

**LACROSSE INSIDER: BOYS SUFFOLK**

## **Malandrino saves best for last**

BY JEFF GOLD

April 5, 2007

There were broken thumbs and non-existent playing time. And there were no complaints.

For three seasons, Shoreham-Wading River's Lee Malandrino served as the backup goalie on a county championship team. He would have started on the junior varsity, but with no other options as a backup, coach Tom Rotanz needed Malandrino on his team.

"It killed me that we couldn't get him some time," Rotanz said. "He was a talented player who was selfless. He was great for our program."

So great that he was named Shoreham-Wading River's Most Outstanding Individual last season.

No player was more excited for the 2007 lacrosse season to start than Malandrino. Finally, with three-year starter Zak Bates graduated - and his right thumb healed from two breaks - Malandrino's chance arrived as the unquestioned starter.

"Now when I walk on the field, it's more exciting to know I'm going to play," Malandrino said. "I sat there biding my time and sure, it was frustrating, but I feel ready. To be able to go out there and play with my friends as the starter, it's the greatest feeling in the world."

Rotanz estimated that Malandrino has played a total of two complete games if you add all his playing time from the previous three years.

Still, his performance in practice gained the confidence and respect of his teammates.

"Lee's a legit goalie and we all knew that," defenseman Matt Vernam said. "We were totally confident in him taking over."

By taking over as Shoreham's goalie, Malandrino is in the cage for a team that has won six straight county titles.

Though Rotanz and his players will repeat their "one game at a time" mantra, it's a program that expects excellence and that it will be playing deep into the postseason.

"You never want to be the senior class that ends the streak," Vernam said. "Of course, winning another county title is in the back of our mind. We do feel that pressure to keep it going."

Malandrino is off to a strong start, having won both his starts.

"I really think he's going to be one of the best goalies in our division," Rotanz said. "He has quick hands and a great outlet pass."

And he has very capable team in front of him.

Vernam is one of the best defenseman on Long Island.

He's a physical player and a strong leader.

"In all my years, I haven't seen someone with his vocal abilities on the field," said Rotanz, who was an All-American at both Ward Melville and Adelphi. "You can almost play the game blind with him as a teammate shouting instructions."

Face-off specialist Jeff Hunter typically dominates and attackmen John Austin and Mike Delia work together to make a potent offense.

"This team is right up there with our better teams," said Rotanz, referencing Shoreham's state championship team in 2002 and Long Island title team in 2003. "As far as ball movement and speed and work ethic, this team has a chance to be something special."

And when it comes time for that critical save, Rotanz and his team are confident in their new man between the pipes.

Suffolk Top 10

1. Huntington
2. West Islip
3. Comsewogue
4. Smithtown West
5. Smithtown East
- 6. Shoreham-Wading River**
7. Ward Melville
8. Sayville
9. Northport
10. Babylon

**Player of the week:** Jeff Hunter Shoreham-Wading River

The "fogo" won 20 of 24 faceoffs yesterday in a 16-7 win over Sachem East.