

*Editorials*

## Letter from the Editor: A Warrior’s Welcome

By Inica Kotasthane, Editor in Chief



With an unconventional start, in the form of destruction from Hurricane Ida, to an already unconventional year—the first year that some of us are entering the school building after eighteen months—I’d like to welcome all of the freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors to Watchung Hills Regional High School.

After a year and a half of either virtual or hybrid learning, the Watchung Hills Regional High School community is happy for all students to be back for in-person instruction. In addition to the year-to-year changes that come along with classes of students entering and leaving the building and new teachers joining the staff, this year has been marked with unique shifts, including the complete renovation of the Learning Commons and pandemic-induced seating charts. As we begin returning to the swing of things, Watchung Hills is beginning to look like the familiar school that I know and (sometimes) love: it is a vibrant place filled with grumbling students in the hallways, long lines in the lunchrooms, and constantly fluctuating temperatures in every classroom.

I kid, I kid. But seriously, I never know whether to bring a sweatshirt to school or not.

There are a multitude of reasons for this year to be one for the books. For one thing, many of us can finally have some semblance of normalcy. Sure, there’s nothing quite as jarring as receiving a contact tracing email in your inbox, but hey, at least you can see your friends everyday. Sports are open to spectators again, and our football team has played two home games thus far, drawing hundreds of supporters as they faced off against Elizabeth and Westfield. The pep rally, organized by our student government, bolstered school spirit, and our upcoming Flex Day is bound to cause some confusion, just as it always has.

Freshmen still get lost in the hallways and are forced to ask teachers for help. Upperclassmen still try to sneak into the North Cafe for the “better food.” Things seem to be right in the universe.

Overall, this year is shaping up to be a good one. Sure, we had a rocky start, but the Watchung Hills community is great at working together and overcoming obstacles. If any group of students, teachers, and administration can deal with a global pandemic, a hurricane, and dysfunctional air conditioning, it’s this one.

To all of our warriors, old and new, welcome back to Watchung Hills Regional High School. Although this year is completely different than anything we’ve ever experienced before, let’s make it a good one!

## WHRHS Football Kicks Off 2021-2022 Season

By Tanguy Lesegetrain, Sports Editor



*Image Courtesy of Mike Hamlett Photography*

After a few key graduations in the past year, the Warriors football team, coached by Rich Seubert, looks to enjoy another strong season.

With some uncertainty on offense, it seems as if the team’s defense will be instrumental for the Warriors as the season progresses.

Middle linebacker and three-year varsity player, Bjorn Golden, stands out for the defensive unit.

Defensive end Chris Huljack remarks, “Our defense has been performing well.”

Senior Brian Scopel has stepped in at quarterback for the Warriors on the other side of the ball, following the graduation of Cornell quarterback Chad Martini.

Center Hunter Seubert, who as a junior, leads the offensive line.

The Warriors had a successful preseason but have since lost their first games in the regular season in some close games, recently scoring 11-13 against Elizabeth and 13-15 against Westfield.

Nevertheless, the season is still long and the team asks students to come to home games to show their support!



*Image Courtesy of Mike Hamlett Photography*

## Features

### Students Talk Back-To-School

By Isabella Lesende and Sunayana Navuluri, Staff Writers

With a new school year underway, we asked students: “How are you handling the school year? Do you wish anything were different? What are you looking forward to this year?”

Their answers were...

“I’ve been handling the school year well so far. Being in person has motivated me much more than the hybrid model both academically and socially. I’m looking forward to some school events such as the club fair so I can experience more of what Watchung Hills has to offer”

- Katerina Sicard (Class of 2024)

“I am having a hard time handling this school year because of the highly increased workload compared to last year, where we only had to do homework for four classes each day instead of six classes. I am also having a hard time adjusting to the length of each school day going from five to seven hours. I wish that we had the option to stay virtual and have shorter days again.”

- Anonymous Sophomore

“Pretty good and better than I thought it would. I wish the schedule was simpler and more clear, but I am looking forward to school events and activities and also taking classes that I actually like.”

- Anonymous Freshman

“I’m not handling it that well because I’m stressed. I wish we had longer break and lunch time. I’m looking forward to meeting new people.”

- Anonymous Sophomore

“I think I’m handling the school year pretty well so far. I wish that we had a little more time to get to our classes. I’m looking forward to getting to be better engaged in classes this year.”

- Olivia Krutz (Class of 2024)

“It’s hard to adjust to the drop schedule and the amount of homework and tests, and also I think some of the teachers expect us to adjust quickly, but it’s hard. I wish the school would have better Covid protocols at lunch because it’s such a mess. I’m looking forward to graduating.”

- Caroline Russett (Class of 2022).

