

From August through February (more often than not), **Bill Belichick** guides the New England Patriots through the NFL. But from March through July, you're more likely to find him on a lacrosse field

MEETING A MASTER MIND

By Mike Keegan

It was Memorial Day Weekend, 2004. The United States was at war. And a record crowd flooded Baltimore's M&T Bank Stadium to watch an incredible storyline unfold: one of the nation's service academies fighting for an NCAA Championship.

Beneath the packed stands, as game time approached, the Navy Midshipmen focused all of their intensity and emotion on the upcoming game. Navy coach Richie Meade addressed his team, and told them "a fan of the program" wanted to say a few words.

"I'm not sure everybody knew who he was, because he just looks like a regular guy," says Meade. "I remem-

ber Tommy Wallin, who was a freshman at the time, finally figuring it out and that look on his face of, 'Holy s---, that's Bill Belichick.'"

Wallin's look pretty much sums it up. Because the New England Patriots' legendary coach, a three-time Super Bowl champion, wasn't just making a one-time lacrosse appearance. He just so happens to be a genuine lax rat.

That's no exaggeration. In the past couple of years alone, he's warmed up goalies at Hopkins, tailgated in the final four parking lot and cleared space in his backyard to set up a lacrosse field. Over the summers at his

house in Nantucket, he allegedly picks up a stick in the backyard on an almost a daily basis. And, he's watched NCAA championship games from the sideline in both '04 and '07.

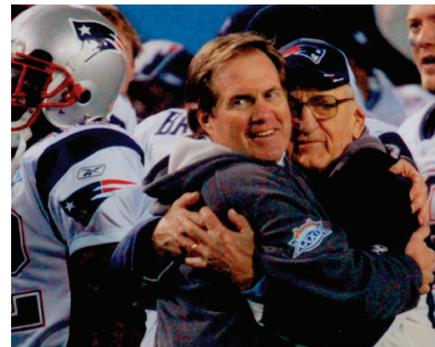
It's part recreation, part love of a sport he grew up playing in Annapolis and later at Wesleyan University, and part bonding experience with his three kids, who each play the sport as well.

"[Growing up in Annapolis] Saturday was a great time to go watch games or swing up to Towson to Bacharach Rasin to pick up a wood stick," Belichick says. "Now, sometimes it's nice to go to a game where





■ Bill Belichick learned much about coaching from his father Steve (below). As a lacrosse fan, he has spoken to the Navy team (bottom right) and played catch at a UMass game (left).



Sports Illustrated senior writer Peter King, maybe the authority on the NFL, believes lacrosse is more than just a hobby for Belichick.

"Lacrosse was a huge, important thing in his life and not just as a sport but as something that helped make him what he is today," says King. "What happened to him is, he got to the point where he was doing things like organizing the team in a lot of ways. He had to arrange the preseason training for his team at Wesleyan when they stayed at Annapolis. This was, organizationally and in sort of a leadership way, I think it was huge for him. ... So I think lacrosse had a lot to do with the coach and the type of worker he is."

I BEAT BILL BELICHIK today.

That's a phrase very few coaches — at any level — have the luxury of uttering. Yet, at the MVP Lacrosse Camp at Rutgers in the summer of 2007, a group of coaches from Baltimore earned the right to say it. Because their Under-15 Baltimore Crabs team took down the Northeasters, a squad of kids from Massachusetts, including Bryan Belichick, the youngest son of Bill, a Northeasters assistant coach. It's a shocker the Crabs coaching staff hasn't had custom T-shirts made up — *I outcoached Bill Belichick and all I got was this stupid T-shirt.*

"We did feel like we had something to prove," says Crabs coach Duncan Booth. "He's obviously an expert

at what he does full-time, so we wanted to show that Baltimore Lacrosse Club knows what it's doing. ... It was one of the first things we talked about with the families: Guess who was on the other sideline? ... We're used to seeing some of the same guys each time we go to a tournament. So seeing Bill Belichick there was unique. Very unique."

But not as unique as you might think. This wasn't the first time Belichick has coached one of his kids. Amanda just graduated from Wesleyan, where she was team captain; Stephen is a freshman longpole at Rutgers; and Bryan is a sophomore attackman at The Rivers School in Massachusetts. Bill Belichick, at some point, has coached each of them.

