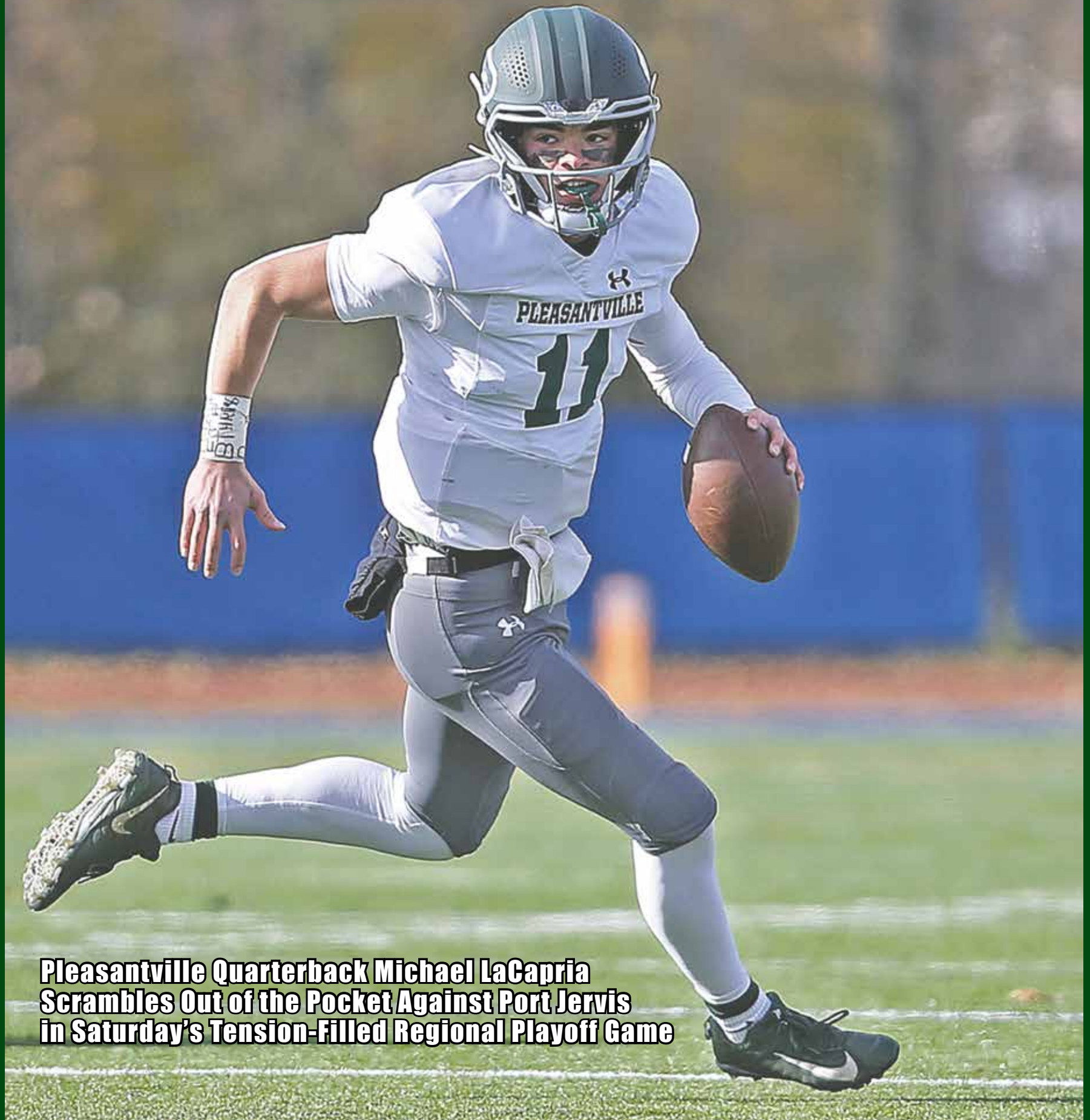


**ExaminerSports**

# **The Panther Run Continues**



**Pleasantville Quarterback Michael LaCapria  
Scrambles Out of the Pocket Against Port Jervis  
in Saturday's Tension-Filled Regional Playoff Game**

ANDY JACOBS PHOTO



# Sports

## Dramatic Field Goal Sends the Panthers to the State Semifinals

By Andy Jacobs

Just in case anyone was thinking the 2021 season hasn't been memorable enough for the Pleasantville football team, the Panthers went out on Saturday afternoon and provided their fans with a finish they won't soon forget.

