

## 2005 Men's Division III

## Preseason Player of the Year Bryan Griffin, Tufts

BY SAM ATKINSON

PHOTO BY JOHN STROHSACKER/LAXPHOTOS.COM

It is a typically lazy morning in Southern California. The temperature is warm, the waves are crashing onto the shore, and Bryan Griffin is ready to go surfing before lunch.

For Griffin, this is a normal day during the lacrosse off-season. When the temperatures plummet on the East Coast, this native Long Islander bolts to California, when funds allow, seeking refuge in a sunnier and tranquil place.

When Griffin is not California Dreaming about his favorite hobby, surfing, and getting pummeled by the waves, his focus is hitting the wall, breaking down Major League Lacrosse game tape of the Boston Cannons (focusing on Michael Watson and Conor Gill) and getting his body ready to take the beating handed out by some of the best defensemen in Division III.

But this day Griffin, a senior attackman for Tufts University, finds himself rehashing games gone astray in a 2004 season where the Jumbos set a school-record with 13 wins but came up two victories short of making their first-ever NCAA tournament. He talks about why the academics at Tufts was the most important selling point to him when deciding on which school to enroll in four years ago.

Then he has to answer some uncomfortable questions. The questions resemble nothing like the ones this history major faces in the classroom – they focus on him.

For the past two seasons Griffin has been making a name for himself in the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC), and now he has arrived on the national scene.

Griffin, a two-time NESCAC Player of the Year, enters the season as *Lacrosse Magazine's* Preseason Player of the Year.

"When we found out about this individual honor we were definitely excited yet kind of disappointed because he has already had a pretty big bull's-eye on his chest," said Tufts head coach Mike Daly.

Griffin, a third-team All-American last season, led the Jumbos with 41 goals and 35 assists for 76 points, which were 12 better than his 2003 season when he netted 41 goals and 23 assists. He has broken two school records thus far and is poised to break five more if his numbers are even close to what he did last season. Griffin's career numbers stand at 112 goals and 72 assists.

The secret is finally out.

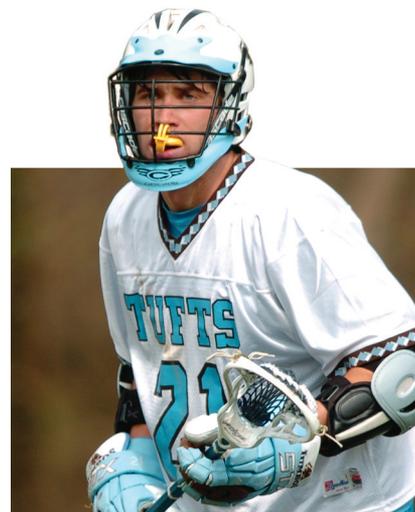
"I don't think I am going to sneak under the radar anymore by any means," said Griffin. "I am nervous but excited at the same time for this upcoming season."

Griffin, 21, and his teammates should be excited for 2005 as they enter the year with their highest *Lacrosse Magazine* ranking ever at No. 9.

"I definitely think there is a lot of pressure on us. I know that we have the potential and we have a lot of great elements, but we still need to come together [as a team]," said Griffin.

Coach Daly has guided his alma mater to two straight 10-win seasons. Not bad considering there have only been four in Tufts' 75-year history.

The Jumbos hope for their third straight 10-win season behind their star Griffin, who is supported by midfielder and roommate Devin Clarke (28G, 13A in 2004) along with fellow



midfielder Mike O'Brien (24G, 9A).

"I am nothing without those guys," said Griffin.

Griffin and Co. have their eyes on winning the NESCAC tournament for the first time as the door has been left slightly open for another NESCAC team not named Middlebury to win.

The Panthers, three-time national champions and four-time defending NESCAC champions, graduated 13 players including first-team All-American goalie Eric Krieger.

"This season is a little different than all of the other ones," said Middlebury head coach Erin Quinn, whose team is ranked No. 3. "Maybe for the first time in a while, at least in reputation, the top returning players in the league at many positions are not Middlebury players."

Tufts, along with Amherst (No. 13) and Wesleyan (No. 19), both of which were in the NESCAC tournament in 2004, is ready to dethrone the Panthers.

Tufts had its chance in 2004 but came up short in overtime, 11-10.

Couple that loss along with a heart-breaking loss to Wesleyan in the NESCAC semifinals, where the Jumbos lost in the final four seconds, and you see why Griffin is so hungry for the upcoming season. He is out to prove he is the best player in Division III.

"I have a chip on my shoulder," said Griffin. "If I lose that edge, then I am not going to be as good of a lacrosse player by any means." **LM**