



David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times
GIVING INDEPTH TENNIS INSTRUCTIONS...Blue Devil Head Coach George Kapner, left, gathers his varsity prospects together and explains certain strategies during a pre-season practice. The Blue Devils have a very strong group of freshmen to mix well with their veterans.

SENIOR ALEC WASSERMAN SET FOR FIRST SINGLES

Strong Freshman Class Gives Blue Devil Netmen Big Boost

By DAVID B. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

High school sports always have regular turnover due to graduation and there are always concerns as to who will fill the varsity vacancies. No fear of the unknown seems to be in the minds of the Westfield High School (WHS) tennis boys since a very talented group of freshmen have taken to the court. The vacancies are going to be filled by talented personnel. The only questions, are the vacancies going to be filled by upperclassmen or freshmen?

As of March 31, one question has already been answered. Senior Co-Captain Alec Wasserman has earned the spot at first singles. Last year, Wasserman and Brian Kender, now a senior, placed second in the Union County Tournament (UCT) at first doubles, losing a 6-7 (5-7), 6-4, 6-3, burner in the finals against Summit's Max Potesky and Leo Sprinzen. Wasserman has improved greatly in the off-season and catapulted to the Blue Devils' top position.

Presently, freshman Ravi Netravali sits in the second singles perch; however, the last two singles slots are up for grabs and will have been determined by the opening match.

"What's interesting is that two freshmen have made the starting team, Kevin Shallcross and Ravi Netravali," Blue Devil Head Coach George Kapner said, "We are still in the last throws of the challenge matches. Right now, Shallcross is in a chal-

lenge match with junior Lee Bernstein for third singles. Lee not only was our third singles player last year but he's better. If Kevin wins, Lee will go from third singles to one of our doubles players, which tells you about the increased strength of this team."

An additional example of the Blue Devils' strength is that freshman Evan Eisenberg was in a challenge match with sophomore John Ramalho for third singles. "If Evan manages to win, he is still in the hunt to make it as a singles player," noted Kapner.

The Blue Devils' doubles lineup may include Eisenberg or Bernstein, Kender and senior Co-Captain Andrew Levy, who was the Union County champion at second doubles last year. Sophomore Jack Trimble is also in the hunt for a doubles position.

"We are looking for the best team. We have players who are not going to play who would have started for me over the past four, five or six years," Kapner stated.

In addition to being talented, this Blue Devil team could be involved in making WHS history. Kapner as a head coach (which includes soccer, tennis and swimming), presently totals 727 career wins. Former WHS Athletic Director and coach, Gary Kehler, currently holds the highest WHS total as a coach with 739 victories - 171 in football, 239 in wrestling and 329 in golf.

"I try not to remember because we have been talking about it so much and there hasn't been much success

while we have been talking," chuckled Kapner. "Soccer season was not what I had hoped it would be."

The tennis Blue Devil's stiffest county competition will come from Summit, last year's UCT winner, and an improved Scotch Plains-Fanwood squad.

"Of the teams that I know something about, Scotch Plains is going to give us the biggest push in the Watchung Conference and Summit had our number for five years. Summit's had a wonderful run, a phenomenal coach and a great program, said Kapner. "This team has the capability of doing everything. We certainly are the favored to win the Watchung Conference. Without knowing Summit's real depth, we are certainly capable of recapturing the county tournament and that is definitely one of our goals. The seniors have talked about it because we just missed last year. It was such a close tournament. Then it comes down to the sections. Quoting an old friend, 'One of the great things about high school sports is it's not necessarily how good you are, but how good your opponents are in a given year.'"

Kapner concluded, "This is the strongest freshman class I have ever had in the 15 years I have been coached here. There is no doubt in my mind that this freshman class is the harbinger of great things to come for this program. We are, I think a better team than we have been in a number of years, which should, hopefully, translate into more wins and a couple more championships."



Devil's Den

Maybe You Can't Go Home Again

By BRUCE JOHNSON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

It was a beautiful day for a drive down to the Jersey Shore. First there would be a stop at Max's hot dog stand in Long Branch, then a visit to my old houses. This is something I do every spring and fall. (OK, the trips to Max's are a little more frequent.)

But I get to Max's and the parking lot is empty. A sign on the door says it is closed for preparation for the season.

Then about two miles away is where I grew up, 6 Clifton Ave. in North Long Branch. It was a joyous place, with our Little League field about 100 yards away, just across the railroad tracks. There were woods behind the house, where we could play Ramar of the Jungle, or Tim Tyler's Luck, even Tarzan, swinging from tree to tree.

The railroad tracks were walked every day on the way to school, with stops at the little luncheonette where I bought all my baseball cards and comic books. Then it was a right at the Methodist Church and up the stairs into school, where I got mostly A's but spent an unusual amount of time with the principal, a Miss Conroy.

Those railroad tracks had long ago been replaced by Ocean Boulevard, a racetrack disguised as a road. The luncheonette is long gone. And the school has been boarded up for decades.

But that couldn't prepare me for what I saw when I got to Clifton Ave. Don't get me wrong. The place had looked like a drug headquarters for decades. The nice little cottages that I recall growing up around had become darker, and unkempt. But as I drove up the street it was startling to see ... nothing. The Clifton Ave. apartments had been leveled and all that remained was ... well, nothing.

