

# *Miami Herald*

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## HIGH SCHOOLS | WATER POLO **Northeast ready to make some history**

**The undefeated Northeast boys  
are poised to capture the state's  
first water polo title.**

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**TOP SCORER:** Northeast's Darren McKay leads the undefeated Hurricanes with 42 goals.

Christian Padilla is a water-treading, missile-deflecting red badge of courage. He throws himself into the line of fire every day and has the rosy welts to prove it.

Padilla is the goalkeeper for the Northeast boys' water polo team. Armed with three All-Americans, Northeast finished its regular season 22-0 and is the favorite to win the first FHSAA-sanctioned boys' high school water polo state championship. It's Padilla's job to block some of the hardest-thrown shots in Florida. He shows his mettle every day during practice.

"It took me a while to get used to it," Padilla said. "But I'm pretty good now."

Padilla is pretty good in the goal and pretty good at absorbing pain. In his one-year tenure as Northeast's varsity goalkeeper, Padilla has climbed out of the pool with mangled fingers, bloody noses and hyper-extended elbows. He should get combat pay to go along with his varsity letter.

### **A TOP PROGRAM**

The source of Padilla's discomfort is the best water polo team in the history of Northeast High and, some say, the best boys' team in the history of Florida high school water polo.

"As far as teams historical in Florida, [Northeast] is probably the best ever," said Jim Shoemaker, coach of the Cooper City boys' water polo team.

Northeast began its run to the state championship tournament with a 21-3 victory against Plantation in the District 6 final Saturday.

But Padilla's daily pain spawns from the arms of several hard-throwing Hurricanes: seniors Jorge Montero, juniors Jansen and Drac Wigo and sophomore Darren McKay. Montero and Jason and Drac Wigo are NISCA High School All-Americans. McKay leads the team in goals with 42.

Those four standouts and five other team members competed in last summer's Junior Olympics for the Fort Lauderdale club team, South Florida Water Polo.

"Being this good is a relatively new thing for Northeast," Northeast coach Loren Price said. "We have seven strong starters and a deep bench."

It's an embarrassment of riches. At the center of all that talent are the Wigo brothers, twins rated as two of the best high school water polo players in the country.

In street clothes, it's hard to distinguish the twins from one another. In the pool, the Wigo twins are a yin-and-yang duo of water polo mayhem.

Janson Wigo is a lefty, and his brother shoots and passes with his right hand.

According to Padilla, Janson Wigo "just throws it so hard it's scary" and Drac Wigo shoots with creativity and finesse. Janson Wigo scored 38 goals during the regular season, and Drac Wigo scored 28.

"The twins have a great shot at playing in the Olympics one day," Price said. "I think they had a ball in their hands ever since they learned how to swim."

In a sport where southpaws are a rarity, Northeast boasts five. From a strategy standpoint, Price says his fleet of lefties makes his job easy. "It opens passing lanes for us that wouldn't be there," he said.

Northeast lost to Miami Beach in the 2004 state final. While the Hurricanes wouldn't mind avenging last year's defeat, they would rather play Cooper City in the state championships. The boys' and girls' water polo state tournament will take place next weekend at St. Andrew's Academy in Boca Raton.

"Our team and the guys at Cooper City are all friends," McKay said. "We all play together on the same club team."

Northeast beat Cooper City twice during the regular season.

## **AGAINST DADE'S BEST**

Cooper City (12-3) recently beat the best water polo teams Miami-Dade has to offer -- including Miami Beach, the defending state champs -- in the Miami Ransom Invitational.

"An all-Broward County final would be awesome," Price said.

Cooper City also is doing its part to make that happen for Broward after the Cowboys defeated South Broward 20-4 in Saturday's District 8 final at at Pembroke Pines Charter.

The Cowboys are not the same team Price and Northeast beat twice during the regular season.

Cooper City received an added bonus April 3 when the FHSAA cleared Bence Jaczko, a Hungarian foreign exchange student, to play.

Jaczko is a member of the under-16 Hungarian national team.

"With our Hungarian player coming along we're peaking at the right time," Shoemaker said.