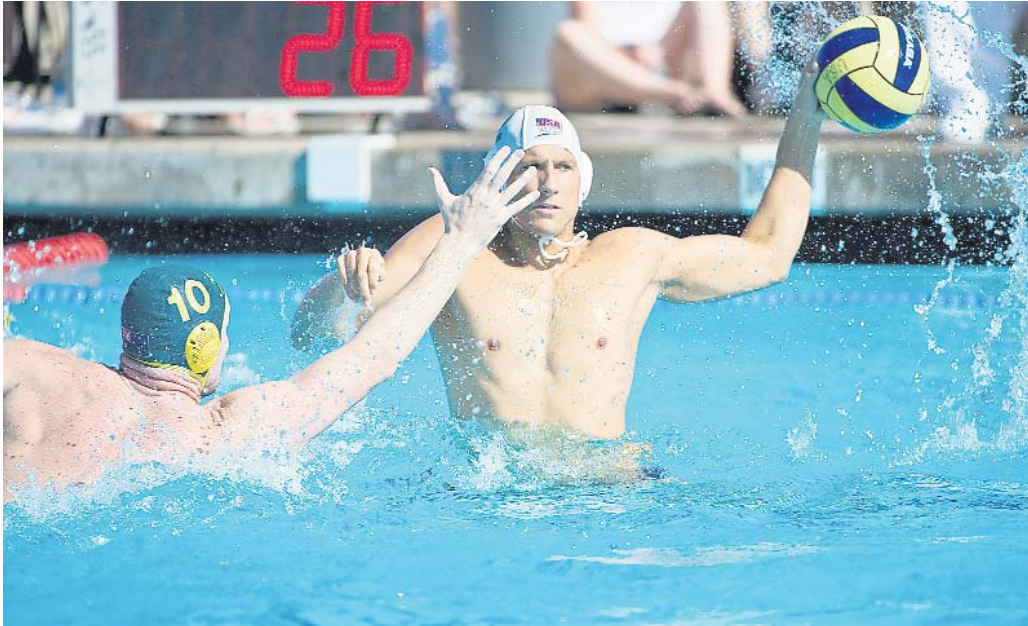


Local Water Polo Standout Plays Back At Home

By Jack Fernbacher



Peter Verellas

Photo Robert Johnson



Peter Verellas surrounded by the youth

Photo Doug Kohen

After months of traveling around the world, one water polo standout got the rare chance to play in his hometown with the Senior National Men's Water Polo team. Campolindo graduate Peter Verellas played with the national team against Australia in familiar water at the Soda Aquatic Center at Campolindo High School on June 7.

"It was really great to be back," said Varellas, who has been playing professional Water Polo in Italy for the past couple of years. "As a national team, we don't get many chances to play in the United States. It was nice to be at home, see all the familiar faces, and literally sleep in my own house."

In the game, the United States got off to a roaring start as captain and Stanford graduate Tony Azevedo scored two early goals and led the team to a 4-0 lead at halftime. The United States held on to the lead to defeat Australia 6-4 in front of a sold out crowd at the Aquatic Center.

"We were favored to beat Australia, but it always feels nice to win," said Varellas. "It was really awesome to see the younger players and fans supporting us at the game."

The United States National Team came into the Australia game with momentum after beating the reigning world champion Croatia 8-5. Currently the United States is ranked ninth, so the victory over Croatia was a big win.

The Olympic squad for the United States will only have thirteen players and right now the national team consists of eighteen players. The final thirteen will be determined later in June and Varellas hopes to be headed for Beijing.

"Our team is headed off to Europe right now to play other national teams," said Varellas. "Then, we will train back in the U.S., and all I can do is try my hardest and hope for the best."

At the introduction of the game, players of the Lamorinda Water Polo Club team surrounded Varellas as the announcer listed off his numerous accomplishments. At the end of the welcoming speech, the announcer inducted Varellas as the first ever player into the Lamorinda Water Polo Hall of Fame.

"The special intro was awesome and made me think about how many people helped me get to where I am," said Varellas. "When I started, there was no avenue for any players to play before high school. Lamorinda has been a huge part of my development as a player and I got to where I am because of all the people who helped me."