medalist Caitlin Cahow; junior forward and Olympic gold medalist Sarah Vaillancourt



ing Vaillancourt's back—is tri-captain Caitlin Cahow '08 on defense; another 2006 Olympian, she skated for the bronze-winning U.S. team. At press time, Cahow was third nationally in power play goals (with 8) and second in goals scored among defenders (with 1.06 per game). Against Boston College

on January 8, the senior scored her first collegiate hat trick in a 7-0 blowout. With just eight conference games left, the Crimson looked likely to lock up home-ice advantage for the ECAC tournament that caps the regular season, and seemed poised for play on the national stage.

age three, has loved being in goal since he started playing there at eight. After high school in Calgary, he played for two years for the Brooks Bandits of the Alberta Hockey League, a "Tier II" Junior "A" league in Canada. Richter laughs about the hockey world's consensus that you need to be a little crazy to play goal. "A lot of goalies are 'different,'" he admits. "My coach in the juniors told me that I was one of the most normal goalies around."

Nonetheless, he does things on the ice abnormally well—such as picking up the trajectory of a puck when players skating in front of the goal screen his view. "Finding the puck when there's traffic in front is half the battle," he says. "To control a rebound on the ice when you can barely see it in the first place is a real challenge."

Saves, whether with stick or body, in-

evitably create many rebounds, and hence more chances for the attacking team to shoot, often from close range. Richter pays serious attention to rebound management. "You want to make rebounds go to the right spot," he explains. "That means keeping the puck away from the center of the ice." Ideally, a goalie will deflect a shot to his own teammate, starting a transition to offense. If the other team does get the puck, the goaltender tries to make sure that happens in a less dangerous area, such as the corners of the rink or behind the net.

Breakaways present special challenges as well as opportunities for the goaltender's most spectacular feats. "You want to skate out of the net and attack the [oncoming] player," Richter says. "Then you move back as he comes for-

ward, so if he makes a 'deke' [decoy, a feint], you can use your momentum to go with him. By staying in front of him you cut down his angle if he shoots. Guys are getting pretty crafty with fakes. As a goalie, you want *him* to make the first move, to commit himself. The bottom line is patience. Reaction and patience."

Of course, the goalie has plenty of help from his teammates. (Though the crowd usually cannot hear, players do plenty of talking while play is in progress.) Richter's position gives him a panoramic view of the ice that allows him to help teammates by letting them know, for example, what is developing behind them. True, in the final analysis, he's the last line of defense, but, as he points out, "I didn't pick this position because it was easy."

—CRAIG LAMBERT