John McCarthy's 25-yard field goal on the last play of the game erased a two-point deficit and lifted the still-undefeated Panthers to a dramatic 23-22 victory over the Section 9 champion Port Jervis Raiders in a Class B state regional playoff game on the turf at Middletown's Faller Field.

"Oh my goodness, he's been doing it all year for us," said relieved Panthers head coach Tony Becerra shortly after his senior kicker had calmly supplied the three points that kept the team's state title hopes alive. "I wasn't worried about him at all. I knew if the snap was good and the blocking was there, he'd put it through, without a doubt."

"It's like a dream come true, like none other," said McCarthy amid all the mayhem afterwards that his clutch kick created. "It's always a thought when you're younger, 'Oh, I'm gonna hit a game-winning field goal or score a game-winning touchdown. And I just did that. So it's surreal.'"

The field goal by McCarthy concluded a spectacular fourth-quarter comeback by the Panthers, who found themselves still trailing by eight points midway through the period. A 23-yard touchdown run by Daniel Picart with 5:07 remaining in the contest cut the Port Jervis lead to 22-20, but when the sophomore sensation was stopped short of the goal line on the two-point-conversion try it was the Panther defensive unit that then rose to the occasion and set the stage for McCarthy's heroics.

"Defensively, it's been like that all year," said Becerra, "where we face high-powered teams and we bend but don't break."

The Panthers only had one timeout



Daniel Picart is chased by a pair of Port Jervis defenders as he carries the football in the second half of Saturday's state regional at Middletown's Faller Field.

remaining when the Raiders took possession of the ball following Picart's second touchdown of the day. With just under five minutes remaining, one first down likely would have ended the Pleasantville season. But on third-and-three, Port Jervis quarterback Brett Fuller was stopped for a two-yard loss and the Raiders, to their everlasting regret, were forced to punt.

That punt rolled to the P'ville 39-yard line, leaving the Panthers with just three minutes to put together a drive long enough to get within McCarthy's kicking range. "That's all we wanted," said Becerra about the final chance for his team. "I was a little worried because we only had one timeout and we needed to get the ball back in position. I was tempted to come out of the Wildcat (offense) because it takes a lot of time. But we were able to get close enough."

The elite running ability of Picart, who finished up with 180 yards on 22 carries, enabled the now 11-0 Panthers to sustain the drive they absolutely needed to escape losing their first game of the season. His 13-yard run on third-and-seven moved the ball to the Port Jervis 45. Then with less than a minute remaining, his 15-yard jaunt on a third-and-10 play got the Panthers to the Raider 30.

Picart followed up with a seven-yard run before stepping out of bounds with 27 seconds to go. Next came his 16-yard run along the right sideline that moved the Panthers into field-goal range with 12.3 seconds left. A delay of game penalty moved the ball back to the 12-yard line, but Picart was able to run to the 8 on the next play and Becerra used his final timeout with 2.7 seconds showing on the clock.

"It's not just Daniel," said Becerra about his team's tension-filled, game-ending drive. "He's got to have blockers, and he does. That was just all heart. Everyone on that offensive unit just showed heart."

Picart's dazzling running out of the Panthers' so-far-unstoppable Wildcat then



Pleasantville senior quarterback Michael LaCapria fires a pass during Saturday's state playoff game vs. Port Jervis.

turned the spotlight on McCarthy, who had already provided the Panthers with several key field goals in their march to 10 straight victories and the Section 1 championship. Quarterback Michael LaCapria deftly handled a low snap, setting the ball in place an instant before McCarthy's booming right foot sent the ball spiraling high over the crossbar as time ran out.

"It was a little nerve-racking that last five or so minutes," said McCarthy, quick to credit the help all his coaches have given him. "I've been practicing all year. I was nervous, but then at the end it was amazing."

At first, though, that amazing feeling seemed like it would never happen. The Panthers got off to a disastrous start and found themselves in a 9-0 hole nearly seven minutes after the opening kickoff. The Raiders, riding their own six-game winning streak, including a 41-16 thrashing of Red Hook in their sectional final, quickly marched down the field on the game's first possession.

A 30-yard pass play from Fuller to Jacob Balmos set Port Jervis up at the Panthers' 10-yard line. But on fourth-and-goal from

*continued on next page*



Pleasantville senior placekicker John McCarthy watches his game-winning 25-yard field goal sail toward the uprights on the last play of the day Saturday afternoon in Middletown.

