

# SPORTS

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## NHS lacrosse team posts best season yet

### Coach: Seniors contributed to Rockets' success

By MICHAEL KING  
NEWS-RECORD STAFF WRITER

NEENAH — With a 10-3 final record and a No. 6 state ranking in its fifth year of existence, the Neenah High School Lacrosse club raised the bar for future teams.

"Overall, this was the best season ever for Neenah Lacrosse," said Head Coach Paul Zielski.

After going 8-2 in the regular season, including a key victory over Appleton, the defending state champion, the Rockets advanced to the sectional final but fell short of qualifying for state.

Zielski credited the seniors, most of whom played all four years, for making big contributions to the team's success. Six team members, including five seniors, were recognized as all-conference performers in the Bay Valley Conference consisting of teams from Oshkosh, Menasha, Appleton, Bay Port, Green Bay Southwest, Notre Dame Academy, De Pere and Wausau.

Another highlight of the season involved the Neenah school board's decision to grant the team official club status, meaning that the student athletes can earn a varsity letter.

"As the head coach and founder of this team, I take a great deal of pride in this team and the teams from the first four years," Zielski said.

Seniors Brad Simpson and Dan LaFond were chosen first-team all-Wisconsin Bay Valley Conference while another senior, Trey Bomier, was named second team all conference.

Three others were named honorable mention: Chris Otto, senior; Ryan Wilder, junior; and Jacob Walter, a senior.

After going 3-8 as a junior,



NHS LACROSSE CLUB PLAYER Dan LaFond (No. 18) takes a shot on goal during a game against Appleton this pas season. The Rockets advanced to the sectional final, but fell short of qualifying for state.

Submitted photo by Pinnacle Photo

LaFond called it "a great year overall. I'm disappointed in the way our season ended, but I'm very proud of the way we came together as a team to make for one good year and to set a standard for years to come."

LaFond said he moved to Neenah from California four years ago and "was looking for something to help me stay in shape for football and wrestling" when he was introduced to the sport by a new friend who was carrying a lacrosse stick.

The next day, he went to practice "and I haven't looked back since then."

He plans to play lacrosse in college at Tri-State University in Angola, Ind., earn an elementary education degree and eventually land a teaching job "that also allows me to coach lacrosse," LaFond said.

The 7-6 comeback win against Appleton, which had a 19-game winning streak, was memorable. "With 4 or 5 minutes left

in the game, we were able to score three goals and hold onto the ball long enough to wear the clock down."

Simpson, who has been playing lacrosse for nearly eight years and plans to play next fall at the University of Denver, called the early season victory against Appleton a "turning point in our season."

"This was by far our best year," said Simpson, who led the team in scoring with 28 goals despite coming off knee surgery.

For Bomier, "it was an absolutely tremendous season for the players on the team and the club as a whole."

He recalled an early season game at Bayport under the lights as a key point where the team came together. "We crushed a team that was supposed to crush us," said Bomier, who plans to try out for the Madison Lacrosse club team next year at UW-Madison. "It

was just a great feeling to walk off that field after winning by eight goals."

Other seniors on the team were Max Suechting, Andrew Ernst, Evan Keller and Joe Mischo.

Zielski noted that five former Rocket lacrosse players are currently playing collegiate club lacrosse and at least four seniors will join them.

"With the continued growth and popularity of lacrosse our future looks very bright," he said. "Next year we will be returning 22 players and two lines of very strong midfielders and 2 starting long stick defenders."

Zielski said he and assistant head coach Chris Green have been thrilled to have the opportunity "to teach them this great game" and find it rewarding "to see our hard work finally paying off in a winning season."

Michael King : 920-729-6622, ext. 33, or mking@newsrecord.net.