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Central High School stands at 8-1 overall and 7-0 in the Philadelphia Public League. A big reason: **Nicole Umeweni, Katelynn Rice, Elena Cruz-Adames – the team’s defensive backs and the PhilaFH Defenders of the Week.**

In the last five games, the Lancers’ defense has allowed one shot on goal. Last week, Central topped Franklin Towne Charter 5-0.



“Nicole, Elena and Katelynn are stalwarts in the backfield,” said Head Coach Gina Donnelly. “They also clear the ball effectively as a unit. They call out changes in formation when necessary and

provide seamless back-up when someone pushes up or out. They communicate well with subs into their back line and help coordinate offensives pushes up the sidelines.”

Nicole Umeweni, a skilled defender who can steal the ball from even the most agile attackers, is also a critical player in the team’s transition game and corners. “Last week, Nicole was the reason we scored before half in our last game and got our momentum going. Time was out in the half so she pushed up on the corner we were completing and singlehandedly kept it in play for our score.”

Cruz-Adames, a two-year captain, is noted for her block tackle, game sense and communication skills. Coach Donnelly noted: “Elena can literally play any position on the backline, and will call out defensive shifts if she feels a sweeper set-up will work better than playing a diamond midfield.”

Rice, who holds down the left side, has shown marked improvement in the 2017 season, Donnelly says. “She is a model for taking space, creating scoring opportunities, helping out the midfield, as well as clearing the ball out of the deep defense.”

Powered by Umeweni, Cruz-Adames and Rice in the backfield, Central has their eye on the Public League Championship, a prize which eluded them last year, as well as advancing in District 12 playoffs.

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