



**SPORTSFIVE REPORT:** - The Tournament is complete. Long Island won the Gold medal with an undefeated record. Western took the Silver medal with a big win over Hudson Valley who took the bronze.

### **The Winners:**

The Empire State Games, in its 29th year, has a long history and is the oldest and largest of the "State Games" in the country. Men's lacrosse was started in 1984, with the Central Region winning the gold, Long Island the silver and Western, the bronze.



Photo by James Lathrop

In those twenty-three years Long Island has won the gold 13 times, Central 7 times, Hudson Valley twice and Western once, so it is not surprising that "The Island" would be the expected forerunner for the 2006 games. In fact, most students of ESG lacrosse would have expected that Long Island would play Central for the gold medal and that Hudson Valley and Western would duke it out for the bronze.

### **Before The Games:**

Long Island came to this year's games with an impressive list of players and in many minds, the best team the Island has put together. Topping a truly all-star list were the Bratton twins, Rhamel and Shamel, (Huntington) and Cold Spring Harbor goalie Adam Ghitelman. All three have been selected as scholastic All-American and all three played on last year's ESG Long Island team. Every position was loaded with proven performers. Zach Howell, a varsity attackman at Huntington since 9th grade was an alternate on last year's Long Island team and was named to

Newsweek's top 50 list along with midfielders Stephen Bentz (Massapequa) and Al Kohart (Comsewogue), attackmen Dean Gibbons (Garden City) and Ryan Young (Chaminade). In defense, Ryan Flanagan (West Islip) and Kevin Piegare (Cold Spring Harbor) helped their teams to win NYS championships this spring. Long Island won their 13th gold medal in Rochester with an undefeated record (5-0).

Western, came to the games knowing that their greatest strength was in their defense. Penn Yan goalie, RJ Wickham and his teammates Michael Manley and Dana Wilber were

teamed with Webster Schroeder's Drew Palmer and Penfield's Alex Nowak. Corning East sent Conor Flynn and Orchard Park sent Derrick Danieu to complete the long stick roster. Although there was no doubt that Grant Catalino (Webster Schroeder) would be an impact player in the offense, some questioned how much deeper the offense would go for Western and there was concern that the midfielders would not be able to keep up with Central and Long Island. Such was not the case, and the tie breaker procedure notwithstanding, Western clearly played a silver medal tournament.

There was controversy for Hudson Valley before the games, when Coach Dave McNally (Suffern) did not select any players from sectional strongholds Yorktown or Mahopac. John Jay All-America defenseman Ryder Bohlander did not try out (so as to attend football camps) and a number of players with notable scholastic seasons did not make the cut. Area lacrosse fanatics were certain that "The Valley" was headed for disaster. They would be silenced, however, as the Valley beat Central on Friday and had a chance for the silver before falling to Western on Sunday morning and taking home the bronze.



Photo by James Lathrop

Central came to the games with an impressive list of player credentials.

Coach Greg Scott (Lafayette) selected nine midfielders; other than Josh Amidon (Lafayette) and Nick Lococo (CNS) it would be difficult to say that one midfielder would be stronger than another. Other middies selected included Tim Rommel, Nick Blumer, Jovan Miller, Tim Desko, Nunzio Doldo, Jeff Gilbert and Joel White. West Genesee Goalie John Galloway led Section 3 in seasonal play with a 73% saves record (66% post-season). Jack Venditti, who led Baldwinsville this season with 86 points, and Jack Harmatuk, who led CBA scoring with 89 points this season looked to lead a strong attack for Central. A critical loss to Long Island (18-6) killed Central's chances for a medal.



Photo by James Lathrop

It was hard to evaluate the New York City team before the games as their players tend to come from a number of teams that get less State and National attention. At one point, ESG rules prohibited out of State prep school players from playing on regional teams but that rule was changed and nearly all of New York City team members are from the "independent school" ranks. Returning players included midfielders Anthony Adler (Lawrenceville), Phil Dimin (Fieldston) who scored 4g in 2005 and third year player Nick Weaver (Millbrook). In defense Matt Greenberg (Hotchkiss) returned for his third year and in attack, Max Van Bourgondien (Lawrenceville) returned for his second time.

Exactly half the Adirondack team (ten players) came from Niskayuna who lost in the NYS tournament in the Class A quarter final round (9-7) to John Jay. Midfielder Nick DiSarro (Nisky) returned from last year's game as did midfielder Sam Bradman (Canton). Pat Corbine (Canton), who led the North Country in saves (72%) joined the team this year along with Corey Heck (Columbia) who

was named to the Times Union All Star Team this year after a 20g-27a season for the Blue Devils. Adirondack won their first medals (bronze) in back-to-back wins 2003-2004.

### **Performance (Offense):**

Long Island won the gold with an undefeated record (5-0), beating each of the other regions, but the performance was not as dramatic as the pre-game study seemed to indicate. In the end however, Long Island got the job done and brought home the gold and the Rochester lacrosse fans were able to see some excellent lacrosse skills.