“The school year was hard to adjust to after being virtual all of last year, but I am handling it well. I wish that it was easier to access your classes and work if you were to quarantine because it can be hard to keep up with all of the work you are missing if it is just through Google Classroom. I am looking forward to finishing my college applications and getting into college, as well as the fun parts of senior year like prom and other school events.”

- Maahi Manek (Class of 2022).

“I’m handling [the school year] pretty well and only wish that we didn’t have Covid and actually got to interact with our class or school. I’m looking forward to graduating.” - Emily Dang (Class of 2022).



### Learning Commons: What’s In It?

By Siena Martin, Staff Writer



With the restart of all in-person schools on September 1st came the introduction of Watchung Hills’s new Learning Commons. Initial plans for the library revamp started as far back as January of 2019, and construction ran through the summer of 2020. In 2019, Superintendent Elizabeth Jewett confirmed that the library had been considered for an update for a few years, saying that the district wanted to create a more “useful” space for students after seeing how they interacted with the media center throughout the day.

The newly updated library, designed by Spiegle Architectural Group, is made to be a state-of-the-art learning commons that balances technology and a variety of learning styles. The learning commons includes a teacher-led instruction area, podcast room, TV studio, 3D printer, VR Lab, tech desk, cafe area, and quiet areas for solo work. The moveable walls are meant to help create a more malleable learning environment.

Student reactions are very positive with a flow of students to the learning commons during study halls and lunch. “I think it’s really nice, it’s very modern looking and there’s a lot in it,” says Junior Faron Martin.

With such a variety of resources and an aesthetically-pleasing study space, students are sure to utilize the Learning Commons to further their ability to learn, study, and improve their school experience.

### Mr. Wolsko Awarded Somerset County Teacher of The Year

By Jack Osmond, Features Editor

Mr. Darrin Wolsko, freshman biology and human biology teacher, has been awarded the Somerset County Teacher of the Year Award. Wolsko was the first Watchung Hills teacher to win this award since its inception in 1998.

The award is highly selective and a great honor, as over 640 school districts are able to submit a nomination each year. The winner of the award is chosen from a pool of 35 to 40 applicants by a special committee consisting of the county president of the New Jersey Education Association, an education specialist, a county superintendent, and the current county superintendent of the year.



Mr. Wolsko has been teaching for 25 years, 18 of which have been at Watchung Hills. During his time, he has impacted countless students. His classes are more than lessons about biology. He teaches life lessons, makes his students laugh, and supports them in hard times. “The way that he cares for our students, especially in the past year, I know that he makes a tremendous difference in their lives,” Superintendent Elizabeth Jewett said in a statement to the Echoes Sentinel.

Mr. Wolsko plans to apply for the State Teacher of the Year Award, according to the Echoes Sentinel. All of us at Watchung Hills Regional High School wishes him the best of luck!

## COVID-19 Procedures at WHRHS

By Sunayana Navuluri, Staff Writer

Shortened days filled with Zoom calls and a lack of lunchtime were the realities of WHRHS students during the 2020-2021 school year. Though this year has much more normalcy compared to last year, COVID regulations are still prevalent due to the recent surge in the Delta Variant across the United States. Students and teachers are required to wear masks at all times, except lunch, regardless of their vaccination status.

On the topic of masks, one WHRHS student remarked, “I think they are essential for public safety at this time. I agree completely with the governor’s mandate, and believe it’s a necessary precaution to be taken to help prevent transmission. I feel I would not be comfortable without wearing a mask. Not to mention it would be putting other more vulnerable people at risk which I believe we should take every precaution against.” Another stated, “I do not like the masks but I am not going to go against them either.” It is obvious that there are two sides of opinions on masks, but so far, WHRHS has done an excellent job complying with the regulations.

Social distancing measures occur in the classroom, but they are not as restrictive as last year. This year, students have been separated into different areas for lunchtime by grade: freshmen sit in the North Cafeteria, sophomores in Gym 3/4, juniors in Gym 7/8, and seniors in the South Cafeteria. For those who prefer to be more socially distanced, the gazebo, picnic tables, and Senior Courtyard are open for lunch. Nevertheless, students can finally experience the “normal,” yet chaotic WHRHS lunch experience.

Many students commented on the drop schedule and how difficult it is to get used to a year of shortened classes. The rotating drop schedule has four days: Periods 4 and 8 are dropped on Day 1; Periods 1 and 5 are dropped on Day 2; Periods 2 and 6 are dropped on Day 3; and Periods 3 and 7 are dropped on Day 4. Compared to the A and B schedule that students had last year, this year’s schedule is very overwhelming for new students.

Overall, with football games, in-person school, lunch, and in-person clubs, WHRHS has taken a big step forward towards normalcy, which has allowed for students to experience high school in a more exciting way.