"Coaching is coaching fundamentally," he says. "You're just teaching different skills to kids at different ages. You just try and get them to do the right thing."

Booth, whose Crabs team finished a remarkable summer undefeated, says the Northeasters gave them one of their toughest tests of the season. And, though Bill Belichick didn't get too involved with the Xs and Os of coaching, he is one of the driving forces behind the program, after helping get it off the ground.

"He is very involved with that team," says Booth. "The jerseys even have a Patriots-looking logo on them. ... In our conversations with him, he was very passionate about the game. ... We had a team that may be tough to repeat at any point. We won every tournament we played in. On top of that, we had good kids off the field too. So that is something he is trying to create with the Northeasters. So most of our conversation was about how to get to that level."

Developing successful youth and club programs isn't the only way Belichick is giving back to lacrosse in New England. As part of the Boston Local Organizing Committee's bid to bring the 2008 Men's NCAA Championships to Gillette Stadium, Belichick filmed a video for the presentation (Lax2008.com).

"Of course we're excited for [the final four] to be in Foxboro," says Belichick. "There's a lot of enthusiasm for the sport up here, with the quality of play at the high school level, UMass made the final a year ago and Wesleyan has been a goal away from the Division III game in the last couple years. ... And there are guys like [Max] Quinzani at Duke starting as a freshman. He's a great player from Duxbury. [Steven] Boyle from New Hampshire is another freshman for a national championship team. There are good players in this area. It's a good area for lacrosse and it's growing rapidly."

Belichick has even started identifying some of that homegrown talent. Mark Goodrich, *Inside Lacrosse's* No. 9 overall recruit this year, played with Belichick's son Stephen at The Rivers School. So, Belichick shot an email to JHU coach Dave Pietramala, telling him about Goodrich, who's now with the Blue Jays.

Stephen Belichick's friends, Goodrich included, have spent a lot of time at the Belichick house and have seen Bill Belichick's love for lacrosse first hand. They'd all play backyard games together over the summers. But the only open space was on

Coaching Connections

A look at some of the college lacrosse coaches who have had recent interactions with Bill Belichick

Richie Meade, Navy: During 2004 championship weekend, Meade invited Belichick to give a pregame speech. Belichick told Meade he'd tell the Midshipmen exactly what he told the Patriots before the Super Bowl, about every guy knowing his role and trusting his teammates to know theirs. Says Meade: "Belichick walked out and Mike Pressler was in the room because he was working as a host for the NCAA. Pressler said to me, 'That was pretty interesting.' And I said, 'Yeah. He told them what we tell them all the time, but they'll listen to him.'"

Dave Pietramala, Johns Hopkins: "After he spoke at the All-American Banquet in 2006, we sat and talked for three hours at the hotel restaurant. We talked about different philosophies, about toughness, Xs and Os, competition, coaching. Of course I wanted to know about his world and he was also inquisitive about ours. I continue to look at it as

a learning experience and a privilege but I consider him a friend now."

Bob Shillinglaw, Delaware: "I played at Severna Park and he played at Annapolis, so we were arch rivals. I went to his dad's football camp at Washington College every year. ... A couple years ago, when he was with the Giants playing at Philly, a university reporter asked him about a former Delaware tight end on the Eagles. And Belichick stopped, mentioned me and said, 'Tell him I say hi.' So he's a football guy, but he still thinks about lacrosse."

Jim Stagnitta, Rutgers: Belichick's son Stephen is a freshman defender for Rutgers, so Stagnitta and his family have gotten to know the Belichicks. "At the final four in Baltimore, we were grabbing some crabs at Obrycki's. And Bill walked in with his family. The place is packed, just people all over. Bill and his family are in the corner eating crabs,

and my son goes and sits with him while he's eating and grills him for 35 minutes on Randy Moss. Bill was so gracious with him. I just don't get the sense a lot of people in his position would have time for that, but I think that's the norm with him."