The statistical data demonstrates the dominance of the Long Island team within the tournament. Offensively, "The Island" scored 23 more goals than second place Western, fired more than 50 shots more than Western and 125 more than Adirondack and had the top score in shooting percentage (63%).



Photo by James Lathrop

While they dropped in assisted goals, it is understood that tournaments of this type tend to feature single dimensional offense. Players are influenced by two factors; first they are less familiar with their teammates and second, they are often looking to impress college coaches who may be watching. As a result, teams tend to see more one-on-one offense than "ball moving" play that result in assisted scores. Although Dean Gibbons had 11 of his 13 goals assisted, other leading scorers for Long Island often produced unassisted goals. Shamel Bratton scored 15 of his 16 unassisted, Al Kohart scored 6 of his 10 unassisted and Ryan Young scored 5 of his 9 unassisted.

Western's strategy was to take as many shots as possible, and as a results tied for last in shots on cage. Grant Catalino, who tied for first (with Shamel Bratton) in points and tied for second in goals produced (13), missed the cage with more than half his shots (46% on), but when he was on cage, 76% of his shots scored goals. Mike Danylyshyn, who was one of the tournament standouts for Western had 74% of his shots on goal, but 50% were stopped by the opponent goalies. Catalino scored most of his goals unassisted (10 of 13) while Danylyshyn was assisted on 6 of his 10.

OFFENSE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Goals	LI-78	W-55	CEN-54	NY-41	HV-36	AD-26
Shots Taken	LI-250	W-191	CEN-167	NY-136	HV-126	AD-126
% Shots On	NY-63%	CEN-61%	LI-56%	HV-54%	W-53%	AD-53%
Asst. Gls %	HV-69%	CEN-59%	AD-46%	LI-42%	W-42%	NY-37%
Ground Balls	LI-181	W-168	CEN-150	HV-148	AD-145	NY-143

Central clearly did well in offense and so their problems in the tournament occurred elsewhere. Their offense played better team ball than the rest of the field, scoring a larger number of assisted goals, while still producing nearly as many goals as Western. Central's leading scorers Boltus, Lococo, Venditti and While were all assisted in more than half of their goals and in fact, Boltus and Venditti in the attack had 11 of their combined 16 goals assisted while beating the opponent goalies on those shots on 91% and 86% (respectively).

Hudson Valley looked good in assisted goals. Kevin Stockel led the effort with 9 goals, all of which were assisted (4 from John Jay teammate Chris Bocket) and by Brian Douglass (also from John Jay) who scored 8g (6 assisted). The volume of shots, however were only half the number taken by Long Island and nearly a third less than

Central.

Ground ball production is often an indicator of success and although the numbers fall within a close range, the stats show a slight edge to Long Island and Western.

**Performance (Defense):**

On the defensive end of the field, Long Island, once again is the statistical gold medal winner in nearly every stat. The Island allowed substantially fewer goals, and with 26 goals against, had less than half the number as the bottom three teams. The combined goalie average for the Long Island placed them third, but the order of magnitude was not great. Western’s Wickham ended the tournament at 56% whereas Long Island star, Adam Ghitelman had a 52%, but Wickham faced nearly twice as many shots (90 vs 42). The four top teams were all in roughly the same statistical area.

Central, as demonstrated in the chart, was clearly not in the top three from a defensive standpoint. There was a dramatic difference in the goals against average, which was greatly influenced by the Long Island game’s 18 goals against, but Central allowed both Hudson Valley and New York City to take them to double figures. In every case Central’s performance was significantly lower than Long Island or Western and more closely resembled the Valley’s. The defense allowed substantially more shots on the Central goalies who saved just over 50% but looked similar to the goalies from the top three teams.



Photo by James Lathrop

DEFENSE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Gls Against	LI-26	W-35	HV-41	CEN-53	NY-60	AD-74
Save %	W-56%	HV-54%	LI-52%	CEN-51%	NY-45%	AD-39%
GA Average	LI-5.4	W-7.0	HV-8.2	CEN-10.6	NY-12.0	AD-14.8
Clearing %	LI-82%	NY-79%	W-73%	CEN-69%	AD-69%	HV-61%
Son Against	LI-56	W-79	HV-90	CEN-109	NY-110	AD-121

**Special Teams:**

The Man up data is significant as each team had roughly the same number of extra man opportunities (22 for ADK, but the rest had between 27 and 33). New York City had the best average (39%) with 11 goals on 28 tries. Except for their Long Island game where they were 0 for 2, they scored at least two goals per game in man up and had 4 for 6 against Central in their last game of the tournament.



Photo by James Lathrop

Long Island was exceptional in the man down efforts, turning away 93% of the opportunities and having perfect games against Western (8-8), New York City (2-2) and Adirondack (5-5) while allowing only one man up goal against Central and Hudson Valley. Central allowed 16 man up goals while Hudson Valley allowed 8 and New York City allowed only 4.

