



## St. Pius X Golden Lions Roar to Third State Water Polo Title

Collins Hill forces overtime and penalty shot shootout for 2010 title

The Golden Lions of St. Pius X won their third state water polo title in four years in thrilling fashion Sunday night. St. Pius defeated the Collins Hill Eagles 14-11 in front of a raucous, packed house at the Collins Hill Aquatics Center. The 2010 title is the third in four years for head coach Father Dan Rogaczewski and his St. Pius squad.

Collins Hill held drew first blood in the battle and held a tenuous 1-0 lead after the first quarter. Halftime found the two squads deadlocked 3-3. St. Pius scored in the closing seconds of the third quarter to cling to a razor-thin 5-4 lead after three quarters. Both goalies turned away a number of shots as neither team scored in the last four minutes of regulation and the score was knotted 7-7 as the buzzer sounded.

Collins Hill won the sprint to open the first of two three-minute overtime periods. The Eagles capitalized on a rare blown defensive assignment by St. Pius and scored just eleven seconds into the period. Pius calmly advanced to offense after the restart and drew an ejection. The Golden Lions moved the ball around the perimeter and used the entire ejection clock before tying the game 8-8.

The large Collins Hill crowd erupted just 15 seconds later as their team reclaimed a razor-thin one goal lead. Tournament MVP Kevin Hughes encouraged the wildly cheering Eagles fans to quickly find their seats as he blasted in an immediate, half-court high-corner skip shot that clearly stunned the Eagles players. The first overtime period ended in a 9-9 tie.

The two squads traded ejections in the first half of the final overtime period but neither could capitalize. Collins Hill finally broke through with a goal at 1:10 left for what might be the game winner. St. Pius seemed to seal their own fate with a turnover, and Collins Hill swam down to ice the game. The Eagles turned the ball over and St. Pius coach Rogaczewski quickly called his one time out to set up a play. His Golden Lions put the ball in play and scored, tying the game one more time, 10-10 as the final second ran down.

The GHSWPA officiating crew made sure both teams and the hundreds of electrified fans clearly understood how the shoot out worked, and then the agonizing event within an event began. Both squads converted their first penalty shots, but the Eagles missed their next two while St.



Pius remained perfect and eliminated Collins Hill with a fourth goal and a final blocked Eagles attempt.

“This is by far the highest level of play we’ve seen in the four years of the Georgia High School Water Polo Association,” explained a soaking wet but clearly pleased St. Pius coach Rogaczewski. “Not just from Collins Hill and St. Pius, but from every single team in the league. Everyone demonstrated noticeable improvement.”

“There was unanimous agreement that Kevin Hughes was the tournament MVP,” said Mark Lefkow, GHSWPA Technical Director. “Since last season, Kevin invested a great deal in his water polo performance, including time in the water with Atlanta’s Dynamo Water Polo Club and a trip to California for a water polo camp. He dominated the high school bracket at the PowerBar Cup tournament in August, showed leadership with the ball and without across the entire season and made critical play after critical play in this championship game.”

The Norcross Blue Devils, a first- year program led by Dynamo WPC athlete Carlos Santini, put a great finishing touch on their inaugural campaign with their 9-7 third place win over Greater Atlanta Christian. Norcross graduates three of their starters, but the combination of strong underclass contribution this season and coach Santini’s clear knowledge of the game and passion to help his players succeed makes them a force to reckon with in the future.

The Georgia High School Water Polo Association wraps up the Fall 2010 season with All-Star games on Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup> at the Greater Atlanta Christian School aquatics center. The three games (Frosh/Soph, Girls & Boys) begin at 5PM.

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