No Max's. No 6 Clifton Ave. The trip was turning into a melancholy disaster. As I pulled out of the complex, or what was left of it, I passed a grammar school. The name across the top said "Lena B. Conroy School" and I realized the day wasn't a total

Raider Netmen Blank Cranford Boys, 5-0

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School boys tennis team blanked Cranford, 5-0, on April 4. Senior Jason Krueger at first singles silenced Justin Grand, 6-1, 6-1, while his freshman brother Ryan at second singles stopped Steve Milwicz, 6-1, 6-2. John Altman defeated Tom Gessner, 6-2, 7-6, at third singles.

Jeremy Sanders and Billy Albizati topped Matt Ross and Eric Murphy, 6-0, 6-4, at first doubles. Greg Leischner and Scott Layden defeated Jesse Hynes and Craig Palmisano, 6-2, 7-5, at second doubles.

waste. It was kids like me who helped Miss Conroy get a school named after her.

DEN TRIVIA
 What pitcher holds the WHS record for strikeouts in a baseball game? (Hint: extra innings count)

ALUMNI MEET
 For decades, from the 1960s into the 1980s, the WHS boys' swim team would hold an alumni meet every December, the current year's varsity vs. a group of whichever alumni showed up. It was "usually" a very fun affair.

A recent letter from 1982 WHS captain Ted Ritter mentioned the meet and how it might be interesting to hold one. It got me to thinking that it might be quite fun to do. The problem is finding pool time and tracking down alumni to see if they'd want to take on the 2006 Blue Devils, both boys and girls.

So if any swimming alumni out there are reading this column, let us know if you'd be interested in this meet. Dan Morgan, Joe Wilson and Scott Eichhorn work out at the Westfield Y quite a bit. Wilson, in fact, looks like he could still compete for a state title! And there are other recent alumni who would surely be able to swim an event or two.

Let's look at the Friday after Thanksgiving, 2-4 p.m., as a possible date/time. Lots of people would be home for the holidays, and nobody would have school or work that day. It would be a fun fundraiser and a good time for all.

ALL-AMERICAN BOY
 Speaking of WHS swimming, congrats go out to junior Pat Daurio, whose 58.27 in the 100-yard breaststroke at the state Individual Championships last month earned him All-American honors for 2005. Daurio's 1:55.61 in the 200 individual medley at the same meet earned him All-American consideration, and he'll find out next month if he's one of the top 100 times and gets All-American in that event, too.

The Blue Devils' medley relay of Luke Baran, Daurio, Dan Chabanov and Brandon Cuba went 1:39.31 to also get All-American consideration. Daurio is the first WHS swimming All-American since Seth (Stubby) Burstein earned the honor in the 100 butterfly in 1999.

HALL OF FAME UPDATE
 Have a candidate for the WHS Athletic Hall of Fame? You should contact Ed Tranchina, athletic director at the high school, or Roger Love at Taylor-Love Realty for a form to fill out to get your athlete, team or coach on the list of potential inductees.

The Hall of Fame committee will be meeting in the next month or so to start going over the list of candidates

for induction in November 2006. This will be the seventh class of inductees, which started in 1994.

SPRING FEVER
 The list of possible county champion teams this spring is pretty long. But it would not surprise if WHS brought back county titles in baseball, softball, tennis, golf and possibly lacrosse and track. And many of the spring teams have a solid shot at going quite far in their respective state tournaments.

REMEMBER WHEN ...
April 5, 1932: The WHS foursome of Bob Young, Bob Gregory, John Messersmith and Frank Esposito finishes second to the Hamilton Institute of Canada in the distance medley at the Penn Relays.

April 7, 1997: Rachel Brendler, a transfer from Belvidere, hits a grand-slam home run against Cranford (on an 0-2 pitch) in her first at-bat for WHS.

April 7, 2000: Jay Cook ties Ron Nobile's school record with eight RBI in a WHS victory over St. Joseph (Metuchen).

April 10, 1964: Clark's Frank Spaziano tosses a no-hitter against WHS.

April 11, 1963: Tom Clemens (Class of '56), a former WHS football player, is among the 129 sailors who die aboard the atomic sub Thresher.

April 13, 1959: Gary Kehler's debut as WHS golf coach is spoiled by Union, which posts a 9½-8½ victory.

TRIVIA ANSWER
 Ernie (Smitty) Lanning struck out 21 batters in a 10-inning win over Rahway in the 1960 Union County Tournament. (Losing pitcher Tom Hoagland whiffed 17.) The seven-inning record is an almost unbelievable 19 by Bob Williams in 1951 against Plainfield. Williams was a transfer from Dunellen.

Devil's Den appears every Thursday in the Westfield Leader. If you have comments or story ideas, please contact me at bj1019@aol.com.

Cougar Softballers Rip Lady Raiders, 3-2

The Cranford High School softball team scored three runs in the third inning and held off Scotch Plains-Fanwood, 3-2, in the season opener in Cranford on April 1. Cougar pitcher Elena Morge struck out 10 and walked two while yielding three hits.

Kate Ramey had an RBI single and Morge had a two-run triple for Cranford. Kelli Kaskiw cracked a RBI double for the Raiders and pitcher Elaine Piniat recorded seven strikeouts and no walks while allowing four hits.

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