Pleasantville’s Josh Della Puca Has Something to Shout About as the Panthers Take the Title and End Bronxville’s Dynasty
Panthers Edge Bronxville to Capture Their First Sectional Title

By Andy Jacobs

The Pleasantville boys’ lacrosse team has been knocking on the door for a sectional championship the past three years. Last Thursday afternoon, the Panthers stopped knocking and just barged in.

With Josh Della Puca and Brian Reda scoring three goals apiece and goalie Oscar Marchi making 17 big saves, the Panthers outlasted four-time defending champion Bronxville 9-7 in the Class C title game and gained a huge amount of retribution after losing to the Broncos in the finals the past two seasons.

“I’m speechless right now,” said Della Puca moments after Pleasantville had clinched its first-ever sectional championship by prevailing in a dramatic fourth quarter on the turf at White Plains High School. “A lot of thoughts are just mushed into my brain right now, so I don’t know what to think.”

It was Della Puca who, only moments earlier, had the ball in his possession behind the Broncos’ cage in the final 30 seconds as the Panthers tried to run out the clock while clinging to a precarious one-goal edge. He wound up passing the ball in front to Reda for the game-clinching shot into an empty net with just five seconds remaining.

“They were not gonna let this game get away from them,” said Panthers coach Chris Kear, still dripping wet after his jubilant players poured Gatorade on him upon putting at least a one-year halt to the recent Bronxville dynasty. “We have kids who have a lot of experience now who are back from last year. And they were hungry. So they brought everything they had today.”

The Panthers, now 18-1 this season and headed for Saturday afternoon’s state regional final at Lakeland High School, scored four goals in succession in the first half, building a 4-1 advantage nearly three minutes into the second quarter. Della Puca had two of the goals, including one with just a couple of seconds left in the opening period.

“After a few goals in succession for us, they had three in a row to come back,” said Kear. “They were playing well, but we were too. We just tried to keep our composure and not throw the ball away too much. We just had to play smart.”

The Broncos, who had tied the game on Michael Crawford’s first of two goals with only 2.4 seconds remaining in the first half, took a 5-4 lead almost two minutes into the third quarter when Gerry Frost found an open Robby Westerfield in front of the crease for a point-blank shot that Marchi had no chance to stop.

“We knew that it was gonna be a game of runs,” said Kear. “We figured they were gonna get a few, then we’d get a few and then they get a few. We just tried to keep our composure and just make sure we got good possessions, won a few face-offs and didn’t throw the ball away too much. We just knew they’re a great team, so we had to play smart.”

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turned aside a backhand try from Henry Glass, Section One's all-time leading scorer, who wound up pointless thanks to the smothering defense of the Panthers' Jack Drillock. Marchi quickly got the ball to Declan McDermott up the left sideline. The freshman middie then passed to Della Puca, who sent a missile of a shot into the back of the net for his 100th career goal, tying the game at 5-5 with 2:22 left in the third quarter.

"I wasn't even thinking of it," said Della Puca about his milestone goal. "One of my friends actually told me in the school today I have 97 goals. I was like, 'Oh.' And I completely forgot about it. When I scored, I heard someone over there, like, 'That's his 100th.' And I was like, 'Oh, that's cool.'"

But Bronxville answered with another goal from Crawford just 39 seconds later and took a 6-5 lead into the final quarter, which was about to provide the large Panther student cheering section with more ups and downs than a ride on a roller coaster.

Just 25 seconds into the final quarter, Pleasantville, taking advantage of a Bronco turnover, got even on a fast break that featured lightning-quick passing from McDermott to Bryan Arcidiacono and then to Reda across the crease for a shot into the wide-open net. A little more than a minute later, Drillock, in one of the rare moments he wasn't shadowing Grass, picked up a loose ball at the offensive end and rifled a shot past goalie Henry Glass, Section One's all-time offensive MVP plaque, it was Marchi who turned aside a backhand try from Dante Bolla and scooped up by Grass across the crease was knocked under a minute to play, a pass by Marchi, who sent the ball up the field to McDermott.

The Panthers called a timeout with 32.4 seconds left on the clock. With a one-goal lead and their first championship in hand during the regular season to the Panthers by two goals, again responded, this time getting a goal from Frost to

Pleasantville's Ian Esliker controls the ball in the second half of Pleasantville's 16-3 semifinal playoff win vs. Nanuet.

Nolan McAndrew tries to get to the cage in the second half of Pleasantville's 16-3 semifinal victory.

Brian Reda passes the ball in last week's easy semifinal game vs. Nanuet.

