

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' LACROSSE

New traditions fuel Shen

Lacrosse coaches bring players closer together

By Jess Koehler



Photos by John Carl D'Annibale / Times Union Shenendehowa boys' lacrosse coach Jason Gifford encourages his players to play for each other, their school, their families and their community.



Clifton Park

Before the start of the boys' lacrosse season, Shenendehowa's coaching staff introduced a pair of new traditions to the program.

The first was a chain with links for each individual player. Once the games began, they put the links together.

John Carl d'Annibale / times union

Shenendehowa goalie Anthony Tebbano is eager to face Niskayuna, ranked No. 7 in the state in Class A.

Shenendehowa's Owen Putman (32) says a key to the Plainsmen's success is mixing the team's experienced players and young players.

"Once the season starts, we play for each other," Shenendehowa coach Jason Gifford

said. "When the games started, we hooked the links together as a reminder they're now playing for each other, for their school, for their families and their community."

Assistant coach Bobby Karl introduced a hammer, given to a player who made a specific impact on a game whether on the field or from the bench. Whichever player is given the hammer the most keeps it at the end of the season.

"The kids have been giving them out," Gifford said. "It's something where the kids recognize each other. It's something that brings the locker room a little tighter together."

The Plainsmen have certainly been playing together as a unit this season. With a well-balanced offense and a developing defense, Shenendehowa sits at 7-2 overall and 7-0 in Suburban Council play.

"We play best when we're playing as a team," senior attack Owen Putman said. "We don't have any individuals trying to do too much. Everyone's just fallen into their roles and doing what we're coached to do."

Six Plainsmen have scored at least 10 goals this season. Adam Barcori leads the team with 24 goals, and Putman has 23, to go along with 10 assists.

"As a coach, my philosophy is I want to be able to spread it around," Gifford said. "I don't want teams to be able to key on one guy. That's not how you win your big games. We want to spread it around and get people involved and grow as the season goes on."

Having such a balanced offense takes a little pressure off junior goalie Anthony Tebbano.

"I know if the defense can get a stop and get (the offense) the ball that they're going to take care of it and make the best of their opportunity," Tebbano said.

Tebbano is in his second season as the Plainsmen's full-time goalie. He's stopped 64 percent of shots faced with 103 saves.

"Tebbano has been fantastic in goal," Gifford said. "This year you see a lot of confidence in him and he understands a lot more than just his role now. I think he's much better with player tendencies. He's kind of taken his game to the next level."

Of course experience has certainly helped the Plainsmen. They returned 13 players from last year's Class A sectional semifinalist team.

"It's huge because last year we had a couple returners, but none of them had much game experience," Putman said. "We're really mixing the experienced players and the young players."

Shenendehowa will need to continue its team play when the Plainsmen visit Suburban foe Niskayuna at 4 p.m. Wednesday. The defending state champion Silver Warriors are 6-2 overall and 6-0 in council play. They're ranked No. 7 in the state in Class A.

"It's definitely challenging, but it's a lot of fun," Tebbano said of facing Niskayuna. "You get to see what everyone's made of on the defense."

Following Wednesday, the Plainsmen will have six regular-season games remaining before postseason play begins.

Gifford said his team may not be at their best right now, but that's OK for him. He wants them to be at their best in May.

"I think the kids understand that we need to find our consistency," he said. "We need to keep striving to be at our best when it matters most. That's what we're working for every day."

• jkoehler@timesunion.com 518-454-5411 @JKoehlerTU