## Senior Spotlight: How Matthew Nunes Started a Non-Profit Out of his Living Room

By Ryan Rana, Staff Writer

During the past year and a half, Covid-19 has affected all of us, and while most just tried to keep their head down and get through it, there have also been those who go out and help. One of these people is Matthew Nunes, a senior at WHRHS.

Nunes started a non-profit organization out of his living room that 3D prints face shields for anyone who needs one. He has donated shields to the Warren Police, EMS, Brooklyn Hospital, Fire/EMS, St.Peters, and a plethora of other places.

“I love fixing technology and doing different things with 3D printers,” Nunes said. While he has been doing things with this tech for a while, he recently found a way to utilize his skills to help out the community.

Originally making masks with just one printer, and sending out to those who requested it on his facebook page, he quickly ran into some issues. He was getting more and more requests and he wasn’t able to handle all of them by himself and using just one printer.



To solve this issue, Nunes set up a Go-Fund me page and raised nearly seven thousand dollars. He used this money to purchase more materials and seven more printers. He also recruited four other friends and family members to help handle all the orders. Nunes credits his team, which includes Samantha Nunes, John Cerwinski, and Jeffrey Opell for helping him along the way. When asked what inspired him to do this his answer could not have been more simple, “I saw a lot of people were dying because of COVID and I wanted to help out.”

What is so special about the work Nunes has done is that he is showing the world that anyone can make a difference. It does not matter one’s age or what resources one has, because if someone is genuinely interested in helping others, people will take notice and will contribute however they can.

“The best advice I could give anyone is that if you want to help someone to just go for it. Anyone willing to help can make a difference in someone’s life like we did with a lot of people,” Nunes noted. So far, he has made and donated 2,946 shields.

With Covid-19 arguably slowing down in terms of cases and with more and more vaccinations occurring, Matt is searching for another problem that could use his leadership, compassion, and resources. Anyone who wants to contact him can check out his website [njshields.org](http://njshields.org).

## Rap Battle: *CLB* v. *Donda*

By Sravan Desu and Arya Reddy, Staff Writers

Recently, two Grammy award-winning artists, Drake and Kanye West, released albums this summer. Drake released *CLB* (Certified Lover Boy) and West released *Donda*. Both artists are legends in the hip-hop community, and music industry as a whole, and have released critically acclaimed albums in the past.

Despite these similarities, though, the two seem to have a rivalry. Drake always admired Kanye but their real animosity started around 2010 where some people thought that Drake was talking about Kanye in a negative way. Because of this, the release of their albums only five days apart quickly sparked an unspoken competition and two big questions among fans of hip-hop.

The first question is a simple one of numbers, that has equally simple answers: In the first week of streaming, *Donda* out-streamed *CLB*, but later, *CLB* out-streamed *Donda* by a few million. The second, more complicated question that's being asked is: Is *Donda* or *CLB* better? The artists' relationship from the past few years makes this topic even more interesting.

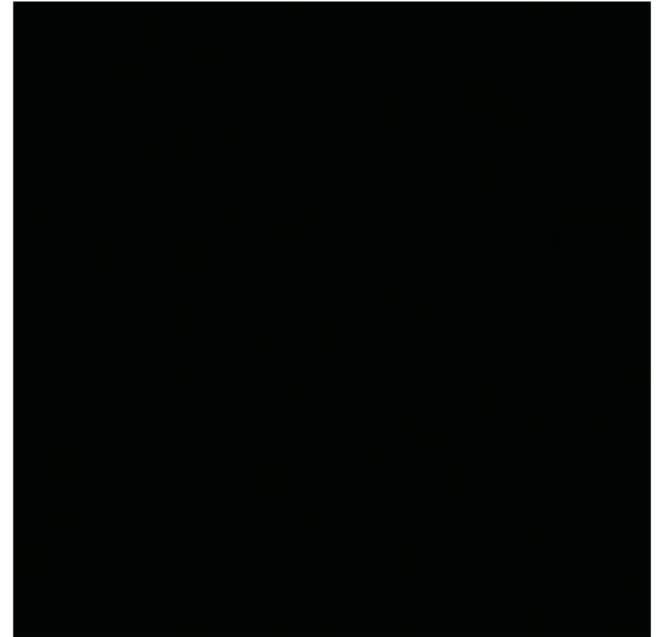
To provide more opinions on the matter, here is what some of our students had to say:

- "I liked CLB better because I don't like Kanye and it's just better."
- "I liked CLB because it's Drake."
- "CLB was a hundred times better."
- "Kanye's was way better."
- "Drake was overhyped this time."



