

After emotional family losses, Calvert Hall wins A Conference lacrosse title

TOWSON - After Calvert Hall was awarded the championship plaque after winning its second straight Maryland Interscholastic Athletic Association A Conference lacrosse title May 18, Peter Ilardo quickly grabbed it. The senior gave the award a big kiss, screamed and began passing it around to his teammates.

The Cardinals earned that conference championship with an 8-6 victory over Boys' Latin in the title game at Towson University's Johnny Unitas Stadium. This Calvert Hall title was the culmination of a painful journey through a season of sadness for those connected with the Calvert Hall lacrosse program.

They lost long-time assistant coach Dave Huntley, who died suddenly last December, which still affects the team. Then Ilardo, one of the team's captains, lost his father, Harry, after a long illness just two days before this game.

There were some tears in the eyes of Calvert Hall coach Bryan Kelly while trying to describe how difficult the last few months have been for him and his players.

"It's been a journey and it's been hard; it's been a hard year for me emotionally," Kelly said. "Never won a championship without Dave (Huntley) on the sidelines. Peter losing his father on Wednesday...and tonight being the 18th (of the month), and that's Dave's number (at Johns Hopkins University). There's just a lot of things. I just felt like it was a God thing tonight. He's been involved in everything, and he's helped walk me through."

Ilardo said sitting out this game was not an option. After all, the senior knew his father would not have wanted that.

"I knew my dad would have been pretty mad at me if I didn't play," Ilardo said with a smile. "He was one who never wanted me to stop. I just played for him. I know he's

watching, and I know he's here."

Ilardo's extra-man goal put Calvert Hall (16-3) ahead to stay at 3-2. The Cardinals, who beat Loyola Blakefield two-days earlier in a rain-delyaed semifinal, led 6-4 at halftime. The victors held the Lakers without a goal for nearly two quarters, from late in the second quarter until late in the fourth, after the Cardinals had taken an 8-4 lead.

Grant Mitchell (three goals), Jack Sawyer (two goals, one assist) and Daniel Kelly (two goals, one assist) helped on offense along with Jacob Kelly (two assists). Then there was Ilardo putting the Cardinals ahead to stay, to the satisfaction of many.

"I wanted one so bad for [his father]," Ilardo said. "I know he would have been super proud."

After celebrating on the field for several minutes, the Calvert Hall players gathered for a team picture to commemorate their championship, waiting as Ilardo was talking with the media.

Players began yelling that Ilardo needed to move right into the middle, and so he did. Ilardo laid down front and center, smiled broadly and the pictures began, more memories of an emotional championship win.

"Seeing Pete, a guy that's been there for me since freshman year, his father passing, we had to do it for him, and we did," said Sawyer. "This one was for Pete and Coach Hunts."

For a photo gallery, scroll below.