Bill Tierney, Princeton: "I met him at the All-American Banquet," Tierney says. "He said some nice things to me and I was stunned he even knew who I was." Then, in late-August during a telephone interview with an IL reporter, Tierney said: "I'm sorry to cut this short, but I've got to return a call from Bill Belichick. I'm not sure what he's calling about."

Seth Tierney, Hofstra: "I don't have the relationship with him that Coach Pietramala does. But when I got the job at Hofstra, he shot me an email congratulating me, which was pretty humbling." —M.K.

"LACROSSE WAS A HUGE, IMPORTANT THING IN HIS LIFE AND NOT JUST AS A SPORT BUT AS SOMETHING THAT HELPED MAKE HIM WHAT HE IS TODAY."
—PETER KING, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

your own life and fortunes don't lie on every pass, not that I wouldn't be emotionally into a Hopkins game. ... And, I'm glad my kids are enjoying it as much or more than I did."

The son of legendary Navy football coach Steve Belichick, Bill grew up in Annapolis, where he played football and lacrosse. He played mostly defense in

high school, bumped up to middle and attack while in college at Wesleyan, and even stepped in goal in an emergency situation.

"I played goalie for a quarter against UMass," says Belichick. "They were very good so it was not a lot of fun. You get a different outlook from the cage. ... But it made it a lot of fun to appreciate all aspects of the game."

a hill, so one day Belichick told the guys he needed a hand.

"He told us he needed us to help him with some yard work," says Goodrich. "So we ripped up a bunch of trees in the back. I remember tying a stump to a truck to clear out room for a lax field."

Thanks to Coach Belichick, the 2008 NCAA Championships won't be the first time a lacrosse stick has been seen on the field at Gillette Stadium either. He has let Stephen and his friends get involved with the Patriots, working with the team over the summer, cutting video for scouting sessions and doing other tasks.

"Growing up in Annapolis, Saturday was a great time to go watch lacrosse games or swing up to Towson to Bacharach Rasin to pick up a wood stick." —Bill Belichick

"I'm just happy to be a part of it and happy he lets me and my friends get involved," says Stephen Belichick. "Me and my buddy were just throwing around out on the game field today and my dad came out to hang out with us. ... He loves the sport. He comes to every game he can. ... He introduced me to it, gave me my first stick and taught me how to play in the backyard."

IT WASN'T THE BEST warmup of his Hopkins career. But it was one of the most memorable.

Out on Homewood Field in early April, 2007, just a day before a matchup with Duke, Blue Jays goalie Jesse Schwartzman focused on protecting the goal not from assistant coach Bobby Benson, but from Belichick.

"His shot was just a little awkward," says Schwartzman, "but he did get one in on me. It was one of those change-ups that was tough to judge."

According to Schwartzman, Belichick shrugged off the goal like he fires shots past Division I All-Americans on a daily basis. The rest of the Hopkins team

wasn't as smooth about it. They erupted in cheers for Belichick, and gave Schwartzman an earful.

"We got on him pretty good about it," says attackman Steven Boyle.

Boyle, a New Hampshire native, got a pretty big kick out of the experience. The team stretched as a group while Belichick shot on Schwartzman. That is, until coach Dave Pietramala had a better idea for the

only player from New England on the '07 squad.

"Imagine Steven Boyle, a huge Patriots fan, watching this during team stretching," says Pietramala. "So I walked up to him and said, 'Why don't you go warm up the goalies with Coach.'"

So, to sum up Boyle's freshman year at Hopkins: he was MVP of the inaugural Face-Off Classic and an honorable mention All-America; he won a national championship; and he got to play catch with one of his idols. Sounds like it went pretty well.

"[The highlight] is just the story that goes along with it," says Boyle, of his shooting session with Belichick. "There are a lot of Pats fans [at home in New Hampshire] so they thought it was pretty awesome."

Belichick was at Hopkins mainly because of his friendship with Pietramala, which started at the '04 NCAA championship weekend. Pietramala had worked with current Patriots tight ends coach Pete Mangurian at Cornell, so Belichick remembered Pietramala and called him a year later to congratulate him on his own championship.