ANDY JACOBS PHOTOS



Pleasantville's Kieran Cotter finds room to run as he carries the ball in the third quarter of the 23-22 regional victory over Port Jervis.



Members of the Pleasantville football team share an emotional moment together after John McCarthy's field goal gave the Panthers a dramatic come-from-behind victory over Port Jervis.



# Sports



The Pleasantville defensive unit looks to the officials for a call after recovering a fumble in the first half of Saturday's Class B state quarterfinal victory over the Port Jervis Raiders.

the 5, an incomplete pass into the end zone halted the Raider threat. The Panthers had seemingly escaped danger until a botched pitchout from LaCapria to Kieran Cotter on first down sent the ball bouncing into the end zone, gifting Port with a safety just four minutes into the game.

The Raiders' Calvin Crews returned the ensuing kick to the Pleasantville 44-yard line and eight plays later Fuller easily skipped to his left for a 1-yard touchdown. The extra point gave Port Jervis a 9-0 advantage with 5:19 remaining in the opening quarter.

"Yeah, that didn't look good from the get-go for us," said Becerra. "But that was early and time was on our side. So once we got it to 9-7, everyone took a collective breath and we knew we'd be alright."

If the Panthers were feeling flustered or overwhelmed, they hardly showed it. They responded with a seven-play, 69-yard drive

highlighted by the running of Cotter and a gravity-defying catch over the middle by Picart, levitating in midair as he hung onto the ball over a pair of defenders for a 31-yard gain.

P'ville got on the scoreboard when Picart, out of an earlier-than-usual use of the Panthers' Wildcat offense, faked a run himself and handed to Cotter, who scooted into the left side of the end zone untouched for a five-yard touchdown. McCarthy's point-after narrowed the Panthers' early deficit to just two points with 1:23 left in the first quarter.

A fumble by Port Jervis on first down was recovered by the Panthers' senior linebacker, Ryan Raefski, who had a part in a dozen tackles against the Raiders. On first down, Picart wowed the crowd with a cutback 31-yard, tackle-breaking run up the right sideline for a touchdown. McCarthy added the PAT and, just like that, the



Pleasantville's Carl Herzner (left) celebrates with Kieran Cotter after Cotter scored the Panthers' first touchdown of the day vs. Section 9 champion Port Jervis.

Panthers suddenly held a 14-9 lead with just under 50 seconds to go in the quarter.

But the Raiders answered with a 76-yard drive that included another long Fuller-to-Balmos pass play down to the P'ville 15. Three plays later, Fuller ran eight yards for a touchdown. Port running back Geffen Cauthen was stopped short on the two-point attempt, but the Raiders still had a 15-14 edge early in the second quarter.

The Panthers soon moved the ball down to the Raider 22, but a flag cost them 10 yards and on third-and-20 LaCapria was sacked for a big loss back to his own 47. When the P'ville punt pinned the Raiders at their own 3-yard line, they then spent the next five minutes running 14 plays and scoring again when Fuller connected with Balmos on a 10-yard touchdown pass.

With the point-after, Port built its lead up to 22-14 with just 31.4 seconds left before halftime. Cotter, who finished with 80 yards rushing, returned the kick to midfield and an unsportsmanlike penalty on the Raiders moved the ball to the 35-yard line. A fourth-down pass by LaCapria to Picart left the Panthers at the 23 with three seconds to go.

McCarthy was summoned to try a 40-



Panther senior wide receiver Nick Paternostro walks dejectedly off the field at halftime after a long pass to him in the end zone was knocked away at the last second in Saturday's regional playoff.

yard field goal, but LaCapria, on a fake, kept the ball and tossed it high in the air down the left sideline toward Nick Paternostro waiting in the end zone. The Raiders' Crews knocked the ball away, though, preserving the Port Jervis eight-point lead as halftime arrived.

"It was tough to pull the trigger on that," said Becerra about the decision to forgo a field-goal attempt that would have tested the limits even for the strong-footed McCarthy.

Pleasantville got the ball to start the second half, but its 10-play drive stalled at the Raider 27-yard line after nearly six minutes when Picart was tackled a yard shy of a first down. The third quarter remained scoreless, but in the fourth another Panther threat ended at the Port 37 when Picart found nowhere to run on a fourth-and-seven play.

