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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
Birmingham United senior Rachel Miller holds up the Division 1 state championship trophy while surrounded by teammates after the Bulldogs won their third straight title.

Lacrosse royalty

Brother Rice and Birmingham United continue championship runs

By Christian Davis
C & G Sports Writer

TROY — The end of the 2009 boys and girls lacrosse seasons proved to be a day to celebrate for local teams.

While Birmingham Brother Rice and Birmingham United reigned supreme, Bloomfield Hills Marian has reason to believe the best is yet to come.

Here's a look at the two championship matches.

Kings of the hill

For a moment, it looked like University of Detroit Jesuit boys lacrosse might dethrone the king.

But by the final shot, Birmingham Brother Rice took its place on the Division 1 throne.

The Warriors won their seventh straight state championship after beating the Cubs 12-11 June 6 at Troy Athens in the final. The victory marked Rice's fifth straight title since the Michigan High School Athletic Association sanctioned the sport.

Just as important, coach Rob Ambrose said this title is significant because of how many talented seniors he lost after finishing 22-0 and being ranked nationally last season.

"Last year was a big year for us; we had a really good team," Ambrose said. "This is special. It's the seventh year running, and when you lose a lot of great seniors from last year, it's this year's seniors' turn to lead the team and the charge, and that's exactly what they did.

"They have to be extremely proud of their accomplishments and what they've done,"

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Ambrose continued regarding the seniors. “Nothing comes easy in life, and they really stuck to it. I think they believed the whole time that they would win. It’s a great victory for them.”

This championship didn’t come easy, either. The Warriors trailed by as many as three goals in the first half and were down two going into the break.

In the second half, Rice’s defense stymied the Cubs’ offense, allowing just two goals in the final two quarters. Rice, meanwhile, scored four, including three in the final frame, with senior captain Dan Henneghan putting in the game-winner with just over three minutes remaining.

Henneghan said he’ll remember this title for a long time.

“The other ones were good, but being a senior, I kind of feel like this is my championship — mine and the other seniors’ championship,” he said. “This one is definitely going to stick out as the best.”

Rice finished 20-3 for the season and hasn’t lost to a team from Michigan in over six years.

Bulldogs do it again

BLOOMFIELD HILLS — One of the best moves of the day came from Birmingham United girls lacrosse coach Jen Dunbar as she narrowly escaped a celebratory dousing of ice water.

“I avoided that — worked on my agility moves,” she joked June 6 at Bloomfield Hills Lahser.

There was reason to celebrate for the Bulldogs that day, as they won their third straight D-1 championship after beating Bloomfield Hills Marian 13-11.

While past championships may have made United the odds-on favorite this season, Dunbar said the squad didn’t start playing like defending champions until the postseason rolled around.

“This is great, because they pulled it together when they needed to pull it together — in the playoffs,” she said, as United finished 17-5-1 overall. “They’re an unbelievably talented group of seniors, and for them to be able to go out with a win and really leave it all out on the field, I’m very proud of them.”

In the final, United trailed 2-0 after the first five minutes of the game. But being down didn’t really cause concern for the Bulldogs, because they had trailed in every playoff game.

By the half, the teams were square at six, but United scored four goals in the final 10 minutes to secure the win.

“It’s an unbelievable feeling; I can’t even put it into words,” senior Nancy Miner said.

“I’m so proud of our team. Everyone did an amazing job. We just wanted it so bad, that’s why we won.

“I was so nervous the whole game, but I had a gut feeling at the beginning of the game that we were going to win.”

Fellow senior Brooke MacGregor agreed.

“We all just did it for each other. We knew we wanted to win — had to win,” she said.

The three consecutive titles ties United with Bloomfield Hills Sacred Heart for the most consecutive championships by a girls team since the sport was sanctioned by the MHSAA.

As for Marian, coach Ginny Heth said this was the program’s first time out of the regional level, and she believes it won’t be the last.

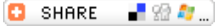
“We have a lot of juniors on this team, and they should do really, really well next year,” she said.

The Mustangs finish 15-4-1, and the coach said her seniors will be missed.

“I know they enjoyed every minute of playing here and being part of Marian,” she said. “I know they did, and they’ve been great leaders.”

For more photos and a closer look at both championships, visit our Web site at www.candgnews.com and click on the Sports link.

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