

### VARSITY

## **V845 boys basketball coach of year: Robinson's calming influence guided New Paltz to 3rd straight title**

**By Rick Remsnyder For the Times Herald-Record**

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New Paltz High coach Stuart Robinson was in a lot of close games this season. An overtime thriller over Monticello to win a third straight Section 9 Class A title was the ultimate nail-biter.

While Robinson may have been feeling a lot of emotions inside, his outward appearance was always the same. Cool, calm and collected.

Junior Justin DeMaria said Robinson's laid-back demeanor was a huge factor in the Huguenots' magical run to a record-setting third straight Class A title. New Paltz became the first Section 9 school to win three consecutive Class A championships since the state expanded to five classifications in 2003-04.

"My coach was very smart about what he was doing in those situations," DeMaria said. "Whenever we were in those huddles during the timeout, he was very calm and careful with what he was telling us, and I think that brought a lot of pressure off the players that were in and made us feel more relaxed."

The Huguenots had tight games against Red Hook and Minisink Valley in the Class A playoffs before fending off Monticello 69-67 in overtime on Jackson Soper's 3-pointer in the finale at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh. Entering the sectional tournament as the No. 4 seed, New Paltz upended top-seeded Minisink Valley and No. 2 Monticello to win the championship.

Robinson has been named the Varsity 845 Coach of the Year after his team captured the Class A title and also won the school's first Mid-Hudson Athletic League championship since 2000 with a 64-43 victory over Millbrook.

New Paltz came into the season flying under the radar after losing the all-star backcourt of Axel Rodriguez and Casey Burke from the previous year's team that went 18-5 and won a second straight A title. Though largely overlooked this season, the Huguenots posted a 17-7 record with a core of four juniors – DeMaria (a team-high 16.0 points a game), Soper, top rebounder Matt Simmons and Jeffrey Reynoso. Senior Patrick Murphy (15.0) missed about half the season with an injury, but was a big contributor when healthy.

Though the loss of Rodriguez and Burke had some thinking the Huguenots would take a step back this year, Simmons said Robinson didn't feel that way.

"At the beginning of the season, Coach Stu made it clear about how high his expectations were for the team and told us that he'd be pushing us to reach those standards," Simmons said. "Knowing that he believed in our success for the season, it gave us more of a reason to go out and perform at a high level."

Robinson understood why some people might have doubted the Huguenots' title chances heading into the 2019-20 campaign.

"Axel and Casey were known entities," Robinson said of his graduated stars. "This year, a lot of our players were unknown entities. They hadn't really gotten playing time or been tested on the varsity level."

Robinson thought the squad's strength was its mental toughness.

"I think they never gave in or succumbed to anybody else's thoughts or expectations of them," he said. "They set their own expectations and worked each day to achieve that level."

Robinson, the longtime Director of Athletics, Wellness and Recreation at SUNY New Paltz, was also the successful men's soccer coach there for 15 years. He was twice named SUNYAC Coach of the Year.

While continuing to work as SUNY New Paltz's athletic director, he enjoys the challenge of coaching at the high school level. After three years as the New Paltz High junior varsity coach, he replaced former head coach Matt Moore in 2015.

"While most of my career was focused on coaching soccer, I always had an interest and a love of basketball," Robinson said. "When the opportunity

presented itself, I guess I was more excited at the opportunity and the challenge of doing something different.”

New Paltz High athletic director Greg Warren said Robinson understands what it takes to be a successful coach.

“He really understands his personnel well,” Warren said. “What makes them tick and how to motivate each of them individually and collectively as a group. He brings a quiet confidence to coaching, which instills confidence to the team.”

With most of his squad returning, Robinson realizes the Huguenots won't catch anyone by surprise next season.

“I don't think next year we get to call ourselves an underdog,” he laughed. “That role will be different next year and we'll have to be prepared for that. I don't think anybody wants us to win four section titles in a row.”