The Panthers' Bryan Arcidiacono loses his stick and the ball as he tries to get to the goal in last week's semifinal game vs. Nanuet.

Pleasantville's Lucas Cohen is guarded by Nanuet's Patrick Fay during the Panthers' lopsided 16-3 semifinal victory.

Brian Halloran of Pleasantville runs around the back of the cage in last Tuesday's 16-3 semifinal win over Nanuet.

Della Puca, who had started the Panthers' 16-3 semifinal demolition of Nanuet with a goal 90 seconds after the opening faceoff two days earlier, also ended up with three assists against the Broncos and earned the game's offensive most valuable player award.

"I never thought we were gonna lose this game," he said, asked if the Broncos' comeback from a three-goal deficit had worried him. "I knew all the guys on our team really wanted this one. And we got it."

While Della Puca collected the offensive MVP plaque, it was Marchi who was named the defensive most valuable player.

"He's been phenomenal all season long," said Kear of his senior goalie. "We knew we were gonna get some great stops from him. He fills up the cage nicely. He's an experienced athlete and we just knew with him back there, we always have a chance."

If anyone had told Marchi a couple of years ago that he would be at the center of the Panthers' first-ever lacrosse championship, he'd have had a hard time believing it.

"To be the first team in school history to win the section title is just incredible," he said. "I can't even describe the feeling right now. It was very nerve racking, to be honest. I mean, I've never played in such a big game and to be the starting goalie in the section final after nobody knows you at the start of the year, it's just incredible."
**Track & Field**

**Class B Championships**
**Byram Hills High School**
**Saturday, May 23**

- Briarcliff’s Ryan Gallagher
- Briarcliff’s Sara Roa
- Westlake’s Manny Corona
- Pleasantville sprinter Cassidy McCrea
- Briarcliff’s Natalie Cornacchio competes in the high jump.
- Westlake’s Kate Pinchiarioli
- Westlake’s Steven Brunetto clears a hurdle.
- Briarcliff’s Natalie Cornacchio competes in the high jump.
- Pleasantville’s Olivia Heintzman

**Class C Championships**
**Valhalla High School**
**Friday, May 22**

- Valhalla’s Amy Rice competes in the 1500.
- Valhalla’s hurdler Melissa Giglio
- The Vikings’ Olivia Bespolka took third place in the long jump.
- Right: Valhalla pole vaulter Elliot Pennella

By Andy Jacobs Photos
**GOLF**

Section 1 Tournament Round Two

Above: Valhalla’s Matt Minerva follows the flight of his approach shot last Wednesday afternoon at the Fenway Golf Club.

Left: Aiden McDermott of Pleasantville tees off on the last hole in the second round of last week’s Section 1 tournament.

**TENNIS**

Sectional Tourney Early Rounds

Fox Lane’s Sachin Ganesh smacks a forehand return at last Wednesday’s Section 1 tournament.

Above: Byram Hills’ Garrett Wolfe follows through on a serve in doubles play at last week’s Section 1 championships.

Right: William Bohrer of Byram Hills concentrates on a backhand at the sectional tourney.

Byram Hills’ Jacob Eisenberg gets set to hit a backhand return in his sectional singles match last Wednesday afternoon.

Greeley’s Avatar Simpson hits a forehand in his doubles match with teammate Erik Rauch last Wednesday afternoon.

Horace Greeley’s Alex Kogan hits a forehand volley at last week’s Section 1 tennis tournament.

Right: Jeremy Wei of Greeley lines up a forehand during his sectional doubles match last week at Harrison High School.

Greeley’s James Wei serves the ball during doubles action at the sectional tourney.

Nick Delfico of Fox Lane watches his tee shot during the second round of the last week’s sectional tournament at Fenway Golf Club.
Winkler Pitches the Foxes to a Playoff Win Over Greeley

By Monica D’Ippolito

The third time turned out to be the charm.

After getting swept by rival Horace Greeley in the regular season, the Fox Lane baseball team got redemption Saturday afternoon. The fifth-seeded Foxes, led by starting pitcher Aaron Winkler, held on for a 2-1 victory over the fifth-seeded Quakers and advanced to the semifinal round of the Section 1, Class AA tournament.

“It’s really nice to see Aaron come through in this particular situation,” Fox Lane coach Matt Hillis said. “He’s battled through a few arm issues this year. He’s found his form he typically has. I couldn’t be happier for the kid. He’s the reason why we won this game.”

The Foxes jumped in front in the top of the first inning with two outs as Julian Francisco got the first hit of the game, running out a slow grounder down the first-base line. He proceeded to steal second, then scored when Andrew Workman followed with a short fly to left field that Greeley’s Quinn Carter couldn’t catch despite a diving attempt.

