

Long Island Championships

Top seeds in bloom again

Five of last season's six county title winners compete to wear LI crown

BY JEFF GOLD

jeff.gold@newsday.com; Staff writer Joseph Staszewski contributed to t

June 5, 2007

Nothing changed. And that wasn't surprising.

The boys lacrosse playoffs have gone exactly as expected. Five of the six county champions from last season have repeated. With the exception of sixth-seeded Kings Park's surprising run to the Suffolk Class B title game, the favorites have won virtually every playoff game. The top seeds all emerged as champions, and West Islip, Huntington and Cold Spring Harbor all have a great chance to repeat as state champion.

The boys lacrosse playoffs continue tonight with the three Long Island championship games, all held at Stony Brook University.

CLASS A FINAL

West Islip vs. Syosset, 8 p.m.

Since an early-season loss to Chaminade, West Islip (19-1) has won 17 straight and was dominant in the county final, beating Ward Melville, 10-3.

The one area where West Islip appears to struggle is in the early stages of games. It trailed by three goals at the half in its county semifinal win, and was up by only a goal at the half against Ward Melville. West Islip coach Scott Craig has repeatedly said that his team has a tendency to relax in the second half of games, and that leads to much better play.

West Islip's talent throughout its lineup is phenomenal, led by attack Justin Turri and defenseman Ryan Flanagan.

Syosset (17-2) defeated Farmingdale to win its first county title and is the only team to be playing tonight that wasn't playing for a Long Island championship a year ago. That inexperience could lead to some nerves. Syosset is led by Jeff Cohen, one of the top scorers on the Island. He has 17 goals in three playoff games.

Newsday's Pick: West Islip.

CLASS B FINAL

Huntington vs. Garden City, 3 p.m.

When the season began, this was the expected matchup. These two met last year and Huntington won, 19-10, on its way to a second straight state championship.

Huntington (19-0), the top-ranked team in the nation by insidelacrosse.com, has continued its dominance this season, and has a 62-game winning streak. It hasn't won a game by fewer than three goals, and that came against Section I's John Jay, the likely opponent for the winner of this game.

Garden City (18-2) hasn't been as dominant as Huntington, but it has played a more difficult schedule. The Trojans have shown an ability to win games in overtime, winning three of four, including a 9-8 county semifinal win over Carey in overtime.

The talent on the field will be fun to watch and this figures to be a high-scoring game. Huntington's Shamel Bratton, Rhamel Bratton, Zach Howell and Sean Brady are among the best players in the country. Garden City's Dean Gibbons likely will break the all-time Long Island career goals mark in this game. He has 235 career goals, one behind Jericho's Max Motschwiler, Long Island's all-time leader. Gibbons set the single-season mark last season with 101, but didn't score against Huntington.

Newsday's Pick: Huntington.

CLASS C FINAL

Shoreham-Wading River vs. Cold Spring Harbor, 5:30 p.m.

These teams will meet for the championship for the second straight year. Cold Spring Harbor (17-1) won last season, 11-3, after leading 6-3 at the half.

Cold Spring Harbor goalie Adam Ghitelman and defender Kevin Piegare will need to foil Shoreham's give-and-go offense because the Wildcats (15-3) have great passers and finishers in John Austin and Nick Madden. Shoreham's faceoff specialist Jeff Hunter could be a key. If he can win possessions, Cold Spring Harbor will have significantly fewer scoring chances.

CSH's offense looked out of sync for three quarters in its 7-6 comeback win over Manhasset in the county final. when it needed a 4-0 fourth quarter to

win.

The Seahawks have to hope their struggles were simply the result of Corey Winkoff's first full game back from a hairline fracture to his collarbone, and that he, David Lau and Brandon Vecchio will execute like they did in the fourth quarter against Manhasset.

It will be up to the Shoreham defense, led by Matt Vernam, to pressure Seahawks shooters into tough shots and quicker possessions.

Newsday's Pick: Cold Spring Harbor.