

A NEW CHAMPION

By Byron Stankus

The Indiana High School Lacrosse Association was established in August of 1998. The IHSLA had its first official season as a governing body of Indiana high school lacrosse in the spring of 1999. In the 18 years of competition, up to this season, there had only been five teams that had won a state championship; Culver Military Academy, Park Tudor, Zionsville, Cathedral and Carmel. This year a new team broke through: Hamilton Southeastern, led by Head Coach Scott Beesley.

This season was quite a good one with a lot of parity across the board, with teams like Marian making the playoffs for the first time. Strong showings from Crown Point, beating traditionally strong Zionsville and Guerin Catholic and Penn with some early season wins. Plus Westfield made a great turn around this year, earning new coach Troy Dinkle the Coach of the Year award. There were 7 All-Americans from 6 different teams: Keegan Logan and Lukas DeVoe from HSE, Chad Kittaka from Carmel, Will King from Brebeuf Jesuit, Brock Snyder from Cathedral, Michael Bocker from Culver and Erich Wiitala from Guerin Catholic. Usually the top two teams dominate these awards. But not this year and that shows the growth of the sport. 'Player of the Year' award also went to a player that wasn't from one of the top 4 teams. All-American defenseman Erich Wiitala won that award from #5 Guerin Catholic. You can see all the other award winners and All-State recipients on the IHSLA home page.

The road to the final four, this season, was relatively predictable. The only upset was #9 Zionsville beating #8 Westfield. But that did not make the championship weekend any less exciting. #1 Carmel defeated #16 Castle 24-2 in the first round and then dispatched #9 Zionsville 17-4. #2 Cathedral's path was similar with wins over #15 Penn 17-4 and #7 St. Joseph's 7-1. #3 Hamilton Southeastern's road to the final four looked the most precarious but they beat rival #14 Noblesville 15-2 and overcame #6 Brebeuf Jesuit's late season heroics 12-9. #4 Culver Military Academy's varsity team rounded out the championship weekend with its wins over #13 Marian 15-8 and #5 Guerin Catholic 9-5.

The final four was set. And it looked like it was going to make for some great games. Each of the teams had a win over another of the others if not two. And no game between these four was more than a two goal margin. Each of the teams had a fair claim at the number one seed and each of the teams had a legitimate shot at the championship. But as things line up it was #1 Carmel in the first Semi-final game versus #4 Culver. And the second match up was #2 Cathedral versus #3 Hamilton Southeastern. It was especially interesting in that both lower seed had won the regular season game.

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