

# Additional Special Sports Section from 'This is Westfield'

## WF PAL's John Dugan Named NJSYFL Grid Coach of Year

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

John Dugan of Westfield was recently named "Coach of the Year" by the board of the New Jersey Suburban Youth Football League (NJSYFL). Dugan has been a coach in Westfield PAL football program since 1998 and started flag football in Westfield 1999 with 67 players, which grew to over 450 players this past season.

"We started it as an inaugural award. We feel that John has gone above and beyond in his commitment to the youth of our communities, not just in Westfield, but throughout the Suburban Youth Football League. He caused a great fostering relationship between communities," said league commissioner Russ Yeager of the Fanwood Police Department.

Previously, Dugan has been a coach of Watchung Hills and Somerville Pop Warner football programs. He has also coached youth basketball and baseball in Westfield.

Dugan is currently employed by UBS Financial Services. He has been

a police officer in the Town of Westfield as well as a Detective Sergeant in the Somerset County Prosecutors Office.

Currently, as a PAL coach, "I strive to have players see that this is a true team sport and that it is more than just a football program."

In the past, Dugan has taken Westfield players to Irvington to assist with their program to increase registration in that town to keep kids on the playing field and off the streets. The Westfield PAL has supplied Irvington with new cleats as well as football jerseys (that were donated) at their annual football awards banquet.

"This has allowed players in Westfield to see what players their same age in towns, like Irvington face on a daily basis," said Dugan.

In December, 2004, Dugan and his PAL team successfully - Dave Corbin of The Leader was allowed to tag along and take pictures - demonstrated their talents in the presence of 76,000 fans during halftime of the Giants/Eagles game at Giants Sta-

dium.

"We actually did this back in 1999 as well. My son John and I went to a Giants/Packers game and saw the PAL team from Rumson run out there and play. I said to John, 'We are going to do that. I just have to see the right people.' Having contacts in the Giants organization has been so good to the Westfield PAL," said Dugan who added.

"That day, I don't know who had more fun. People like you and I and the coaches or those kids! The Giants tapped them on the helmets and were talking to them. To be able to act like a professional football player! We ran a hook-and-ladder, a couple of reverses, crowd pleasers. The crowds were cheering and you could hardly hear each other talk. It is something special to do that in front of 76,000 people. A large number were watching. One of the kids from 1999 actually has a shrine set up in his room with the shoes that he wore that day, along with pictures. And he won't let anybody touch them."

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RECOGNITION FOR A JOB WELL DONE...Eight members of the Westfield PAL wrestling team with two of the coaches pose for a picture with Assistant Publisher/Sports Editor Dave Corbin after a video session at The Westfield Leader office this past March.

### WRESTLING ON RISE, MORE THAN 100 IN PROGRAM

## Westfield PAL Matmen Score Big at State Mat Tournament

By DAVID B. CORBIN  
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PAL wrestling is very alive and doing very well in Westfield. The Westfield PAL advanced K-6 program enjoyed its third consecutive winning season in the Central Jersey League. The grade school team, which had been winless the past three years, won nine matches this year. Eight youth in the PAL program qualified for the state tournament and three placed in the "Elite Eight".

"Two years ago, the program had approximately 60 kids starting the season only to have about 40 to 50 finish. We didn't feel that we were going in the right direction, so we decided to make a push to get it going to the level that it was years ago," said Westfield PAL wrestling Director Al Rabinowitz in a video interview at The Leader/Times office on March 22. "There used to be 140 kids in the program. We went

out, whether it be a soccer game, basketball game or football game, and would find the best athletes or kids who were interested. We would go to their parents to get the kids in the gym. Now, for the last two years, we started with over 100 and we've ended with over 100. That hasn't been done since the early 90s."

Rabinowitz, who has been involved since 1995, was a head coach prior to being director. He also coaches in the Westfield Youth baseball program in the spring and summer, and had played in the Westfield Softball League that disbanded in the late 1990s.

According to Rabinowitz, "Our current fourth grade class is the first

real group of kids that we actively recruited. The enrollment in our program from that grade on down is very strong."

The youth program has been divided into three levels. The Red, coached by Darren Composto, is designed for kindergarten to second graders who are new to the program. The White is a low-level travel squad coached by Tom Miller and the Blue team, coached by Harry Kalimtzis, who has been with the program four years, competes in the rugged Central Jersey League (CJL).

"We decided to start different level programs we call Red, White and Blue. We start with the fundamentals and spend four months getting them ready for the next level. The White is a travel team at a little bit lower level (than the Blue) designed for kids from second grade to sixth grade. They would do that for maybe two or three

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BIG DAY FOR THE WESTFIELD PAL FOOTBALLERS...In December 5, 2004, the Westfield PAL football team and coach John Dugan dashed out of the shoot at Giants Stadium to perform in front of a crowd of 76,000 cheering fans.

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