That left it up to the Panthers' defense to get the ball back again and it didn't disappoint, forcing a three-and-out that provided the impetus for a 40-yard P'ville scoring drive that overcame two false-start flags before ending with Picart's 23-yard touchdown run which set the table for the memorable final five minutes.

"Yeah, that's pretty impressive given Port Jervis' recent track record," said Becerra, whose team will now return to Middletown for the state semifinal late next Saturday afternoon against Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk, the Section 2 champion located a few miles south of Albany. "We're just enjoying this ride and we're looking forward to having practice on Thanksgiving."

"Yeah, we can't wait to practice on Thanksgiving. That's going to be great as a team," added McCarthy, who finds himself tantalizingly close to a chance to play at the Carrier Dome in Syracuse. "We're one win away, but we've got to take it one game at a time. Even though we've been doing very well this year, we take it one week at a time."



The Panthers' Daniel Picart leaves a Raider defender behind as he picks up yardage in the 23-22 win.



The Panthers' Erik Coleman returns a kick during Saturday's dramatic regional playoff game vs. Section 9's Port Jervis.



Sports



Westlake star Gianluca Ruggiero heads for the goal during the Wildcats’ 1-0 win over Section 9 champ Marlboro in the state playoffs.



Westlake senior goalkeeper Francesco Michilli makes a diving save in the 2-1 victory over Irvington in the Section 1, Class B championship game.



Martin Sunjic of Westlake gets set to boot the ball in an early-season home win against Pawling.



Briarcliff sophomore Sebastian Lai speeds upfield during a Bears’ home playoff game.

BOYS’ SOCCER  
2021  
*A Look Back*



Benny Rakower of Byram Hills chases after the ball during a Bobcat home game midway through the season.



Greeley’s Marlon Perez (right) gets congratulations from teammate Diego Weiss after scoring one of his three goals in a rout of Brewster.



Valhalla senior Thomas Casale races up the field in a home game against Westlake.



Briarcliff senior Tyler Cho controls the ball in the title game of the annual Mt. Pleasant Cup.



Luke LaMagna of Pleasantville races up the field with the ball vs. visiting North Salem.



Jared Damon of Greeley controls the ball in the second half of a Quaker road game vs. Brewster.



Valhalla goalkeeper Lucas Zonetti is poised to make a save in a home playoff game vs. North Salem.





Byram Hills’ Aiden Heffner uses his head to send the ball across the field in the sectional quarterfinal game at Yorktown.



Pleasantville’s Nikian Sauthoff has control of the ball in the Panthers’ playoff game vs. Blind Brook.



Rhaymani Alexander (left) of White Plains gets a hug from teammate Brennan Ordonez after scoring a goal against Arlington.



Horace Greeley’s Simon Margolies looks for open teammates as he takes the ball past midfield.



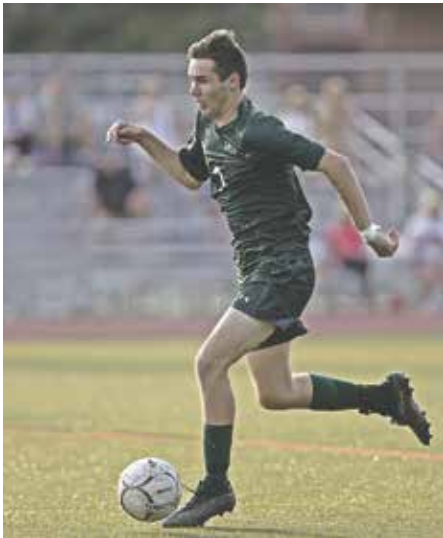
White Plains’ Jair Cano fights for possession in a road game early in the season against Arlington.



Valhalla junior Dimitri Tonelli heads the ball in the sectional playoffs against the North Salem Tigers.



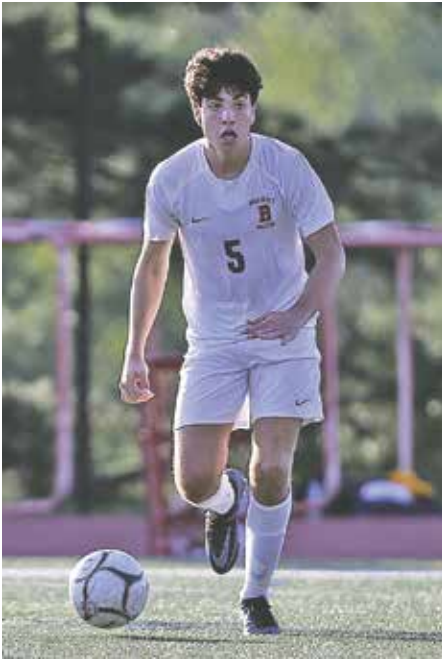
Isaiah Mercado Torres and Daniel Ramirez of White Plains battle in the air for possession of the ball.