Now, they visit each other's practices — the Hopkins staff spent a couple of days with the Patriots in late August — and regularly exchange phone calls and emails. As you might expect, Pietramala has picked up some things from Belichick, like how to handle winning or how to be more efficient with practice and film sessions. Other things, like letting the guy who practices the hardest one day pick the music the next, help promote a work ethic and build chemistry.

"He allowed us to sit in on their meetings and it was fabulous," Pietramala says of his staff trip to Fox-



■ The highs far outnumber the lows for Tom Brady and Bill Belichick, both three-time Super Bowl champions. But in the offseason, lacrosse gets much of Belichick's attention.

boro. "I must've checked my phone 20 times to make sure it didn't ring. ... The thing I've really learned the most is that he's a great listener. He's so inquisitive. He wants to better himself and his franchise. He wants to find a little tidbit everywhere. He's so successful but he'll still think to ask me a question about

how we do things."

Belichick says he's learned plenty from Pietramala, whether it's on-the-field things like preparing for a big game, or an off-the-field incident with a player.

"We had a situation recently where one of our players was killed in a jet ski accident," says Belichick, referring to the death of Marquise Hill in May. "And Dave [Pietramala] had gone through similar things a couple years ago. So we've talked about how he handled that and about all kinds of things."

Of course, it's not all work all the time. Pietramala laughs when he recalls meeting Tom Brady: "Here I am thinking what a tough guy Brady is, getting the snot knocked out of him all the time, and he goes, 'Man, lacrosse is a tough sport with you guys hitting each other with those pipes all the time.'"

Pietramala isn't alone. Over the years, whether it's through his ties with the Naval Academy, or through his daughter Amanda and son Stephen, Belichick has befriended several college lacrosse coaches. Meade welcomed him into the locker room for the '04 final four. Notre Dame's Kevin Corrigan got him to speak at the 2006 NCAA All-American banquet. Delaware's Bob Shillinglaw played against him in high school and maintains sporadic contact. And Rutgers' Jim Stagnitta has gotten to know him well through recruiting Stephen.

Belichick invited Stagnitta and his family to New England for the Patriots game against the Bears last season. They stayed in the same hotel and even attended the team dinner.

"I have a 10-year-old son and he's like a lot of 10-

"[Bill] told us he needed help with some yard work. So we ripped up a bunch of trees in the back to clear out room for a lacrosse field."

—Mark Goodrich, JHU

year-olds in that he plays sports and loves athletics," says Stagnitta. "So we're sitting there and my son is asking question after question and Bill is introducing him to all the players. I know how I am the night before a big game, so about an hour into dinner, I said, 'I'm gonna take [my son] out of here and get out of your hair. I'm sure your pregame regimen doesn't entail getting grilled by a 10-year-old.' And he just said, 'Jim, it'd be nice if you guys could stick around and watch the Notre Dame-USC game with us. My guys have no problems getting focused for games.' So we stayed and watched the game. It was very nice of him to do that."

Getting to know a man through a few scattered anecdotes is never thorough enough. But, by hearing these stories, you begin to understand why Belichick has been so successful. Obviously, his knowledge of the game from his relationship with his father is unparalleled. Through his work with the Northeasters, he obviously takes initiative and gets people organized. From his relationship with Pietramala and other lacrosse coaches, it's clear he's always listening

and learning. And Stagnitta's experience with the team shows he's pretty grounded, as are the players he brings to his team.

All of those attributes have combined to create the three-time Super Bowl champion. Well, all of those and maybe one more thing — a fierce competitiveness.

"He is the consummate competitor," says Pietramala, speaking of Belichick's shooting session with Schwartzman and Boyle. "He used both hands because he would not let [Schwartzman] know which hand was his strong hand. He said he was going to work on his shot and come back ready to go."

Goodrich, in the backyard games at the Belichick house, has seen this competitiveness as well.

"He doesn't tell anybody what hand he is," says the Hopkins freshman. "Stephen doesn't even know. It's his own son and he won't even tell. We have all these guesses. I think he's a righty, but then I see him shoot lefty and say, 'I don't think so.'"

Whether he's a righty or lefty might forever remain a mystery. But one thing's for sure: The lacrosse world hasn't heard the last of Bill Belichick. ■