

## *Mike Epstein*



**M**IKE EPSTEIN left his mark on the sport of lacrosse in Norwalk on both sides of town, one on the field and the other off.

As a player at Norwalk High School, the three-year attackman had a record-breaking career, graduating in 1985 as the city's all-time leader in goals. A decade later, the former Bear was named the new head lacrosse coach at Brien McMahon and over the next 18 seasons transformed the Senators into a perennial FCIAC and state championship contender.

Epstein's lacrosse journey began as a freshman at NHS in the spring of 1982 and a year later he made the varsity roster. His breakout season, however, would come as a junior in 1984 when he scored 43 goals to set a new school and city single-season record. He also recorded 23 assists to finish

with a team-leading 66 points.

He was even better as a senior captain in 1985, breaking his own record with 64 goals while adding 29 assists for 93 points, another school and city record. Those impressive numbers included Epstein scoring a record eight goals (and adding one assist) in the Bears' exciting 14-13 overtime win against perennial power New Canaan.

In addition, Epstein's 113 career goals were also a city record while his 54 career assists gave him a total of 167 points, tying the city's all-time record set by former teammate and 1982 NHS grad Eric Prescott, who was a senior when Epstein broke in as a freshman.

Norwalk would finish 15-4 and reach the FCIAC championship game and state semifinals in Epstein's final season. Besides being voted team MVP, first-team All-FCIAC, and first-team all-state, Epstein capped off his outstanding career by being named a high school All-American by U.S. Lacrosse.

Following a successful career at Division I University of Vermont, Epstein returned to NHS as an assistant coach under his former mentor Randy McCue, a 2013 Norwalk Old Timers honoree. After five years in that role, Epstein was ready to run his own program and when a position opened up on the other side of town, he traded his green and white colors for red, white, and blue as he was named the new head lacrosse coach at Brien McMahon.

It didn't take him long to bring respectability to the Senators' program, leading the team to an 8-8 regular-season record in 1998 and its first state tournament berth in just his third season at the helm. McMahon then won its first postseason game in program history, upsetting No. 3 Guilford to reach the Division II semifinals before losing a 9-7 heartbreaker to No. 2 and eventual state champion Fairfield High.

The Senators returned to the D-II state semis in 1999 while posting a winning record (10-9) for the first time. Then in 2000, in only his fifth season as head coach, Epstein guided No. 1 seed McMahon to the CIAC Division II state championship with a thrilling 12-11 victory over No. 3 Guilford to finish with a 15-5 record. McMahon moved up to Division I the following season

and in 2005 the Senators reeled off three straight state tourney wins to advance to the D-I state championship game, where it lost to perennial national power Darien.

Epstein would coach McMahan 18 seasons, stepping down after the 2013 season with a 192-135 record and a .846 winning percentage. In addition, he coached 11 high school All-Americans, two Academic All-Americans, numerous All-FCIAC and All-State selections, and had over 70 players play collegiately, including over 20 at the Division I level.

The Senators' all-time winningest coach also collected his share of coaching honors during his career, including being named FCIAC Coach of the Year in 2007 and 2011, the Connecticut High School Lacrosse Coaches Association Coach of the Year in 1997, 2000, 2005 and 2011, and the US Lacrosse State Coach of the Year in 2011.

One of the biggest honors Epstein received came in 2008 when he received the *National Frank McGuire Award*, which honors coaches who “exemplify integrity, achievement and a continued quest for excellence from themselves and their athletes.”

Epstein remained close to the sport as a volunteer coach in the Fairfield Youth Lacrosse program, and would eventually return to the high school scene in 2019 as part of the Fairfield Prep coaching staff. He is currently the offensive coordinator for the Jesuits, who have won four Southern Connecticut Conference championships and were Class L state runner-up in 2021 during Epstein's time with the team. He previously served as an assistant coach in the Stamford High girls volleyball program from 1992-95 and was an assistant field hockey coach at McMahan from 1996-2005.