Runs were hard to come by throughout the game as Winkler and Greeley pitcher Satchel Shultz each pitched brilliantly on the mound. It took until the bottom of the fifth inning for the Quakers to answer.

Winkler walked the leadoff batter, then gave up a line single to right to Chris DiGuglielmo. Paul Gadaleta laid down a perfectly placed bunt, advancing the runners to second and third base. Bobby Garbuio then sent a hit to right, scoring Justin Schachter. But Fox Lane’s Henry Davis made a perfect throw to home, cutting down DiGuglielmo at the plate and preserving the 1-1 tie.

“Huge,” Hillis said of the Davis throw home. “Henry Davis is a freshman and we’ve asked him to catch and to play the outfield, which isn’t his true position. But he has a great arm. He came aggressively after that baseball and threw the kid out at home plate and credit our catcher, Sean Fopeano. He did an amazing job on a short-hop throw.”

The play may have stirred up the Foxes’ offense a bit because their bats started coming alive in the top of the sixth inning.

Joe Passarelli led off the inning, knocking the second pitch he saw into center field for a single. He stole second base, but Shultz then got a pair of outs and was seemingly on his way out of danger. But Workman hit a high pop-up over second base that with the cloudless sky created trouble for the Quakers. The ball fell to the ground, bringing in Passarelli with the game’s decisive run.

In the bottom of the seventh, after getting the first out, Winkler yielded a single to DiGuglielmo. Gadaleta reached when his potential double-play grounder was misplayed. One out later, pinch-hitter J. Jahara worked long into the count, fouling off several Winkler pitches before drawing a full-count walk.

Down to their final out, the Quakers had the bases loaded and number-three hitter Mack Lauder at the plate.

“I was thinking about all the work our team has put in,” Winkler said. “From the winter to the spring, throughout the year, how these kids just love baseball and how I couldn’t let them down and I had to do the job.”

On a 2-2 count Winkler came through for his teammates, catching a disbelieving Lauder looking for the final out of the game.

“A ton of character,” Hillis said of Winkler after he got out of the bases-loaded jam. “I don’t know what it is, but we seem to commit a ton of errors on this particular field. There’s no doubt about it, we dug ourselves in our own jams, error after error after error, and to this kid’s credit he stayed composed, he stayed focused and you saw what he did.”

Winkler wound up with 11 strikeouts, while only giving up five hits and two walks in the complete-game win.

In the moments after his big strikeout to end the game, Winkler still held the winning baseball tightly in hand as he was asked where the ball will eventually wind up.

“I haven’t thought about that yet, just holding onto it for now,” he said. “It will stay next to my bed for awhile, that’s for sure. I’m not sure after that.”

While Shultz wound up as the losing pitcher, it could have easily been him clutching the winning baseball. The junior only gave up five hits and two walks in the complete-game win.

“Their's our rival and we’ve had numerous games with Greeley similar to this,” Hillis said. “Obviously, the season sweep during the regular season was a tough pill to swallow and to come here and to have our season continue feels pretty good.”

The Foxes will now face top-seeded Roy C. Ketcham up in Wappingers on Wednesday in a rematch of last year’s sectional final, won by the Indians.

“We’re really not scared at all,” Winkler said. “We had a really tough start. We went 1-4, then we’ve just been riding the rollercoaster coming back up and I think it’s really good timing. We’re right at the top right now. I don’t see any reason why we can’t beat them.”
The Bobcats’ Frankie Vesuvio runs the bases during Saturday’s quarterfinal victory vs. Nyack.

Pleasantville southpaw Matt Gill pitches in relief during last Thursday’s 8-2 play-in win over visiting Rye Neck.

Pleasantville’s Jon Carlo Angiolillo runs toward third base in Thursday’s Panther victory over Rye Neck.

Byram Hills’ Kellen Hatheway belts a first-inning triple in the Bobcats’ quarterfinal win on Saturday.

Byram Hills second baseman Tommy Gagliardi tries to turn a double play during Briarcliff’s first-round win vs. visiting North Salem.

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Valhalla’s Luke Sasso swings the bat vs. visiting Hastings in Friday’s first-round game.

Above: Valhalla’s Jack Gorman slides home with a run for the Vikings in Friday’s sectional win vs. Hastings.

Left: Matt Gertz of Byram Hills pitches in Saturday’s home playoff game.
Hurdle Hopping

Carly Schwartz of Byram Hills Heads Toward the Finish Line at the Class B Championships