



Fred K. Lecomte for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
A GIANT TASK...Raider sophomore gymnast Gina Pelosi who will compete in the all-around readies herself for giant swings on the bars.

## Raider Gymnasts Build For Competitive Season

By FRED LECOMTE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times  
The Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School girls' Gymnastic team, less three graduates from last year, looks to turn in a very competitive performance this season.  
"We're coming in with three new freshman, which in turn will turn out to be another rebuilding season," said Head Coach Lisa Cerchio. "We do have a lot of talent that has returned to

the team, however, we're working through a few injuries."  
Senior Co-Captain Annie Smith, particularly strong on the uneven bars, will perform that same routine in which she competed last year, along with beam.  
"We're hoping to clean it up a little and get her scoring high," said Cerchio.  
Excellent performances are also

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## Devil's Den Who's Your Favorite Team? Only One Answer For Me

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

Devil of the Week  
Greg O'Brien  
Boys soccer

Wayne Richardson, the sports editor at the Burlington County Times, jumped out of his seat one night recently when Pat Burrell belted a game-tying three-run home run for the Phillies. Assorted other copy editors and writers in the office started high-fiving each other. This was apparently a big deal for them.

Moments earlier, I'd had a similar moment. It was Monday, Sept. 10, and WHS was playing SP-F in soccer. Unable to attend the game, I looked for the result via the nj.com boys soccer forum. Then it finally showed up. Westfield 1, Scotch Plains 0. I raised my hands and — softly — said, "Yessss." This was a big deal for me.

They asked me what I was so happy about and, when I told them, they said, "Hey, this is Burlington County, not Westfield. You're not in Westfield anymore."

What followed was an interesting discussion.

I told them, basically, you can take me out of Westfield, but you can't take Westfield out of me. And then I asked them why they were so caught

up in the Phillies. None of the players were from their hometown. None of the players went to their high school. The players just happened to be in Philadelphia following a paycheck, signing on to play for the highest bidder, with little or no concern about the town, or especially for those people rooting for them.

I wear a Westfield swimming hat, a Westfield swimming t-shirt and a Westfield swimming hooded sweatshirt. I swam on the team. I coached the team. And I've been its biggest fan for over 40 years. And it's the most successful team of all the sports at my hometown high school. But I'm just as big of fan of all the teams and athletes representing my high school. The local pro teams? Why would I care about them? Do I think they are representing me, or my town/area? They're all just soldiers of war, mercenaries, vagabonds chasing a higher payday.

I know I'm in the minority on this, but who is the crazy one here?  
Everywhere I go, people ask me, "Who's your football team?" or "Who's your favorite baseball team?" My answer has never changed: "Westfield High School."

And really, why should I be any other way? OK, I'll admit that, once upon a time — when I was too young to know any better — I was a fan of the Mets, Jets, Knicks and Islanders. But then it hit me. Why should I care about those teams and players? And why should I spend money to contribute to their already-too-fat bank accounts? Would I rather spend lots of money to go watch a bunch of strangers play another bunch of strangers in different uniforms, or would I rather go watch the Blue Devils play another local team from another local town?

When you think about it, or when you read any history of pretty much any sport in this country, "my town vs. your town" or "my school vs. your school" or even "my section of town vs. your section of town" is how sports in America really started. Eventually it evolved (or is that devolved?) into professionalism when towns and schools started paying players to come play for them to increase their chances of winning the big game. (Gee, that almost sounds like the non-public schools around the country, doesn't it? But we digress.)

Anyhow, whenever I start thinking I'm the crazy one, I think back to the two old-timers having a burger and beer in a restaurant in Massillon, Ohio, several years ago. High school football, it should be noted here, gets no bigger than in Massillon, Ohio. Any-

how, there was a ball game on TV and a commercial came on for a Cleveland Browns preseason game that would be televised the following night. The one guy turned to the other and said, "Those Browns are so (damn) stupid. Why the (heck) would they schedule an exhibition game on the same night that the (Massillon) Tiggers open up? That's just plain dumb."

Those are my kind of guys!  
Anyhow, I promise not to begrudge anybody who wants to live vicariously through professional sports or idolize false gods (i.e., pro athletes), if they all promise to just let me root for my Blue Devils.

