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THE WEEK IN SPORTS

Sports Section Pages 11-17

GRACEFFO ACE ON MOUND, MCGHEE BEHIND PLATE

Cougar Nine Looking to Learn From Last Year, Move Forward

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

Experience can be a good teacher and Head Coach Dennis McCaffery hopes that this year's Cranford High School baseball team will learn from the experience of falling just short in the Union County Tournament (UCT) finals and the Group 3 Championships game. After losing to Westfield in the UCT Championship, the Cougars went on to win the North 2, Group 3 title and Group 3 semifinal before bowing in an eight-inning classic to Allentown in the Group 3 Championship after a seven-inning scoreless deadlock at Toms River South High School.

"Last year we were able to have somewhat of a successful season. We left two championships on the board, the counties and the state final, which is always difficult to have to deal with. Last year is over. We try to learn

from it and move forward," Coach McCaffery stated.

In order to have a successful season, a sturdy relationship between the pitching staff and the catchers would be essential. Senior Gordon Graceffo will head a group on the mound, which consists of senior Kevin Donovan and juniors Jeremy Ruka, Jake VanDamm, Jack Jarrosz and Andrew Donovan.

"Gordon had a good year last year. He did a nice job and we have a couple of other pitchers, who have varsity experience, so we are hoping that we are able to be successful. Any type of success you have during the season starts with pitching. We are hoping that our pitchers can throw strikes, work ahead and be able to work on both sides of the plate and have command of the game," Coach McCaffery said.

In that classic game against Allen-

town, Graceffo, who will play for Villanova next year, pitched magnificently for seven innings, allowing only a two-out triple in the first, hitting a batter in the fourth and yielding a two-out double in the seventh.

"Gordon is going to be going to Villanova and I am sure he's very excited about that. Gordon is a hard working young man and he's really put in a lot of time on and off the season in the classroom and in the weight room. Hopefully he has a successful season here at Cranford and I am sure when the time presents itself for Villanova, he will put his focus there," Coach McCaffery said.

The Cougars do have two experienced catchers in junior Mike McGhee and senior Pat Connolly, although Connolly has and will be expected to play first base.

"Obviously the catching we are for

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE DEFENSE...Left, a Westfield Blue Devil Lady Laxer puts pressure on several Scotch Plains-Fanwood Raider defenders and the goalkeeper during a scrimmage game at Kehler Stadium last week.

TEAM CAPTAINS - BOND, PAOLETTI, MORIARTY, SHIELDS

Lady Blue Devils Aim to Take Another Step Up in Lacrosse

By ALEX LOWE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

The Westfield High School girls lacrosse team returns for the 2018 season hoping to build on the success of last year. The Lady Blue Devils finished 10-8 in 2017 under first-year Head Coach Abby Cohn and were ranked among the top-20 teams in the

state for much of the season. The Blue Devils advanced to the semis of the Union County Tournament where they lost to Summit, ranked No. 2 in the state at the time. They also reached the semis in the North 2, Group 4 state playoffs before losing to Bridgewater-Raritan, another top-5 ranked team and eventual Tournament of Champi-

ons winner.

The Blue Devils will try to better those accomplishments without the services of a number of talented players lost to graduation. Hannah Liddy (47 goals, 36 assists) will take her act to the University of Denver. Lila Hutchins will play at Bates College

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Cranford Cougar Baseball Seniors...Pictured, left to right, are: John Markese, Pat Connelly, Gordon Graceffo and Sean Petrucci. The Cougars open their season at Scotch Plains-Fanwood this Saturday, March 31, at 1 p.m.

SRS - SAM OUTTEN, BILLINGS, LENIART, BEN OUTTEN

Blue Devils Look to Compete At High Level in Boys V-Ball

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

First year teams usually experience a rocky road but this year's Westfield High School (WHS) boys volleyball team is looking to compete at a high level and have good reason to feel that way. The Blue Devils will be guided by Head Coach Jay Cook (WHS Class of 2002), a three-sport athlete — football, basketball, baseball — who just happened to be quite proficient in all three.

"Like I spoke to these guys when we had our entrance meetings and sign-up meetings, we are behind the eightball in a sense that a lot of teams have had this for three, four, five years, some a little bit longer but my

expectations will never waiver. Any team that I am ever associated with, the goal is to win, to win at a high level and compete at a high level," Coach Cook emphasized.

This may be Coach Cook's first experience working with a boys volleyball team but he has gained experience working with the girls' program headed by Bev Torok.

"On the boys side, it's definitely a new experience. The girls side with coach Torok and coach [David] Tarullo — now the boys JV coach and the freshman girls coach — it was really great but now to bring it over to the boys' side, it's a lot faster. There's a little more flow to the girls' game but this is a lot more explosive and a

lot more powerful," Coach Cook explained.

This year's team consists of 14 players, so the addition of coaching support is much appreciated.

"Coach Tarullo does a great job, especially when I am working with the hitters and he's working with the defensive specialists or visa versa. We also have Grace Serafin, who was a setter on our girls team, who works with our setters on a daily basis. These guys really accelerate the learning process at their positions," Coach Cook said.

Not all of Coach Cook's players are brand new to the game.

"Right now for half the team that

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David B. Corbin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Blue Devil Volleyball Seniors...Pictured, left to right, are seniors Sam Outten, Cory Billings, Mike Leniart and Ben Outten, who will lead the first-year Westfield High School boys volleyball team.



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Broker/Sales Associate
Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage

FRANKDISOLDI
FRANKISOLDI@GMAIL.COM
CELL: 908-787-5990
THEISOLDICOLLECTION.COM



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Office: 908-233-5555

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