

North alumni lax game rescheduled

The inaugural Williamsville North lacrosse alumni game has been changed to 5 p.m., Monday, July 16 at North High School, 1595 Hopkins Road, Williamsville, and will cost each player \$10. No preregistration is required. For more information, call 433-0453.

Empire State Games

Coach stability, excellent athletes cited for Western's winning longevity

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Like a fine wine, the Western Region's performance at the Summer Empire State Games has gotten better with age.

Since the ESGs started in 1978, Western has won 184 gold medals, 44 more than second-place Long Island. Western hopes to continue the winning

tradition at the Games' 30th installment July 25-29 in Westchester County. Westchester County is north of Manhattan.

Western's success over the years is no surprise. Western Region Director Lou Reuter said Western gets more support from the surrounding suburbs of Buffalo and Rochester than any other region in the ESGs, fields a coaching staff with small turnover, and

always has quality athletes trying out.

Reuter, ESG Western director since 1999, also credits his own work behind the scenes for the region's success. Reuter said the ESGs are a year-round process, beginning with a meeting in early September looking at how that year's Games fared until tryouts the following May and June.

"It's a labor of love," said Reuter, a Town of Tonawanda resident. "I don't think the Games have lost their aura at all."

Empire State Games Director Fred Smith also lauds Reuter's work.

"He's out there promoting the games and getting the best athletes to try out," Smith said. "I think that makes all of the difference in the world. I think Lou is a bit more aggressive than other regional directors in doing that. I think that shows up in the box scores and on the playing fields that Western is very strong all of the time to the point of people saying 'let's break up Western' (break up Buffalo and Rochester into own regions)."

Reuter, who started as a volunteer in the early 1980s, has seen his fair share of Western Region domination. His daughters, Gretchen and Sue, were part of the region's gold-medal synchronized swimming teams in the early 1980s. Synchronized swimming has won a gold medal every year. Other active gold medal streaks are scholastic men's volleyball (11 years), scholastic men's ice hockey (seven years), scholastic women's volleyball (five years), and scholastic women's soccer



Lindsey Schlegel of Lancaster carries the banner for the Western Region at last year's Empire State Games opening ceremonies. Schlegel helped the women's scholastic volleyball team to a fifth consecutive gold medal. Women's volleyball is one of several sports Western has dominated throughout the course of the ESGs.

File photo

ESGs provide springboard to pros

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

If you take the 5-hour drive to Westchester County later this month, you could just see tomorrow's world-class athletes competing in one of the best amateur venues around.

Yes, when the 30th Empire State Games descends on Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla Wednesday, July 25 for the opening ceremonies, some of the more than 6,000 athletes will be headed to big, bright futures.

The brainchild of Plattsburgh lawyer Louis Wolfe, the Empire State Games have helped launch careers.

Take a look at boxing. Some of the biggest names in the sport got their start in the ESGs. Former world champions Mike Tyson, Shannon Briggs, Tracy Patterson, Hasim Rahman and Hector Camacho all competed in the games. And Town of Tonawanda heavyweight "Baby" Joe Mesi, who will try to pick up his 36th professional victory the same week as the games, won the heavyweight gold medal in the 1993 games in Rochester.

Basketball has seen such recognizable names as Kenny Anderson, Ron Artest, Walter Berry, Sue Bird, Elton Brand, Rick Carlisle, Christian Laettner, Chris Mullin, Sam Perkins, Tammi Reiss, Wally Szczerbiak and Dwayne Washington. Former Pittsburgh Pirates and Buffalo Bisons slugger Andy Van Slyke played baseball in the games, while recent Stanley Cup winner Todd Marchant laced up his skates for the Western Region ice hockey team.

Many, including wrestler Jeff Blatnick, sprinter Diane Dixon, shooter Thrine Kane, field hockey's Tracey Fuchs, cyclist Nelson Vails, kayaker Cammy Myler, skier Diann Roffe, skeleton's Jim Shea Jr. and fencers Felicia and Iris Zimmerman have gone on to compete in the Olympics.

But given all those famous names, the competition at the Empire State Games this year could be even better than years past.

"I think the athletes have gotten better," Empire State Games Director Fred Smith said. "Generally, we've had standout athletes since the beginning, but athletes seem to be more specialized now. At the start, you'd have athletes that competed in two or three sports.

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(four years).

"Western New York is a hotbed for these sports," said Reuter.

Reuter also thinks scholastic women's basketball (gold medal last year), open softball (hasn't medaled since silver in 2003) and scholastic women's field hockey (hasn't medaled since bronze in 2004) should also field good teams this summer.

There are no new sports added or subtracted this year although Reuter said a group is interested in bringing back water polo, which hasn't been in the ESGs since 2002.

