

The following is a write up regarding MLK Tournament, this past weekend.

2005 MLK Highlights

This past weekend, DUKES LC traveled to Peddie NJ for the annual MLK Invitational, the premier High School indoor tournament. Teams are broken up into two 12 team divisions, North division plays at the Tri-State facility in Wayne NJ, and the South Division play at the Peddie School in Hightstown NJ. These 24 teams met for two days bracket play, with the final 4 teams from each division meeting at Peddie for a single elimination playoff round on Sunday to determine the eventual champion.

DUKES has fared well in this outing through the years, but has never won the championship. Last year we played for the championship, and came up short by two goals. Unfortunately this year's outcome was the same, losing to Long Island Sting 8-7, in a very emotional and hard fought contest. DUKES was actually leading by 2 goals midway through the match, but succumbed to a strong Long Island team that was made up of mostly Long Island Empire Team players, many who are already committed to division 1 schools.

Our opening game on Friday saw our boys loose to another final 4 team, New Jersey Central, 19-17 in a high scoring game that seesawed back-n-forth until time ran out - a bit of a low start, but we know from doing these tournaments that the "sense of urgency" stuff doesn't start until Sunday's single elimination format. Coach Christmas and I are very aware of Ebe's desire to put the best product on the floor at all times, and we've become adept at the persuasive techniques that are necessary to reassure Coach Helm that these tough early losses build character on the final day.

Saturday started with a win, but saw a second loss to a swaggering Maryland Fireballs team, who we knocked out of Champ-Camp last year in a thrilling rain delayed semi-final overtime win. We wanted rematch with this team, as they stalled on our DUKES Underage team this fall in Barehills, but we'd have to wait until Sunday to get the win we wanted – a solid rivalry exists between these two clubs.

Coaches Xmas, Castle & Helm regrouped for a sobering dinner as early losses were not an indication of our abilities. Sometimes a healthy debate is what it takes to get things started, and the coaches broke the meal in full agreement that we would give no quarter for the rest of the tournament. After making two major defensive and offensive adjustments, we went out with a new attitude and took care of business the next two games, to finish the day's bracket play 3 & 2, enough for a 3 place seed going into the final days play.

Sunday morning saw us taking the floor at 7:20 am, against New Hampshire. I was a little concerned that we were "peaking" too early, but we remained focused and moved past Granite State by 11 goals.

Our next game was against the North Division 2nd seed, Tri-State North. We don't get a chance to see many northern NJ teams much in Pa, but they have a strong tradition of putting out good players, with schools that are nationally rank each year by Lacrosse Magazine; like Delbarton, Mountain Lakes, and Montclair. Unfortunately for them, nobody told our boys about all that great press, and we rolled them by 7 goals, getting us into the elite final 8 team playoffs.

Our first match in the final 8, was against the Maryland Red-Shirts, which is a very good team consisting of mostly Baltimore area prep schools, ie. St Paul's, Gillman, and Calvert Hall. We defeated them to set up our semi-final contest; a rematch with the Fireballs, who earlier had beaten the #1 seed from the North division Three Villages, a perennial MLK power-team, so they were feeling pretty good about playing DUKES in the pre-final game. Unfortunately, we spoiled their parade; on the way to a 12-11 victory to get us into the finals, as Sean Evans's goal with 20 seconds to go, iced the win.

The championship game saw us down by 2 goals out of the gate, but we rallied to control the mid-point of the match and ahead by two goals with 8 minutes to go. Strong play by Long Island's Navy bound goalie (who won the goalie MVP) made the difference. A last minute run to force overtime unfortunately didn't go our way, as time expired, the score stood 8-7 Long Island.

Despite the loss, we were still winners, especially given the teams we had to come through to get to the finals. 50 plus college coaches watched our kids play over the 3 day period, and I'm sure all of our players will receive some nice letters from some good schools asking our guys to come play ball for them one day. One of the primary tenets of DUKE'S is to provide a conduit between kids and the opportunity to get the next level, college. By all measures that was accomplished over the weekend, and I know all of us on the coaching staff are looking forward to hearing about any incoming mail as a result of your play this past weekend.

Notable Players

Tournament MVP – Brian Christopher

Offense

Kevin Kaminski – Strath Haven

Sean Evans – Henderson

Pat Lombard – LaSalle

Rob McCallion – Episcopal

Jacob Zug – WC East

Jake Willcox – Malvern

Andrew Cabrey – St. Joe Prep

The Springfield (D) “O” line

Defense

Overall Defense Solid with special mention to Ken Clausen & Kyle Gilfoy

Greg Avato – Springfield (D)
Eric Muller – Penn Charter
Steve Layne – Malvern Prep
Ken Klausen – Hill School (Defensive Game MVP)
PT Ricci – Conestoga

Goalie

Greg Murray – WC East
Kyle Gilfoy - Penncrest

Congratulations to all, and good luck at Barehills this coming weekend.

Mr. Castle