*Drake's album cover for CLB.*

*Kanye's album cover for Donda.*



## *Kissing Booth 3: A Kiss Goodbye*

By Grace Liu, Staff Writer

After four years of notoriously terrible movies, Netflix recently closed up the controversial *Kissing Booth* series. The movie surrounds two brothers and a girl whose moms were best friends. The younger brother, Lee, and the girl, Elle, have an unbreakable platonic bond but their friendship is jeopardized when Elle and Lee's brother, Noah, fall in love. In order to raise money, Lee and Elle created a kissing booth and a kiss between Elle and Noah sparked feelings. The entire series explores the balance between friendship and relationships and lasts over the course of Lee and Elle's journey from junior year to college.

These movies were heavily criticized by the majority audience because of their distinct awkwardness, cliché plot, and cringe worthy dialogue. This poor feedback amounts to one reason: it is completely unrelatable to their target audience: teenagers. The scene, setting, plot, feelings, and experiences are all based on the premise of high school romance, and thus, the movie's fate falls in the hands of teenagers. For the same reason that adults do not have *Doc McStuffins* as their first pick for a medical drama, most teenagers cannot bear to watch adult actors wrongly depict relatable experiences.

However, questionable execution aside, the movie plot and concept was commendable. The themes of learning to balance relationships and the inevitable happenings of growing up had great potential as teenagers often struggle with an awkward position of becoming an independent member of society. The plot, unlike the dialogue, had unique factors that were overlooked by other critics. For one, the kissing booth is every teenager's dream because of the kissing, the hot people, the romance, and the unpredictability.

Also, it highlighted the reality of high school relationships, which is commonly misunderstood by high schoolers to be easygoing and everlasting, when that could not be farther from the truth. Instead of fulfilling the obvious unrealistic timeline that Elle and Noah stay together forever despite all their built up history, they break up in the third movie. Finally, Elle's character development was empowering to all teenagers as they tread through this transition in their life.

Like the majority of the population, Elle is scared of change and the only thing she's ever known was her relationship with Lee and Noah so it is inevitable that when choosing colleges, she is choosing between Harvard and Berkeley, where Noah and Lee are going respectively. However, when her relationship with Noah falls through after committing to Harvard, which he attends, she is granted this scary new freedom to make a change based on herself, which was applying to USC. This storyline had potential to inspire and show teenagers a multitude of things from making decisions for oneself to having courage to seek change; however, given it was caked in platitudes, no one positively responded to it.

Therefore, while the targets for the plot and themes of *The Kissing Booth* Series were not without potential, the execution simply fell short.

## Why the US Withdrew from Afghanistan

By Julia deMontagnac, Staff Writer

September 11, 2001, is a day that America will never forget. On this fateful day, the global terrorist group al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, launched a terrorist attack on the United States, killing 2,997 civilians.

On September 12, 2001, former President George W. Bush addressed a mourning nation and launched the Global War on Terrorism - a war “campaign to counter anti-Americanism” in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East. The goals of this war were to destroy al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other global terrorist groups, and to establish a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan to prevent the country from continuing to serve as “a sanctuary for terrorists with global reach.”

On October 7, 2001, the United States launched the first airstrikes in Afghanistan, which targeted al-Qaeda and the Taliban. This first attack was the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, fought in Afghanistan. At first, this operation was successful in removing the Taliban from power and immobilizing al-Qaeda. However, due to corruption in the Afghan government and armed forces, the Taliban continued to resurge.

Even so, on May 2, 2011, the U.S. Navy SEALs successfully located and killed Osama bin Laden. A month after the death of bin Laden, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that the U.S. government and Taliban were making reconciliation efforts to end the conflict in Afghanistan. Then, on June 22, 2011, President Obama announced that the United States would withdraw combat forces from Afghanistan by 2014, because “the United States had largely achieved its goals by disrupting al-Qaeda’s operations and killing many of its leaders.” However, after several incidents in 2012, the Taliban stopped participating in reconciliation talks with the United States. This led the United States and the Afghan government to come to a new agreement, named the Bilateral Security Agreement. Under this agreement, the United States would withdraw combat troops from Afghanistan in 2014, but would retain a reduced number of troops to train and advise the Afghan forces. The training of U.S. troops aimed to teach Afghan forces how to fight the Taliban insurgency, and forced President Obama to maintain 5,500 troops in Afghanistan and abandon all plans to completely withdraw.

President Trump tried again to withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan, believing that U.S. troops were only serving as “policemen.” The Trump Administration negotiated the Doha Peace Agreement with the Taliban, stating that the United States would withdraw from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021 as long as the Taliban took “action against al-Qaeda and other terrorists” and work to reduce violence in the country.

In March 2021, President Biden stated that it would be “tough” to orchestrate a safe and orderly withdrawal by the May 1 deadline, extending the withdrawal deadline to September 11. In retaliation to President Biden’s announcement, the Taliban increased their violence by 37% and maintained ties with al-Qaeda, violating the Doha Peace Agreement. Acknowledging the Taliban’s provoked response, President Biden moved the withdrawal deadline to August 31, 2021.