Reuter said the original concept of the ESGs was to create an Olympic-village like atmosphere for the athletes and this year's location, Westchester County, hinders that from happening.

"Everything is located for the

athletes across five campuses instead of one or two," said Reuter. "Athletes will be housed by individual sport instead of by region. There will be a lot of congestion."

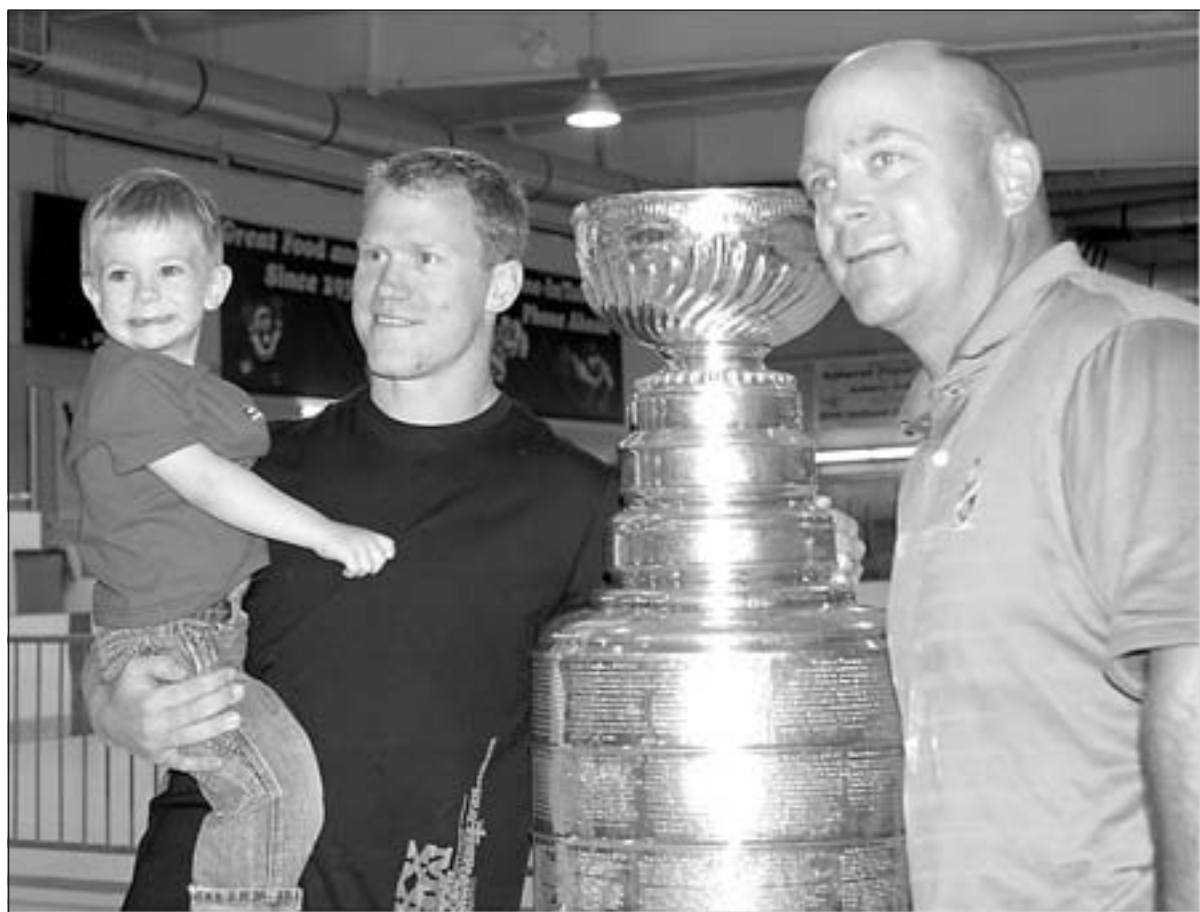
We're spread out quite a bit more than we normally are but we'll make it work," added Smith. "When the athletes get together for opening ceremonies and for the competition, they'll get that spirit back."

Once again, Reuter thinks Western will succeed.

"I think we'll do well," said Reuter.

The 2008 ESGs have already been scheduled for Binghamton. Hudson Valley, Long Island and Albany are tentative sites for 2009 to 2011, respectively.

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BIG DAY — East Amherst native and Anaheim Ducks' forward Todd Marchant had his day with the Stanley Cup on July 4 and spent part of the time at the Amherst Pepsi Center greeting invited family and

friends. Posing with Marchant are John Michalski of Amherst and his son, Johnny.

Photo by David F. Sherman
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