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Central NY girls lacrosse seniors get one more game to reflect on high school careers (24 photos)

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The Section III Girls lacrosse Exceptional Seniors game played at Christian Brothers Academy June 18, 2025. Dennis Nett | dnett@syracuse.com dennis nett | dnett@syracuse.com



By **Julianna Schwindt | Contributing Writer**

Carthage girls lacrosse senior Isabelle Wormwood learned early on the feeling of coming through in the clutch for her team in the biggest moments.

During her sophomore season, she scored a game-winning goal during a late-season game against New Hartford before helping the Comets reach the Class C sectional semifinals in 2022.

The excitement quickly turned to heartbreak after she left the field. Wormwood's parents told her that her grandmother had passed away that same night.

"It was tough. I actually didn't know. I found out when I came off," Wormwood said, tears welling up in her eyes. "She's the reason I keep going."

Looking back, Wormwood feels like her grandmother was with her in that moment and powered her to the game-winning goal. Wormwood's grandmother went to as many of Wormwood's games as possible, so it made sense that Wormwood would feel her presence on the field after she passed..

Wormwood, a midfielder, started playing lacrosse in a youth program in elementary school. She was inspired by her parents, who both played lacrosse. Her mom played on Carthage's first girls lacrosse team.

Now, Wormwood is the first in her family to go to college, and she got there through lacrosse. The graduating senior will play for Le Moyne next season. She plans to study elementary education and teach second grade.

Wormwood was one of the seniors chosen to play in Wednesday night's girls lacrosse exceptional seniors game at Christian Brothers Academy.

West Genesee's Madelyn Ryder, another senior in Wednesday's all-star game, will play lacrosse at Yale, the No. 5-ranked DI women's lacrosse program.

"It was at a tournament that they saw me playing. How can you pass up the opportunity?" Ryder said. "We kind of just clicked. I was at an ID camp and one of the coaches was my coach, and we just talked a lot."

It's not something she could've imagined when she started playing lacrosse in second grade. Ryder hopes to find a community at Yale like the one at West Genesee. She remembers last year when her team all dyed their hair pink for the state championship.

"Some people did the front of their hair. Not the best decision, they thought," she said. "I loved it. It was so fun."



Section III Girls lacrosse Exceptional Seniors

Jamesville-Dewitt's Alana Bates and Sadie Withers recall a mistake on the bus ride as one of their funniest memories.

"We had a three-hour bus ride (to Buffalo) and (Sadie) pulled the fire alarm," Bates said.

"It was the fire alarm window," Withers said. "The latch went off. I didn't know. We had to pull over on the side of the highway to figure it out. It was an adventure."

Bates has played lacrosse since Kindergarten, and she says she's found a family through it. After graduation, she'll play lacrosse at SUNY Cortland and study criminology.

Rome Free Academy's Christianna Clark had a different path. She didn't start playing lacrosse until her junior year, inspired by her younger sister.

"Playing as a junior for your first time is kind of odd, because most people have already decided they're going to play in college," Clark said. "So it's kind of hard to keep up skill-wise, but with a lot of practice and a lot of time put into the sport, I think I did an okay job

keeping up.”

Clark won't play lacrosse in college at SUNY Geneseo, but she will play field hockey.

“It helped me overcome my fear of just starting something new, starting so late,” Clark said. “I'm so thankful I got the opportunity to actually play.”

Vernon Verona Sherrill's Alea Burger and Rome Free Academy's Fiona McMahon credit lacrosse with improving their confidence.

Burger began struggling with mental health in high school. Lacrosse practice helped her forget everything else that was going on in the rest of her life. It was her family away from family.

“I became a Morgan's Message Ambassador, and that's something that's really close to my heart,” Burger said. “And that's through lacrosse, so I have lacrosse to thank for that.”

Burger will continue playing lacrosse at SUNY Brockport.

“Take everything as a learning opportunity,” she said. “Even if it doesn't go your way, you can still take something valuable out of it.”

McMahon started playing lacrosse in eighth grade, and at first, she was scared to even take the ball. Now, she's been captain of both the field hockey and lacrosse teams at RFA. She'll play field hockey at the University of Vermont and hopes to study math.

“It's definitely taught me a lot of leadership skills that I will take away in my everyday life,” she said.

For some athletes, like Bishop Ludden's Charlotte Hsiao and East Syracuse Minoa's Madison Wood, club lacrosse helped them become more outgoing.

“You have to meet a bunch of new girls and make a bunch of new friends,” said Hsiao, who will go to Syracuse University to study communications and psychology. “I joined a club team, and I really didn't know anyone. I just had to introduce myself to people and start making new friends and new connections.”

East Syracuse Minoa isn't known for lacrosse, Wood said. When she joined a youth program in fourth grade, she was one of the first in her school to play. She was the only athlete from ESM at the exceptional seniors game, but she's used to not knowing anyone from her years on club teams. Wood did know one person there, though, her mom, who comes to every game she can.

“My mom is my role model,” Wood said. “She’s driven me to every single six-hour away tournament and supported me through everything.”

And it’s not just the athletes’ own families who support the teams. Cazenovia’s Charlie Prior recounted visiting her coach’s 100-year-old grandmother’s house before a game.

“Grandma Byrne, shout out,” Prior said. “She made us brownies, and they were like the best brownies I’ve ever had in my whole life.”

Grandma Byrne even gave them a speech before they left. Prior doesn’t remember it exactly, but she knows she left feeling inspired.

Prior will take a gap year before playing lacrosse at West Point. It was an unexpected decision for someone with a South African father and no family affiliation with the military.

“After meeting with the coaches and visiting and kind of talking to other people in the army, I just knew that kind of culture and everything about the institution was just exactly what I wanted and exactly what I needed,” Prior said. “I just loved the community and the family of it.”

For the final two minutes of the game, all the girls played on the field at once. It was a way for them all to make the most of their final high school game.

“Don’t take the time you have for granted,” McMahon said. “Because it all goes by so fast.”

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