Summer tournaments

At last, one that we can call our own! Savastanos bring tourney to Westchester

By KEN KOSTIK

Finally, there is one that we can call our own.

For youth boys’ lacrosse players, the summer always meant having to pack your gear into your parents’ car and head off to Massachusetts or Pennsylvania or Connecticut.

Late in the summer, there were showcases in Maryland and Delaware.

There was never one tournament where you could spend the night in your own bed in your own home and enjoy mom’s cooking.

Well, that is all changing this summer.

This weekend, June 29-30, the Westchester Warriors Boys’ Lacrosse Club will host what is believed to be the first elite travel high school lacrosse tournament in Westchester County at John F. Kennedy High School in Somers.

The tournament idea was hatched by Goldens Bridge native Nick Savastano, who teaches PE at the John Jay Middle School in Cross River, and his brother Vinny.

The brothers are former coaches at John Jay, where they led the team to the state Class B 2007 state championship game where they lost to Jamesville-DeWitt.

The Savastanos left John Jay after the 2009 season and moved to JFK, where they have been trying to resurrect the boys’ lacrosse program.

“We were saying to each other that these tournaments are all so far away and the parents have to drive up there and then pay for hotels and food and everything else,” said Nick Savastano. “We asked each other, ‘How about if we ran a local one?’”

He continued, “We floated the idea out there and then ran a smaller version of it this past fall and all we got was positive feedback from the parents.”

The JFK administration eagerly agreed to allow the Savastanos to use their campus’ two fields – one real grass, the other artificial turf, and the plan began to come together.

“They are all on board for lacrosse,” Nick said of the JFK administration. “They all want to better this program and they are all for having more people come on campus. It is a selling point for them – the more people that come on campus means the more people that may get interested in coming to school here.”

He added, “It is a win-win for the school.”

When word was first sent out to other travel programs about the tournament, the Savastanos hoped to maybe be able to field six-team fields in two divisions – U15 and U17.

They were happily surprised by the response.

“We have 22 teams coming,” said Nick. “At first, we were just hoping that we would somehow get 12 teams that we could split into a pair of six-team divisions, but we actually had to turn some teams away.”

He continued, “We are at full capacity right now with the facilities we have. If we want to expand next year, we are going to have to find a bigger place.”

In addition to the host Warriors, Gargoyle Athletics and the Connecticut Chargers are among the teams planning to attend.

Games will begin each day at 8 a.m. and run straight through with the final contest each night scheduled to face off at 8 p.m.

If rain washes out either day, the tentative plan is to finish out the tournament on Monday, July 1.

Each team in the tournament is guaranteed five games.

“We have gotten word from a number of local colleges that they are planning to attend – either the head coach of the assistant coach,” said Nick, noting that Sacred Heart, Marist, Pace and Mount Saint Vincent are among the locals planning on attending. “We will end up having more coaches.”

To help with their rebuilding process with the JFK program, the brothers formed the Warriors in 2011, giving JFK players a chance a summer team of their own.

Since its inception, the Warriors have grown to where they now have a waiting list/

“We have our own kids, but we also get interest from players from all over the area – Brewster, John Jay,” said Nick. “We also do fall ball and over the winter we have indoor clinics, so it has really taken off.”

Even with all the work involved with growing a summer program, the Savastanos were a bit surprised by how much is involved in organizing a tournament.

“Doing all of this, we really appreciate what the people who put together those 100 team tournaments must do and go through to pull it off,” said Nick. “Never mind the teams and the schedule, all of the behind the scenes stuff – the vendors, the concessions, the food.”

He added, “It is amazing.”

At this weekend’s event, Lacrosse Unlimited from Mount Kisco will have a booth set up, while King Kone will have its mobile hot dog truck on site.

Savastano is also busy working out the final details with several other vendors.

“We have been lucky because we have already lined up a number of volunteers to help with the fields and coordinating for both days and we have about 10 or so Section I officials who will be working the games,” said Nick.

The games will consist of two 20-minute running time halves, with a five-minute halftime break.