

# Rec Sports Spotlight: Gamber Grabs 8th Grade State Lax Title

By [Mike Nortrup](#) Times Correspondent

Nobody can say that Mike Fenlon isn't an optimist. At his very first lacrosse practice in early March, he told his Gamber players that their goal should be winning the Maryland eighth-grade boys lacrosse championship.

"I knew from the beginning that we had a team of extremely talented lacrosse players," Fenlon said. "I knew we'd compete not only for the Maryland Youth Lacrosse Association championship but for the state championship well. The state championship was our goal."

A few weeks ago, his boys achieved that goal.

His Gamber 1 team won a thrilling, 7-6 overtime game over the Anne Arundel County-based Bays to win the state title.

Earlier, they took the MYLA Junior A crown via a two-game postseason playoff game sweep.\*

Fenlon felt he had good reason to talk state championship before his boys had even gotten their cleats dirty. More than half of his players were already veterans of high-powered championship play. Eight of the 15 were on the Gamber team that played in the MYLA Midget B sixth-seventh grade division championship game of the year before.

Two others were underclassmen on Gamber's state champion eighth grade team of 2015. That one was coached by Gamber Lacrosse director Kevin Stewart.

Some had even played on state championship football and basketball teams. They also were used to big-game pressure.

Yet despite all of this big-game experience and despite the players' talents, there was a big downside to this team. Many times, members couldn't make it to this year's games because of schedule conflicts with other sports or with club lacrosse teams on which they also played.

When this happened, Gamber was short-handed. Sometimes it had only one substitute or none at all.

Those games would find Fenlon and assistant coaches Matt Kovalsky and Brian Roche frantically adjusting their lineup, fitting players into positions they weren't used to. Even so, that wasn't really like pushing square pegs into round holes.

"They were a team of tremendous athletes. The players could play any position on the field," Fenlon said. "We had players who could play out of position and play there at a high level."

Gamber roared through its MYLA regular season, finishing first with a 10-1 mark. Its only loss was to Havre de Grace. After that, Gamber won its final six games on the schedule. It led the league with 128 goals scored while allowing the fewest (65).

It opened the MYLA playoffs May 26 with a 14-8 win over Lutherville at Deer Park.

Game 2 was against Jarrettsville, which beat Gamber in last year's MYLA Midget Division championship game. The Harford Countians started out quickly this time, too. They scored two early goals. However the locals roared back to win game and title 11-4.

Gamber goalie Logan Covey made numerous saves on point blank shots to keep his team ahead in the two games. Defenders Nate Martin and Michael Davis were consistently outstanding on the back line.

C.J. Kovalski, normally an attacker, moved back to a defensive midfield slot and did an outstanding job there. In another move which demonstrated Gamber's versatility, midfielder Nathan Mattingly moved back from mid-

field to become one of the team's best defenders during the tournament.

Midfielder Conner Covey, Logan's twin brother, was a leading scorer throughout the postseason. Midfielder Evan Park and attackers Jared Hulsman, Nick Wingo and Brady McGuire were also big scorers in the two playoff games.

Attacker Aidan Piscitelli led the team in assists during those contests.

Two other midfielders excelled in key specialities against Jarrettsville. Ethan Zepp won a number of face-offs, and Evan Warren did an outstanding job of clearing the ball.

"The championship was a rewarding experience. We were thrilled to get one back this year after losing the championship to them last year," Fenlon said.

As winner of the Junior A division, Gamber now qualified as one in a field of four divisional winners from leagues around the state. One might think that winning the MYLA title gave the Gamber coaches a confident feeling going up against that field, particularly after Gamber received a forfeit in its semifinal game because its opponent couldn't field its team.

But Fenlon simply said "no" to that idea.

"We were nervous. I didn't know what to expect from the competition although I did know we had the talent to compete with pretty much anybody," he said.

But it occurred to him that just having talent might not be enough. The other teams also had talent. And they worked very hard, maybe harder than Gamber.

"They are really driven by the parents and coaches. We practiced hard, but I wanted the boys to have fun," Fenlon said. "Sometimes we even let them design their own drills. [Other teams] were more serious. We also didn't have a playbook with a lot of plays like they did. We depended on God-given talent.

"We thought all that might come back to bite us."

However, the coaches got a big break when they received the forfeit. That meant they could go scout the other semifinal game and devise a plan against both teams. On the other hand, those other teams never had the opportunity to scout Gamber.

Gamber faced the Bays for the state title on June 9 at Howard County's Rockburn Park.

The Carroll kids fell behind, 2-0 early. Then Kovalsky and Conner Covey scored to tie it.

After intermission, Covey scored two goals and Wingo one to put Gamber ahead 5-2. Even ahead by three goals at that point, Fenlon and his team were not feeling comfortable. They had good feeling to feel disconcerted as the Bays tied it 5-5 late in the third quarter.

Hulsman scored a big fourth-quarter goal to put Gamber ahead 6-5. But the Bays tied it late.

Then, early in the overtime period, there was a wild back-and-forth flurry that would end the game in Gamber's favor.

Gamber mounted a charge. But the Bays stopped that thrust and went on the attack themselves.

"Then we got the ball back and went down the field. Conner Covey went through their whole team, fell down and scored the winning goal," Fenlon said.

Fenlon looks back at the 7-6 win and credits his players' passion, superior lacrosse talents, athleticism and versatility for that win and this year's success as a whole.\*

"This was a very special season," he said. "I've won championships before but never at this level. I credit the passion and talent of the players for our great record."