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DIX HILLS

Taking The Field In Memory

Scarpati Soccer Tournament announced in tribute to Hills grad

By Mike Koehler/mkoehler@longislandernews.com

A soccer tournament created by Danny Silver through hours of hard work is expected to raise thousands of dollars in memory of Matthew Scarpati. But for Silver, a sophomore in college, the loss of his best friend still tears at his heart.

"The hardest part for me is that I have to write an e-mail when I ask for donations. You have to write 19-year-old Matthew Scarpati was killed. Writing it over and over, and it takes a mental toll," Silver said. "It's easy to get caught up in the logistics. But every time you have to ask for a donation, you have to remember that your best friend is gone."

Scarpati of Dix Hills, who was attending the University of Buffalo, was killed last July when an allegedly drunken motorcyclist collided with him along the Wantagh State Parkway. He had stopped to replace a flat tire on his bike when the accident occurred; friends said he was off the bike path so others could go by.

A bicycle enthusiast, he had only recently discovered the bike path. His routes often brought him close to speeding cars, friends said, so he wasn't concerned about pedaling next to the parkway.

But as much as Scarpati loved riding, he equally enjoyed playing soccer. He played on club teams, as well as the Half Hollow Hills East varsity team for three years. Thinking of his friend's passion for the sport last fall, Silver brainstormed what would become the First Annual Matthew Logan Scarpati Memorial Soccer Tournament.

Scheduled for June 12 at Half Hollow Hills East, early plans called for both club teams and the general public to compete in different age groups during a two-day tournament. Those complex plans were scrapped last week, Silver said, in favor of a more manageable first run.

"We're giving up money from [club teams] on registration fees, but we wanted to make sure it runs smoothly. Next year, we 100 percent plan to expand it," he said.

The other reason for the change, Silver added, was the unexpectedly high response from friends and family. In the beginning, he was fretting that he'd have to beg to fill the rosters. Instead, they have 150 people on 16 teams and are turning players away.

The teams will be divided into groups of four and play each squad in their group once. The top team from each group will then move onto a single-elimination playoff, eventually leaving just one team. Games are expected to last 50 minutes, with a five-minute break at halftime and a five-minute break after each game, creating an even hour block for each contest. With five fields available, Silver expects to get 29 games played in six hours.

Just don't expect these matches to be boring or lopsided, because Scarpati's family and friends are playing – Silver expects them all to be competitive.

"Fourteen of the 16 have former varsity players. Six of the 16 teams have guys that played in college," he said. "Teams are talented, they'll play each other hard."

Registration was set at \$200 a team. Combined with raffle and T-shirt sales on the day of the event, Silver expects to break \$10,000.

"I said if we had \$5,000, I would be very, very pleased," he said.

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Matthew Scarpati with a cutout of his soccer idol, Cristiano Ronaldo. Nearly a year after Scarpati was killed changing his bike tire on the Wantagh State Parkway, his friend has planned the first Matthew Logan Scarpati Memorial Soccer Tournament, expected to raise thousands on June 12.

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All of that money will go towards the Miles for Matt Foundation, created in January by Scarpati's family. Some of the funding will go towards \$1,000 scholarships for a University of Buffalo student and Long Island Junior Soccer League player, said Lynn Scarpati, Matthew's mother.

"Our goal is to build the scholarships to a certain level so we can assist in a greater way. We're just starting," Lynn said.

She added that a pair of Half Hollow Hills seniors involved in lacrosse, another sport her son played, also received scholarships in his honor. Zachary Smith and Paul Tesoriero were recently named as the recipients, although Lynn confirmed those were from the Lacrosse Booster Club and Melville Fire Department – not the foundation.

"People should know they are making a difference buying a T-shirt, buying a magnet and I don't want that getting watered down," she said. "I think the desire to do something in Matt's name was very strong in the community, so they started doing things themselves."

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