P.S.: The other night at work, Wayne showed me his pride and joy: an old rundown school bus he bought for \$600 a couple years ago and converted into a Philadelphia Eagles "fan bus" to drive to home games. It's painted green and silver and has the uniform numbers of many famous "Iggles" painted on it. While he's not sure it'll make over the Walt Whitman Bridge, he says he's got AAA, so he's gonna give it a try.

IN THE MAIL  
After writing a recent Den that said Tamaques 2 should be fixed up and renamed after former Westfield Merchants manager Robert Turner, we got a letter from Bernadette Burke Garber, from down in Warewout, Ocean County, letting us know that Tamaques 2 was already named Burke Field, in memory of her father Martin Burke, on July 16, 1972.

Marty Burke was a former baseball and basketball standout at WHS (Class of '37), a longtime member of the Westfield Hawks semipro team, a longtime coach in Westfield Little Leagues and of American Legion Post 3, and the town's former Fire Department chief. His son, Dennis ('64), was a standout lefty pitcher for WHS, Post 3, the Westfield Merchants and later East Carolina University.

(Martin Burke was a member of the very athletic Class of 1937, which included such other luminaries as Eric Anderson, Ben Hargrave, Mount Howarth, Bob McCoy, Charlie Miller and Pump Vella.)

Since Tamaques 2 has already been named, the town should consider renaming Tamaques 4 in honor of the late Robert Turner. With the road in left field and the hill in right field and a very deep center field, it could make for very interesting outfield fences.

THIS 'N' THAT  
It's been almost 30 years since I left a WHS football game with such a sick, numbing, nauseating, what-the-fudge-just-happened feeling? With members of the Class of 1952 (the

first to graduate from the "new" high school) in the stands Saturday for their 55th reunion weekend, WHS laid a gigantic egg on Saturday, losing to Cranford, 17-14. The last time we bombed that bad was Oct. 14, 1978, an 11-7 loss that was our first ever to Scotch Plains. That '78 loss was after consecutive wins over Union and Elizabeth, and was followed by five of the greatest five weeks of WHS football ever, routs of Cranford (46-0), Nutley (34-0), Montclair (27-0) and Linden (67-0), culminating in the famous Thanksgiving Day 6-2 "savage brawl" victory at Plainfield. It will be interesting to see how this year's squad bounces back tomorrow at 3, when Kearny visits Kehler Stadium.

Congrats go out to rookie field hockey coach Molly Phelan on her first victory, 6-1 over Union. That's the most goals by a WHS field hockey team since an 8-0 win over Governor Livingston in the 1999 Union County Tournament.

STILL GOIN' STRONG  
There was a time, a generation or two ago, when many football fans were clamoring for a matchup of the state's two premier programs: Brick and Westfield, which would also be a matchup of legendary coaches Warren Wolf and Gary Kehler. Unfortunately, the game never happened. But guess what? Here it is 2007 and the 80-year-old Wolf is still coaching at Brick. The only coach the school has had since it opened in 1958, Wolf has notched a state-record 351 victories.

STRANGE BUT TRUE  
Kearny is 1-15-1 against WHS in football, and that one win was 8-0 in September 1985 at Recreation Field. Making his first start as the Blue Devils' quarterback — strange but true — was sophomore Dave Brown. Filling in for the injured Todd Graf, Brown shared QB duties that day with classmate Rob Shovlin. Big Dave would go on to earn all-state honors as a senior and have a 10-year career in the NFL.

DEVIL OF THE WEEK  
The winner of this week's free sub from Al the Owner at Westfield Subs (261 South Ave. East) is soccer goalie Greg O'Brien. The senior, who was injured early last season and missed most of his junior year, came up big with five saves last week as WHS opened its season with a 1-0 victory at Scotch Plains.

The Devil's Den appears Thursday in The Westfield Leader during the school year. Contact us with comments, complaints or suggestions at [bj1019@aol.com](mailto:bj1019@aol.com). GO BLUE DEVILS!

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Fred K. Lecomte for The Leader and The Times  
RETURNING GYMNAST...Excellent performances are expected from talented sophomore Lindsay Robinson on beam and bars.

In Westfield...

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