

COOKING UP A STORM

Versatile Chris Cook has Northeastern poised to challenge the big boys

BY MATT DaSILVA

On Nov. 25, the morning after Thanksgiving, Chris Cook spent four hours on the already winter-hardened grass of Shoreham-Wading River High School with an old mentor — perhaps trying to conjure some of the

decentralized structure, scant practice numbers and players hesitant to embrace his efforts to legitimize their program. His first practice, Cook drilled one of the team's more highly regarded defensemen during a man-ball practice session. They shoved each other, as the rest of the team was cautious to intercede.

"We butted heads more than a few times," Northeastern coach Tim Gray says of his 6-foot-1, 200-pound attackman, whom he calls a "firecracker."

"I pretty much caused trouble right from the start," Cook says. "It was a battle for kids to understand that I'm not here to be an ass on the field, but that I was bringing an intensity I wanted everyone else to match, and it's starting to happen."

It started to happen almost immediately. With Cook doing the feeding, Northeastern improved from 4-7 in 2003 to 9-6 in 2004. As a freshman he finished ninth in scoring in the Pioneer Collegiate Lacrosse League with 10 goals and 36 assists.

But as the numbers continued to flesh out last year, Gray — himself a former player — moved Cook to attack. Cook became the focal point in more ways than one. He was the first sophomore president in the club's history. He's made it a point to undertake at least one large-scale social mission each semester, including teaching English as a second language to Boston's impoverished Hispanic youths last year.

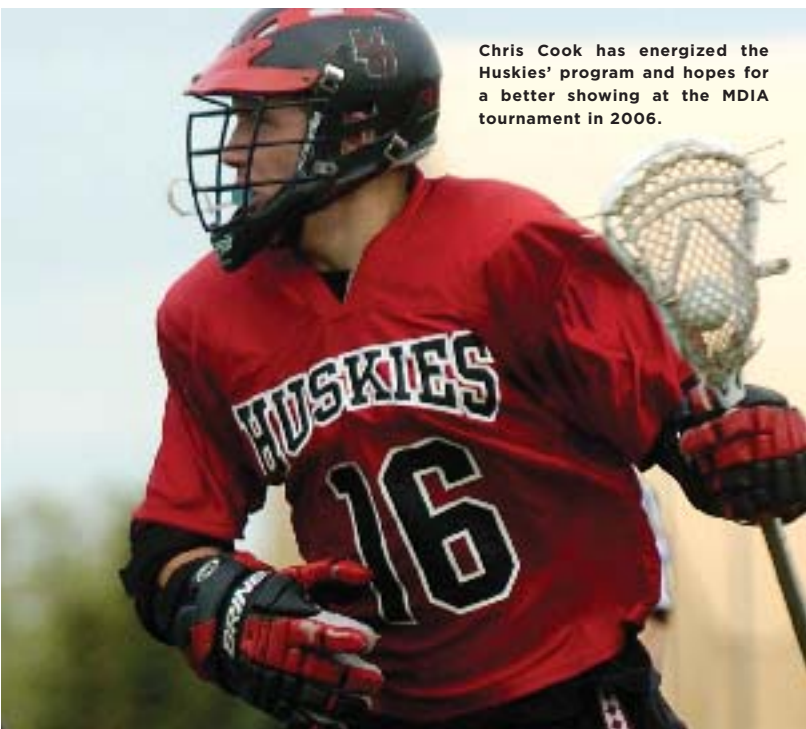
"I like having something that I can bite my teeth into, rather than just passing it by every once in a while," Cook says.

The Huskies emerged under Cook's leadership, trumping Boston College and New Hampshire to win their first PCLL championship and automatic bid to the MDIA tournament. He notched 32 goals and 77 assists along the way, leading the nation in the latter, and earning PCLL Offensive Player of the Year and second-team MDIA All-American nods.

A first-round loss to Michigan was followed by consolation victories over Arizona and Virginia Tech, which were of little solace for Cook. He remembered that the Wolverines were more prepared, to the extent that their defense executed third and fourth slides with decisiveness and ease. He vowed for this year that Northeastern would be able to do the same.

Hence, the four-hour lesson on defense from an old mentor. **LM**

Chris Cook has energized the Huskies' program and hopes for a better showing at the MDIA tournament in 2006.



old magic those grounds produced during the heyday of his lacrosse experience.

What he got from his former coach Tom Rotanz was a four-hour lesson on defense.

Defense.

The most prolific feeder in the US Lacrosse Men's Division Intercollegiate Associates last year, and Cook was talking defense — slides, not scores.

Cook is a fixer-upper, and Northeastern has been reaping the benefits of his grave demeanor between the lines. A former midfielder at SWR who in 2002 captained the Wildcats to a New York state championship, Cook stumbled upon the university after uninspiring experiences at Dickinson (Pa.) College and Stony Brook University.

What he found there was a middling IA team that lived up to the unfortunate end of its club billing — a