

Andrew Olsen always knew what he was getting from Joshua Wilcox.

It didn't matter if it was on defense or in the midfield, Wilcox was going to make his presence felt in the center of the action for the New Hope High School boys soccer team.

"As coach, when you have the middle of the field locked up like we have the past four years, I am not going to say you're relaxed, but you can kind of focus on other issues on the field," Olsen said. "Josh was going to play 80 minutes a game, and the only way he was coming off the field is if he was injured."

Wilcox's consistency in practice and in games was a key ingredient to New Hope's success the last few years. With Wilcox playing an integral role, New Hope advanced to three Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) North Half title games and played for a state title in 2022.

That consistency will serve Wilcox well when he takes his game to the next level. On Monday, Wilcox finalized that plan when he announced he will continue his soccer career at Mississippi University for Women in the fall.

"I think he is going to do great there," Olsen said. "I am excited he will be at The W so on a Tuesday I can go downtown and watch a game. Josh has faced some of the best strikers in the state. We have faced some of the best competition in the state. It is a faster-paced game when you get to that level, but a player

like him, as smart and talented as he is, I think he is going to be able to adapt and pick it up and handle himself really well.”

Wilcox said he always has wanted to play soccer in college ever since he started playing the sport in second grade. He said he knew immediately soccer was for him, even though he played several other sports, because the “constant action” appealed to him.

Wilcox played center back early in his career, but this past season he was a fixture at center midfielder, where he helped the Trojans earn their fifth-straight district title. An injury to center back Austin Minichino forced Olsen to change the lineup late in the season and move Wilcox back to defense. While he played well, New Hope lost to Lafayette 3-1 in its third appearance in the North Half title game in the last four years.

Olsen said he has been “blessed” to have numerous players who have been consistent and dependable on defense, including former center back Cole Crawford. Wilcox may not have been as vocal as some of the others, but Olsen said he set an example everyone followed.

“He leads by effort and example,” Olsen said. “When we’re on the field, he is giving 100% all the time, and the guys see that and respect it, so they know every day when we show up, he is going to make you better and hold you accountable.

“His knowledge of the game and knowing positions and knowing where everybody is supposed to has helped him. When you’re able to read the passing lanes and not have to chase the ball and know where to be, I think that is what has made him successful.”

Wilcox said being a starter since his sophomore season pushed him into a leadership role. This season, he said he needed to play that role even more so he could set an example for his younger brother.

Along the way, Wilcox said learned to be calmer in games, which he said helped him develop a better mentality that enabled him to grow as a person, a player and off the field.

“I have always been tough on myself since I was little, so I have always felt that weight,” Wilcox said. “Throughout the years being in the middle, I realized I’m not going to be perfect every game, so I learned to work from my mistakes. It is a lot of work during the game and after school. I have always tried to put that work in.”

Wilcox is anxious to keep learning and growing physically and mentally. He said that growth will be important as he transitions to a faster pace of play in college. But if you have seen Wilcox play, you know he would be ready if the season started tomorrow.

“I went to a couple practices with colleges, and I think I can handle it,” Wilcox said. “It will be an adjustment, for sure, because it is not high school ball anymore and it is a lot different game, but I think I have got it.”