

# BID FOR PERFECTION

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**WAYNE** - Lakeland football coach Tom McCormack says that his team's Section I, Group III championship game Saturday at Giants Stadium against Wayne Hills places his team in an "extremely unique position."

"We've been living with the pressure of being undefeated (11-0) all year long," he said. "Everyone wants to knock us off."

Suddenly, he believes, that pressure has "vanished." He admits that having the pressure disappear before the championship game is a bit odd, but he nevertheless maintains that it's true.

"Obviously, 11-0 is pretty good," said McCormack. "But that pales in comparison to 51-0."

Top-seeded Wayne Hills has not lost since 2004. They will be going for their 52nd consecutive win when they take on unbeaten Lakeland in the final.

"That's puts the pressure on Wayne Hills," McCormack said. "We're 11-0 and nobody thinks we're going to win. It's very unique to be undefeated and still widely regarded as underdogs. If we lose, our 11 game win streak is over. If they lose, there 51 game streak is

over. In that respect, they have a lot more to lose."

McCormack has been using the team's status as an underdog as a motivating factor.

"We have an amazing opportunity," McCormack said. "We're trying to win the championship. That's a big enough motivator. But to win it, we have to beat a dynasty at Giants Stadium. I'm not going to sit here and boldly predict that we're going to be the first team to beat Wayne Hills in five years. On the other hand, we're not going to lie down and hold up the white flag. We're confident that we can play with them."

One thing fueling McCormack's confidence is the fact the Pascack Valley gave Hills a good game in the semifinals. Hills trounced its first 10 opponents by wide margins this year. Then, they narrowly got past PV, 17-10. They had beaten PV earlier in the year, 35-0.

"They've been beating everybody handily this year," McCormack said. "Then, Pascack Valley comes in and gives them a game. That's not surprising. Pascack Valley is one of the best teams in the state. Still, that (the close nature of that game) shows us that Wayne Hills is human."

"Had they been coming into Saturday's game off of 11-straight blowouts, I think deep

down we might have been thinking they're near invincible. Now, we know the least possible to put up a pretty good game against them. If we can play them well, if the ball bounces our way a few times, I think we could pull it off."

This will be the first time Wayne Hills and Lakeland have ever played each other in the state, even though they are located mere miles apart. They have two common opponents. Hills beat West Milford, Lakeland's longtime rival, in the first round. Lakeland beat Ramapo, Wayne Hills' longtime rival, in the first round.

"That will help both teams prepare for the championship," McCormack said. "We both play in the conference (Hills-NBIL and Lakeland-Northern Hills). Both are like any other conference - some strong teams and some weak teams. The NBIL, I think, has some good running teams. We have more of an open attack. I don't think Hills has as much experience against teams that play the same style. Hopefully, that will benefit us."

Both teams won championships last year (Lakeland was in Group II and Hills in Group III then.). Hills has not lost since 2004. Lakeland went unbeaten that year,

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hovered around the .500 mark ever since. Hills will be going for its fifth straight Section I, Group III title and its sixth such title in the last seven years. It will be the team's 13th trip to the final game (1991, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

Lakeland has a rich history too, although even McCormack admits it does not compare to Hills' histo-

ry. McCormack graduated from Lakeland in 1990 and played on the Lancer team that lost to Passaic in the 1989 semifinals.

"Passaic was the dynasty back then - like Wayne Hills is today," McCormack said. "The field (Boverini Stadium in Passaic) was frozen solid. It was a disappointing loss. I still can't rehash it with my former teammates."

"We don't have the championships that Wayne Hills has, but we still have had some outstanding teams here. I know guys from all the great Lakeland teams. We all

argue about which team was better and, of course, we all stick up for our individual teams. On Saturday we'll all be united. If we win, I think I'll be able to make the case that we're one of the best Lakeland teams ever."

If that happens, he probably won't get an argument from his fellow alumni, all of whom will likely be ecstatic.

First, as McCormack says, they have to "beat a dynasty."

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