Long Island and Western were substantially more successful with face offs, and they did it two different ways. The Island found success using

Stephen Bentz (39 for 55 = 71%) with teammate Al Kohart (27 for 44 = 61%), while Western used Carter Bloor (58 for 92 = 63%). Central used three players and was hampered by their lack of possession as they tried Amidon (47%), Desko (38%) and Doldo (58%) but could not establish the performance that was expected before the games began.

SPECIAL TEAMS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
MU Goals %	NY-39%	LI-36%	CEN-26%	W-24%	HV-17%	AD-14%
MD GA %	LI-93%	NY-81%	HV-75%	W-71%	AD-67%	CEN-57%
FO WIN %	LI-66%	W-65%	AD-48%	CEN-46%	HV-44%	NY-32%

### Conclusions:

There are relatively few issues that need addressing relative to the 2006 ESG Lacrosse

games. First Long Island clearly won and was dominant in many areas, with the most important being wins. Their undefeated record speaks for itself. There were moments in games when they did not live up to their impressive credentials, but in the end they took home the gold.

A second question relates to Western's finish. Did they "luck into" the silver?

From their opening game with Long Island, Western's "keep it tough" defense made Coach Hobart's statement that Western would play a very physical game. Manley and Palmer were particularly aggressive in front of the cage and although they each earned 5 penalties, their behavior kept a number of opponents from wanting to venture into shooting range. Both of them ended with 6

take aways (2nd place on the leader board). Fairport's Mike Danylyshyn who tied for 4th in tournament scoring and tied for first in tournament assists (10g-8a) was a surprise "Top Performer". His 18 points combined with Catalino's 21 points accounted

for more than a quarter of the Western offense. Dom Scalzo (Webster Thomas) also made a statement with his eight goals. Carter Bloor (Corning East) took a staggering 92 face offs (all but 11), and was the top dog on the leader board with 59 wins (64%). In offense, defense and face offs, Western demonstrated that they earned the silver medal.



SportsFive photo

Hudson Valley played their most exciting game on Friday morning, when they took a 5-1 halftime lead and never looked back in their 10-6 win over Central. They had a shot at the silver in the last game of the tournament, but Western, knowing that they needed to win by three goals, did not let the Valley get close. Although the Valley clearly beat Central, they were certainly helped by Central's game against Long Island, as before Saturday's games, the "goals against" for Western and Central were tied at 23 and Hudson Valley



Photo by Paul Jordan

was at 22. After Saturday's games, Western was two behind the Valley and Central was out of it (11 goals behind Western).

Finally, what happened to Central?

There is no doubt that Central had a talented list of players and Coach Scott is a proven leader. Defensive problems and an inability to win face offs hurt Central. They lost a critical game to Hudson Valley in a downpour on Friday morning and after losing in a blowout to Long Island (18-6) on Saturday they nearly lost to New York City on Sunday morning (13-12 in overtime). Central did beat Western on double header Friday (10-9) but the 18 point loss to the Island put them out of medal contention. Central has finished out of the medals only six times since the ESG added men's lacrosse in 1984. They team simply did not "jell" as the Central team and fans had hoped. It happens.



Photo by James Lathrop

As for the medal, their performance did not warrant a bronze, but there is the possibility that Long Island understood the tie breaking procedure and wished to take Central out of contention. Given the long rivalry between the Island and Central, it is possible that Long Island added a few goals to help influence the tie breaking outcome. Before the game Central, Western and Hudson Valley were all with one goal (in goals against). In the Long Island Central game, there were two stops for lightning. If the game had ended at halftime, the goals against would have been 6 goals and Central would have been right in the mix with Central and HV. Long Island scored 6 unanswered goals in 4th quarter ending Central's chances and perhaps taking "will to win" away from them for Sunday's overtime game against New York City.





Photo by James Lathrop

Finally, it is worth noting the accomplishments of the New York City team. The City, who won their first game last year when they came back from a 7-3 deficit to beat Adirondack 8-7, beat them again this year, this time with a score of 12-7. As exciting as was that win, on Sunday morning they nearly defeated Central, as they scored two goals at the end of regulation to force the game into overtime. Central won 13-12. Fieldston midfielder Phil Dimin placed 3rd on the tournament leader board for goals (11g-2a) while Max Vanboargondien (Lawrenceville) placed 5th in points with 14 (9g-5a).

New York City has struggled over the years to produce a team and each year is the team "that gets no respect". It is worth noting that this year's team made great strides and gives the City fans a great deal about which to be proud.

That ends the review of the 2006 Empire State Lacrosse games. It was, as usual, an exciting time for the players, coaches and fans and well worth the effort that the New

York State Office of Parks and Recreation puts into this annual extravaganza. Well done.

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