

Boys' lacrosse preview: Shoreham-Wading River has proud tradition

BY JOSEPH STASZEWSKI

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Tom Rotanz thought his seniors were crazy. The Shoreham-Wading River lacrosse coach noticed them all giving each other an unusual quick finger shake before games last season.

But this season, he's all for it.

"I thought it was supposed to be the pinky finger," Rotanz said.

How wrong he was. Captain Matt Vernam cleared things up when Rotanz finally inquired about the odd ritual. "He said, 'Coach it's the ring finger. We were doing it to win the championship ring,'" Rotanz said.

The Wildcats did just that, beating Corning East, 14-10, for the school's second Class C state title. This season it will compete as a Class B school, but the situation and ultimate goal does not feel any different.

"I don't think it really matters," junior attack Joey Lustgarten said. "During the season we play the same teams, B and C. They are all great. So as long as we come back with the ring, it doesn't say B or C. It just says state champions."

Lustgarten is one of three key offensive players that return from last year's team, which also helped Shoreham win its seventh straight county title. He is joined by midfielders Mike Delia and Kyle Sopko. Delia had 19 goals last season and Sopko added 18.

Lustgarten is an exceptional feeder, with a quick stick and great vision. Last season he had 38 goals and 62 assists and was the perfect facilitator to senior attack man John Austin and Nick Madden.

Lustgarten had a goal and four assists in Shoreham's victory over Cold Spring Harbor in the Long Island championship game and a goal and five assists against Corning East.

"He is like the rich uncle everyone wants to be friends with," Rotanz said. "They know when he gets the ball everyone cuts hard."

The convincing and surprising 9-5 Long Island championship game win over Cold Spring Harbor, then the defending state champions, sparked the title run.

"Once we won we felt we could do anything," Delia said. "We beat Rye and we made it

to the states and said this is the last possible game. We can't lose. No one wants to go to states and lose. It is the most depressing thing."

The towns of Shoreham and Wading River avoided that feeling twice last season as the girls lacrosse team also won a state title. The two teams met by chance when the boys' bus stopped at a Wendy's next to the girls' hotel. The boys were also there to welcome the girls home after their win.

"It's a rich lacrosse community in Shoreham and everyone knows each other," Lustgarten said. "It was just a great feeling for the whole community."

If the Wildcats are going to bring that feeling back they will have to rely on their ball-movement offense, a solid defense led by Sean Mahoney and Kevin DeFranco and the leadership of the next senior class.

"Matt Vernam was a great leader for our team," Rotanz. "He just took over and you could hear him half a mile away. I think now that he's not here they realized that we all have to do it."