President Biden supported the withdrawal from Afghanistan because he believed that the U.S. missions overseas should have “clear achievable goals” and “stay clearly focused on the fundamental national security interests of the United States.” President Biden refuted those who advocated for keeping a small number of troops in Afghanistan, stating, “There is nothing low grade or low risk or low cost about any war.” Statistics show that the war cost roughly \$300 million per day, totaling more than \$2 trillion spent on this war since 2001. Furthermore, from October 2001 to April 2021, the war has led to the deaths of 2,448 American service members, 3,846 U.S. contractors, 66,000 Afghan national military and police, 1,144 allied service members, 47,245 Afghan civilians, 444 aid workers, and 72 journalists.

During the last month of the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, Afghan political leaders gave up and fled the country, and the Afghan military collapsed, allowing the Taliban to take over the government. According to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, although the United States trained the Afghan forces and provided them with modern air force equipment and weapons, the Afghan forces lacked the leadership to resist the Taliban’s takeover.

President Biden has stated that the U.S. will continue to support Afghanistan in “diplomacy, international influence and humanitarian aid.” In a speech on the U.S.’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, President Biden said, “Human rights will be the center of our foreign policy, but the way to do that is not through endless military deployments but through diplomacy, economic tools and rallying the rest of the world for support.”

## China Restricts Video Game Time

By James Wang, Staff Writer

Starting September 1, China will restrict minors (those under the age of 18) from playing over three hours of video games per week. According to the National Press and Publication Administration, minors will only be able to play video games between 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Fridays, weekends, and public holidays. These are yet another set of strict regulations imposed by the central government to crack-down on the technology, education, housing, and entertainment industries. The government has recently cracked down on large companies, including Alibaba, Didi, and Tencent. It also has banned the paid tutoring of core school subjects in order to prevent wealthy families from receiving an advantage over less wealthy families in education. Stricter regulations toward fanquan’s (online fan circles) also hope to mitigate the toxicity and brainless following of celebrities, in which underage fans often irresponsibly spend their own or parents’ money on celebrity rankings, songs, and promoted products.

To be more specific, the recent gaming restrictions are mainly aimed toward free online mobile games. This includes Tencent’s Honor of Kings, which has become the most popular mobile game in China. The government enforced the stricter regulations in hope that they will help curve the growing childhood addiction toward video games.

Parents have been large advocates for such regulations. For years, parents have expressed their concern and dissatisfaction toward video games. This eventually led to the regulations in 2019, in which minors were only allowed to play 90 minutes of games a day. Yet even these rules were not strict enough for many parents, pressuring the government to further tighten the restrictions toward minors.

While it is obvious that many parents support the recent regulations in the industry, many others are not as happy. Many netizens on Weibo, a large social media platform in China, have stated that the restrictions are too strict, treating a seventeen year old the same way as a five year old. Some have suggested that different age groups should be allowed to play different lengths of time. Furthermore, some have expressed that the 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. time frame is ridiculous, not taking into account those who are not free during the time. In addition, many are certain that minors will simply use their parent’s identity to create accounts, or use other consoles, in order to completely bypass the entire system.

While there are many criticisms that can be made toward the regulations, there are also a few positive outcomes that must be recognized as well. For one, the regulations on online video games will help to boost the single-player video game sector. Currently, China’s video game industry relies heavily on online multiplayer games, giving companies no reason to develop single-player games. With the restrictions only centering on online games, companies will be forced to think creatively and begin to develop new single-player games that can revive the sector. The regulations might also begin to encourage schools to introduce more extracurricular activities outside of pure academics. The Chinese education system focuses largely on academics, giving students little to no opportunity to pursue activities such as sports, school clubs, and music.

China’s new gaming regulations toward minors have sparked controversy within the gaming community and society overall. Some have joked that the government is simply proving to parents that even restricting video games will not raise their child’s grades, feeling that the nation’s parenting culture has gone off the rails. Others feel that children will at last be freed from what is being called a “spiritual opium” that has been destroying the nation’s youth for the past decade. It is not entirely known what the future of China’s gaming industry will be like, but it does not mean that it is the end.

## Kickoff of the NFL 2021-22 Season

By Jacob Meltzer, Staff Writer

A thrilling offensive battle kicked off the NFL season on September 9th. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers defeated the Dallas Cowboys 31-29 on a game winning field goal from Ryan Succop. Despite the outstanding game including Dak Prescott's 403 yards and 3 touchdowns, the Cowboys fell just short.

