

The Washington Post

When Georgetown Prep and Landon meet in lacrosse, "it's not a game, it's a happening"

By Christian Swezey
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The Interstate Athletic Conference has won its season series against the Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association three times in the past five years. This year's 8-1 record was by far the most impressive.

As the IAC shows unprecedented depth among its teams, however, there is still one matchup that commands the most attention: The game between Landon and Georgetown Prep. The top-ranked Little Hoyas (11-3 prior to Tuesday's game against Hamburg, N.Y.) and No. 2 Landon (12-2) will play on Friday at 4:30 p.m. at Georgetown Prep.

The matchup continues to capture the imagination of lacrosse fans near and far.

"Up here in Baltimore, we think we've cornered the market on high school lacrosse," said former Maryland coach Dick Edell, a Baltimore native who played and coached in what is now the MIAA. "But I don't know of any greater environment than the Landon-Georgetown Prep game. It's not a game, it's a happening."

Both teams enter as strong as usual on defense and a little less-imposing as in

recent years on offense.

"I don't see the scorers on either team as being players who can light it up," Landon Coach Rob Bordley said. "Both teams have boys who can score but nobody has a [former Landon star] Matt Ward or [former Georgetown Prep standout] Andrew Brancaccio, a kid who can't be stopped."

Landon junior Patrick Keena (23 goals, 20 assists) is on pace to become the school's all-time leading scorer, and senior Joe Paoletta (18 goals) has scored crucial goals late in the fourth quarter in wins over MIAA teams St. Mary's-Annapolis and Gilman.

Georgetown Prep counters with senior attackman Mike Pirone (18 goals, 19 assists), junior attackman Cory Dobyns

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(18 goals) and senior midfielder Matty Collins (12 goals, 9 assists).

This year, both teams win with defense. The Little Hoyas have given up 15 goals in three league games.

Senior Robert Posniewski held St. Stephen's/St. Agnes junior David Solomon, an All-Met last year, to one assist in a 6-5, triple-overtime win on April 6. He also did not give up a point to players he guarded in an 8-5 victory over St. Albans on April 9.

The defenders can score goals, too. Posniewski scored in a triple-overtime victory over St. Stephen's/St. Agnes on April 6; senior Taylor Morgan scored against St. Albans; and senior Greg Perrault scored in a 10-8 loss to LaSalle (Pa.) on Saturday.

Meantime, the winning goal for Landon against St. Mary's-Annapolis last month came from junior defenseman Luke Howard.

"I've seen Landon play and they are disciplined and well-coached, as always," Georgetown Prep Coach Kevin Giblin said. "It seems that there are a lot more good teams out there.

"We have a lot of games that are as intense as the Landon game. Now, are those games all conference games? No.

And are they the same rivalry as Landon? No. It's a special game to play in and to coach in."

Bordley agrees.

"Normally it's a tight game," he said. "We haven't beaten them badly in recent years. They've beaten us badly in recent years, but I don't think that's going to happen. I think it's going to be as it always is -- a tough, hard-fought game."

A key on Friday may be in transition. Teams have struggled to score in six-on-six against Georgetown Prep. Paoletta, a standout running back in football, thrives in transition, as do the quick decisions of Keena and the ability of sophomore Matt Opsahl (15 goals).

One other player to watch in transition is Landon senior Jack Strabo. He is a top cross-country runner who qualified for

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the Foot Locker South Region meet last November.

Flint Hill senior goalie Chris Nelson helps his coach sleep well at nights. Huskies Coach Adam Rice said he is comfortable knowing that he enters every game with Nelson in goal.

Nelson has helped the Huskies (6-5, 3-0 Mid-Atlantic Conference) to an undefeated start in league play following a 7-2 victory over host Potomac School last Friday.

In that game, Nelson made 17 saves. The Huskies face another MAC test on Wednesday, when they host Sidwell Friends (4-5, 2-2).

"He is very, very good," Rice said of Nelson. "He makes three or four saves a game where you just shake your head and wonder how he did it. He is a really intelligent player. He makes plays outside the cage but he isn't reckless."

The Huskies have played some of the area's top teams very close, thanks largely to Nelson.

The Huskies took No. 3 Bullis to triple overtime in a 6-5 loss last month. Nelson made 20 saves in a 6-5 loss to Woodberry Forest and made 14 saves in a 6-3 loss to No. 9 St. Stephen's/St. Agnes on April 13.

Nelson has committed to play for Denison, the alma mater of his current coach. And as for Rice's sleeping patterns, Nelson's graduation won't necessarily affect them.

"We have a young kid in our program who is going to be very good, too," Rice said. "I am hoping to sleep well for the next few years."

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