

Revamped Pine-Richland hockey roster looks to get up to speed

By: [Jerin Steele](#)

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Pine-Richland's Jordan Spear skates with the puck against Central Catholic's Mario Misiti during a PIHL playoff game last season.

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When last season ended, the [Pine-Richland](#) hockey team said goodbye to its top four point-getters in standout forwards Alex Erlain, Carson Kalpakis and Michael Megine and defenseman Esai Morse.

That leaves the Rams with some scoring to replace, but they have some returners and new faces looking to make their mark.

"As coaches, we're excited to see who steps up," [Pine-Richland](#) coach Jordan Yoklic said. "We have a good blend of seniors, incoming freshmen that earned varsity spots and everything in between. We're optimistic with the

group we have. It's a lot of first-year varsity players, so we just have to get adjusted to the pace for Class 3A play.

"It's a learning process at this stage of the year. As we keep playing, these guys are going to get better and better to work toward a championship-level caliber of play."

Pine-Richland advanced to the Class 3A semifinals last year before falling to eventual Penguins Cup champion [Peters Township](#).

The Rams opened the season with a 5-2 loss against [Upper St. Clair](#) on Oct. 3.

The biggest returner is Dan Mooney, who established himself as one of the top goaltenders in the PIHL last season.

Mooney carried a 14-4 record with a 1.99 goals-against average and .918 save percentage as a junior. He's grown into a leader for the team and a calming influence between the pipes.

"Mooney is definitely the backbone of our team," Yoklic said. "It's very comforting and a luxury to have a quality goaltender, especially one like him that works extremely hard on and off the ice. The skaters in front of him want to make his life as easy as possible and let him see the shots. We're confident he can make any save when he sees the puck, and if there's a second, third or fourth opportunity, he can make those saves too."

Joshua Folmer, Jordan Spear and Jack Breisinger are seniors who make up the captain group. Folmer and Breisinger are the leading returning scorers with 14 points each last season.

"They are familiar with our coaching style and expectations," Yoklic said. "They have high goals individually and for the team. We're fortunate to have those guys back and will be relying on their leadership."

Seniors Ryan and Shawn Peacock, who are twins and Haden Snyder also return. Yoklic said he's looking for big strides from underclassmen Benjamin Baileys, a junior, and Jeremy Casper, a sophomore.

With a decent amount of first-time varsity players on the roster, Yoklic put a lot of time into team building activities over the summer, so they could get to know each other.

They did workouts on the Pine-Richland football field and weight room and took a team-wide trip to a Pirates game.

There was also a trip to Chicago to play three games in August, and they participated in the annual St. Margaret preseason tournament. The Rams went 3-0 in pool play at St. Margaret's before falling to [Armstrong](#) in the semifinals.

Yoklic credited the players and parents for their willingness to play in the offseason and their commitment to the program. The Rams have another trip planned in February to play in a tournament at Notre Dame.

It's all part of the process with the goal of being a contender once again when the Penguins Cup playoffs arrive in March.

"Our goal going into every single game is to come out with two points, but big picture, we just want to come to the rink, whether it's a practice or a game, and get better as players and coaches," Yoklic said. "We want to find that team bond. If you develop that early, it sets you up well come March.

"We've been doing some team-building things away from the rink, at the rink, watching film ... all the little things that build you into a championship-caliber team. The returners and the new faces on our team are starting to understand that. They're all excited to continue learning and improving."

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