### Giants Recap

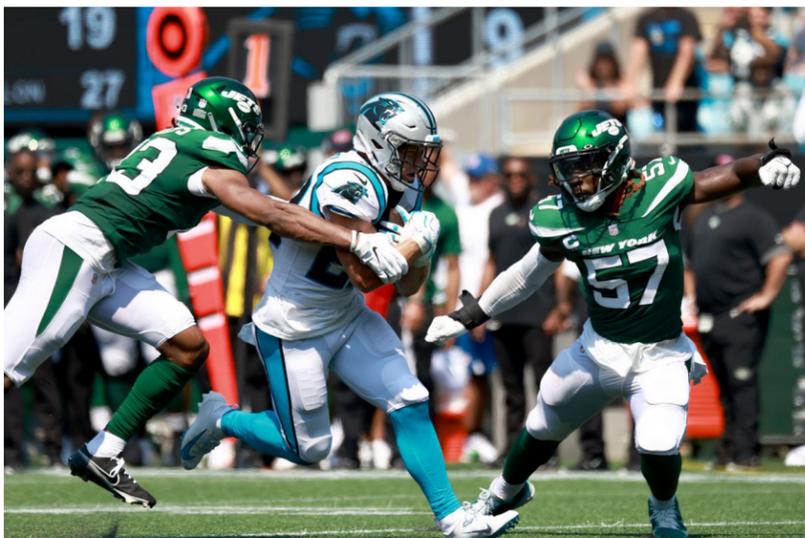
Despite the optimism of the team going into the season with its new additions such as wide receiver Kenny Golladay and first round pick Kadarius Toney, as well as the return of Saquon Barkely from a season ending injury, the New York Giants couldn't seem to figure things out against the Denver Broncos. Their offense was lackluster and the defense failed to come up with important stops and had numerous missed tackles. The Giants couldn't gain momentum the entire game. They lost 27-14 with the majority of disappointed fans leaving MetLife Stadium after the Giants failed to score an important touchdown to trim the lead to 6 points.



Overall, a disappointing week one for Giants Fans. The team hopes to bounce back on Thursday Night Football against their division rival, the Washington Football Team.

### Jets Recap

Carolina Panthers quarterback Sam Darnold, who was the former Jets quarterback, got his revenge against his previous team on Sunday. He threw for 279 yards and 1 passing touchdown while also running for a touchdown. He was aided by Christian McCaffery who had a monster game with 187 yards from scrimmage and ex-Jet Robby Anderson on a 57 yard touchdown pass. The 2021-2022 season sparked a new era for the New York Jets as they drafted their future quarterback, Zach Wilson, second overall in the 2021 NFL Draft. The Jets put up little resistance against the Panthers in the first half, being down 16-0.



However, they came back to life in the second with 2 touchdown passes from Zach Wilson to his newly signed wide receiver Corey Davis. Despite the Jets' best attempt, the Panthers emerged victorious 19-14. Jets fans hope that Zach Wilson will lead the team to a prosperous era.

## WHRHS Men's Varsity Soccer Preseason

By Aaron Opell, Assistant Sports Editor

As fall sports begin at Watchung Hills, many may want to know how our Warriors are gearing up for the season.

Warriors Soccer is popular at Watchung Hills with 27 players on the varsity roster. Coach Leonow, head varsity coach, explained how preseason focused on several components of the game. "In the physical aspect of the game we looked to increase our fitness through game-oriented activities. Psychologically we looked to build on overall player confidence. Tactically we focused on what to do when our team has possession of the ball and group defending when we lose possession." With a full roster and comprehensive training plan, the Warriors won-out their pre-season schedule with wins against South Plainfield and Governor Livingston.

The 2021 season outlook is very positive with many skilled seniors returning plus the addition of talented freshmen Kieran Jacobs and Brady Siefert. Junior John DiMaggio and freshman Oskar Gaebaele combine in goal to round out a strong lineup.

But for many, the team's camaraderie is what Warriors Soccer is all about. senior center back Ryan Hardy says, "What I'm most looking forward to is playing with my friends and having a great last year at high school with people that have been my teammates since I was in elementary school."

## WHRHS Women's Field Hockey Preseason

By Isabella Lesende and Sunayana Navuluri, Staff Writers

Following a season full of COVID-19 regulations, the field hockey varsity team made it through by following protocols to ensure everyone's safety. 2020's strong team had nine graduating seniors.

This year, there are a total of twenty-two players. The varsity captains are Emma Killeen and Clara Chen. The program captains are Kayla Langell, Molly Hartigan, Emily Keller, and June Yin. Coach Kelly hopes to build more trust between the players; she stated "You need a foundation in order to be successful. I think it will take time, but I am confident we will persevere and come together as a team."

Vandita Soni and Izzy Mannino have greatly improved since last season and you can tell they have trained very hard to increase their speed and field hockey knowledge. Coach Kelly added, "I think the development of our younger players will be key this season." These players include: Sophia Ehlert (Class of 2024), Christina Monty (Class of 2024), Olivia Risler (Class of 2025), and Madison DiSarno (Class of 2025). In the game against North Hunterdon, Sophia Ehlert scored the lone goal.

