

Bristow dances her way to a deuce in Hawks shutout win over Bears field hockey

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Early in the fourth quarter, Urbana's Lexi Bristow had to perform a deft balancing act to strip the ball from an Oakdale field hockey player.

The two were battling along the baseline, and Bristow needed to stay in bounds. So, she put her 11 years of ballet training to use, poking the ball away before turning and tip-toeing past the defender.

Bristow slid the ball past the goalkeeper for her second goal of the night, and the Hawks could dance and celebrate a 4-0 road win over the Bears on Wednesday evening.

Those ballet lessons have helped Bristow, a freshman, tighten her field hockey game and let her make an immediate impact for Urbana (7-1).

"I feel like when I was first learning ballet, it takes a lot of discipline, and the discipline from that makes me, I think, a very coachable player," Bristow said.

That came as no surprise to Hawks coach AJ Stuart, who has known Bristow for years and quickly took a liking to the young attacker.

"She's got great instincts. She has a very high IQ for the game," Stuart said. "She knows where to be on the field. She's always aware of who's available for a pass. She knows when to shoot. She knows when to pass. She knows how to utilize her speed to get the ball down the field. She's been a great asset. I love her."

Bristow could have continued down the dance path if not for her older sister, Paige. She introduced field hockey to Lexi in second grade and later became a "legendary player" herself, as Stuart said, being named the 2018 FNP All-County Offensive Player of the Year.

Lexi Bristow eventually took a greater liking to field hockey and quit dance earlier this year. She's proven adept in the first few weeks of her freshman year, registering her second multi-goal game of the season Wednesday.

Her first tally came just over five minutes into the contest, when she pounced on a loose ball and

backhanded it into an open net.

That came less than four minutes after Kaitlyn Mogar opened the scoring with a tip-in goal, giving Urbana its fastest start of the season.

“That set the tone. We’ve struggled a little bit with intense starts this year, so it was kind of nice to have that great start where we had those two goals super quick,” Stuart said.

It put Oakdale (2-7) on its heels, and it surrendered another goal to Katelynn Inkman in the second quarter to fall behind by three.

The Bears picked it up in the third quarter, hemming the Hawks in their own end over the last eight minutes of the period. They received eight consecutive penalty corners and peppered Urbana goalie Mackenzie Steinheimer.

But she stood tall, along with her defense, making a career-high five saves.

“They’re the toughest team we’ve played all season,” Oakdale coach Sherry Moores said. “And I think we hung with them in the second half a little bit better.”

In the fourth quarter, the attention turned back to Bristow, who slipped in her second of the match to ice the contest.

It took the balance and discipline she learned on the dance floor to make the play, something that’s become second nature for the freshman. So, when she saw the slightest of openings on the baseline, she leapt at it.

“I saw the moment to take it, and I hit it,” she said.