Pleasantville senior Rainer Duchmanh charges toward the goal in a Panther home game back in September.



Evan Boekel of Byram Hills surveys the field as he controls vs. host Yorktown in the sectional playoffs.



Miles Prosperino of Briarcliff moves the ball across the field in a game against Westlake.



Luca Mulhare of Westlake is about to score a goal during a Wildcat home victory early in the season.



# Sports



Briarcliff first-singles player Riya Rao lines up a forehand return during a home match against archrival Pleasantville.



Jasmine Powell of Fox Lane hits a forehand in a match at second singles against host Horace Greeley early in the season.



Fox Lane's Ally Waldman hits a backhand volley during her match at first singles vs. host John Jay in Cross River.



Coco Baek of Greeley sets her sights on a backhand return in a home match at second singles.



Byram Hills standout Alyssa Margolin drills a backhand return during her straight-sets victory over Bronxville's Victoria McEnroe in the Section 1 championship match.

## GIRLS' TENNIS 2021 *A Look Back*



Byram Hills' Sydney Levy scampers for a forehand return in a singles match during the Bobcats' Senior Day vs. Edgemont.



Jenna Kleynerman of Byram Hills gets set to put away an overhead in the doubles final of the sectional tournament.



Ali Giardini of Briarcliff moves forward to slice a backhand return in a match at third singles.



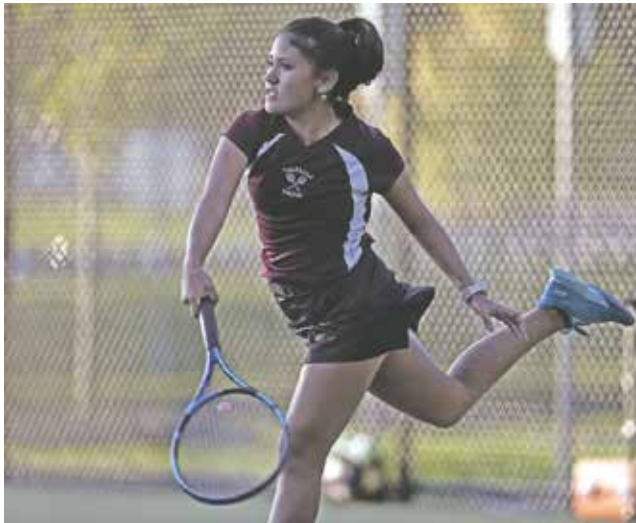
Greeley's Ella Fink concentrates on a forehand return in her match at first singles vs. Fox Lane.



Sports



Pleasantville's Sara Wilson prepares to smack a backhand during her match at first singles vs. host Briarcliff.



Valhalla's Lori Rivera follows through on a serve in a singles match against host Westlake.



Veronica Ludwiszewski of Westlake reaches to hit a high backhand return during the Wildcats' Senior Day against Valhalla late in the season.



Bridget He of Valhalla keeps her eyes on the ball as she lines up a backhand late in the season.



Westlake's Lia Bucello moves to her right to retrieve the ball in a match at first singles vs. visiting Valhalla.



Chloe Balin of Pleasantville prepares for a backhand return while playing a match at second singles for the Panthers.

NY STATE SWIM CHAMPS



Horace Greeley swimmers, left to right, Sabrina Johnston, Emma Zhu, Kelly Byrne and Maddie Adams-Miller pose together after finishing first with an automatic All-American time in the 400-yard freestyle relay at Saturday's state championships up at Ithaca College. Johnston also took state titles in both the 50 freestyle and the 100-yard backstroke, helping the Quakers capture the state's team championship.



White Plains sophomore swimmer Alexa Reyna earned a pair of state championships on Saturday, taking first place in the 500-yard freestyle with a state record time after winning the 200 free with a new Section 1 record. Both of her finishes were automatic All-American times.



## BOYS' SOCCER 2021

***A Look Back***

see pages 4 and 5

Westlake's Gianluca Ruggiero