Laura Matos, a returning varsity player, helped direct the defensive team throughout the game. Madison DiSarno works hard, is willing to learn, and is not afraid to play post. Emma Killeen is committed to playing DIII at Kean University next fall. She has a strong field sense and powerful hits.

Coach Kelly noted, "I could tell you a million great qualities about each player. I truly see potential in each of our players."

After a change in head coaching for the junior varsity team, the players had some adjusting to do. The new coaches, Coach Svenson and Coach Nevolo, are a big asset in improving the team. One JV player remarked, "The coaches are really pushing us into putting our best foot forward at any opportunity we get to play field hockey, whether it be practice or games."

The captains this year are Jaime Lippit, Jillian Gaydos, and Morgan Carn.

Coach Nevolo said she hopes to help with the team's communicating skills which will benefit the accuracy of their passes. She thinks the team has improved tremendously already.

"My overall goal is to help all the girls have a fulfilling season where they enjoy being a part of the team, work hard, and feel like they've improved every game."

## POV: Freshmen

By Selina Zhan, Season Wei, and Sania Shareef, Staff Writers

Entering a new building full of new classmates and teachers can be overwhelming for some freshmen. As we walked into Watchung Hills on September first, we felt like outliers, not knowing where any of our classes were or how to navigate the school. Some of our classmates even walked into the wrong classroom. Knowing how confusing the drop schedule is, a lot of people probably found themselves in the same situation.

On the other hand, meeting new teachers and classmates from the other three districts was really exciting. Although it might take some time for everyone to warm up to each other, through classes and school extracurriculars, most people will probably have found their friends by the time winter break rolls around.

Speaking of classes and school extracurriculars, Watchung Hills offers a lot more variety and freedom when it comes to choosing your classes, activities, sports, and clubs based on your interests. For example, the electives and clubs are both great ways to meet new people with similar hobbies. That's just one of the many differences between middle and high school.

Another difference between WHRHS and our middle schools is the maturity of students throughout all grade levels. In our middle schools, students were less independent. Therefore, we also had less freedom in middle school than we do now in high school.

Consequently, this creates a mature learning environment in high school that teaches students how to make their own decisions. In addition to those differences, Watchung Hills' students also seem to have more school spirit. By participating in school sports or attending school events such as pep rallies and football games, students from all four districts are brought together. In middle school, school-wide events were less frequent. Overall, high school seems to be more fun and a more interesting experience.

Because of all the opportunities our high school provides, students often have very different goals based on what they hope to achieve later on in life. Some students might want to get into a certain college or get a certain job. However, there are some goals that a lot of students share, ourselves included.

One such goal might be to get good grades or excel in every class. Whether it's by writing a phenomenal essay in English, acing a test in math, or getting a hundred on a lab in biology, getting a good score on an assignment is a wish all students have.

Another goal students might have is to get onto the school varsity team for a sport. Both of these goals can help motivate students to work harder, practice or study more, and try their best. Whatever it is that a student wants to achieve by the end of high school, our goal plans and high school careers all start in freshman year. That's why it's crucial to do well in freshman year and get a head start.

As the class of 2025 and the youngest in the school, the upperclassmen inspire us to persevere through the next four years of high school in order to explore ourselves and the path we choose to take.



## POV: Sophomores

By Grace Liu, Staff Writer

With pumpkin spice lattes back on the Starbucks menu, school is back in season too. Last year was a whirlwind of cohorts and virtual school, and sophomores, many who are still unfamiliar with our school, might as well be freshmen.

High school has an unspoken rule where sophomores, juniors, and seniors are part of the "real" high school and the freshmen are the "babies," since they don't yet know the ins and outs of high school, physically or mentally. In a normal year, sophomores would have figured it out by now, but with the given circumstances, most of this year's sophomores cannot relate. American high school is magical to the typical child who hears about the popular kids and sees it on TV, but reality is nothing similar to the myth. That first year of high school, where middle schoolers become high schoolers, is full of excitement with anticipation of new experiences, a new setting, more responsibility, and more freedom. Then they are hit with the reality of work, higher expectations, and major changes leaving them exhausted after the first year.

Current sophomores are in the awkward position where they experienced all the upsetting realities and unfulfilled experiences, making them more exhausted by the end of their freshman year. Thus, coming into this year, they have some excitement for actual high school like a freshman, but more dread because of known realities, like a sophomore.

There is also the obvious fact that many are still figuring out how to navigate the school, a problem typically only freshmen face. In addition to getting lost, sophomores are also not as accustomed to their new classmates from the other three districts as they would have been had they had a full freshman year, which induces both excitement and fear in meeting new people. Events such as football games and pep rallies were also canceled, which took away from an authentic high school experience. This lack of experience in high school causes sophomores, and the rest of the school, to be mentally a year behind. This year presents a whole lot of catching up for Watchung Hills' sophomores, and it'll be interesting to see how it goes.

## WHRHS Sophomores and Their Summers

By Isabella Lesende and Sunayana Navuluri, Staff Writers

Over the summer, Watchung Hills Regional High School students finally got to explore their interests and advance their talents after a year of Covid-19 restrictions. Many students had the opportunity to travel across the world, including places like Iceland, Greece, and Spain.

Annie Dong (Class of 2024) explored the United States as part of a backpacking adventure camp. The camp included stops in Colorado and Arkansas where the campers hiked trails and enjoyed nature. "I had a really great time there," Annie stated, "Our camping site was so pretty because it was up in between the mountains (but really not so safe due to the rolling thunderstorms every day)." Annie and her campmates also went on a challenging hike: Mt. Elbert, which is the second tallest mountain in Continental America. "We were all pumped to wake up at four and hike all the way up to 14,439 feet."

Sophie Kotar (Class of 2024) was able to go to the University of South Florida to take part in the American Ballet Theatre Summer Intensive. In the highly selective program, only fifty dancers from around the world were chosen. For two weeks, ballet students learned ballet techniques and improved their pointe from ABT instructors. They also had supplemental classes such as jazz, modern, yoga, and pilates.

Many students also had the chance to practice their favorite sports. Katerina Sicard (Class of 2024) is a Synchronized Ice Skater, and over the summer she used her free time to get in the rink and enhance her skills. "I worked and achieved my goal of passing my silver partner ice dance tests which was a big accomplishment for me," said Sicard. Katerina also took part in the Team USA Junior Development Team.

After a fun and eventful summer, WHRHS students returned to school to share their experiences.

## Get Loud!: WHRHS Shows Spirit At Fall Sports Pep Rally

By Ambika Muralitharan, Student News Editor



Watchung Hills held its 2021 Fall Sports Pep Rally on Friday, September 17th. For freshmen and sophomores, this is their first pep rally ever, where each of the fall sports introduces themselves on our football field, whether it's performing a routine like the cheerleaders or running the track like the track team. Seniors Shiv Goel and Kaylin Davis were the hosts and did a great job hyping each grade.

The seniors who won the "Most Spirited" title were Calyn Goldberg and Arturo McConnochie. The most exciting part of the rally was the tug-of-war, where athletes from each grade level had one side of a four-way rope. In the beginning, it looked like anyone's game, but the juniors eventually won the intense game. The other grades will have to wait until next year for a rematch.



## Mixin' It Up: Upcoming 9th and 10th Grade Mixer

By Isabella Thomas, Staff Writer

Freshmen and sophomores are looking to set the tone for the new school year as they emerge from their homes and come back to in-person learning with the 9th & 10th Grade Mixer, organized by the All School Council (ASC), the Grade Level Council (GLC), and the PTO. The 9th & 10th Grade Mixer will take place on Saturday, September 25, from 3 to 5 PM, and will feature backyard games, music, snacks and so much more.

Most sophomore students spent the previous school year attending school virtually for part, if not all, of the year, which means they haven't really had a chance to get to know the other grades or the school. Also, as we all know, the freshman students have just lately begun to become familiar with Watchung Hills, after spending a large amount of the previous year virtual. The ASC, in conjunction with the GLC, reviewed the impact of virtual learning on this year's incoming freshmen and sophomore students, as well as how their social skills were harmed, as they decided to stay at home rather than risk becoming infected. To address this, the ASC and the GLC have decided to arrange an exciting event that invites all ninth and tenth grade students to join together outside of the classroom with their peers, in the goal of creating a welcoming environment, here at Watchung Hills.

"Our ASC and GLC student leaders are excited to make this event a new tradition at the Hills," shares ASC advisor Ms. Kelly. "Once we start having a successful event it builds excitement and leads to many more. Of course we know any event is more successful when you have even more backing behind it." This motivated the ASC and GLC to seek support from the PTO, who were more than willing to assist.

According to Ms. Kelly, "With Mr. Ascolese's competitive spirit and Mr. Wasserman's fine taste in music selection, this event promises to be lit (as the kids say)!" The students who plan on attending agree with Ms. Kelly, including freshman Rhea Patel, who is looking forward to meeting the other ninth and tenth graders at the mixer. "Going to a large high school, it's pretty difficult to meet every person in your grade and be able to interact with them," she says. Patel hopes that the mixer will give her the opportunity to connect with many other students in the ninth and tenth grade.

She believes that the event will be a "unique and engaging way to promote school spirit and create a sense of community within the school, and I'm sure many others are looking forward to it as well."



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