



Blake Miller, left, with his brother Eugene and his mother, Angela, in 1994.

LIZARDS

Top acquisition has inspiration

■ Miller set to open season after death of his mother, who wouldn't let him quit

BY TOM ALLEGRA
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Blake Miller is the 2004 Major League Lacrosse MVP, a Manhasset product expecting to lead the Long Island Lizards to their third title in the league's five-year history.

Miller, 32, played on scholarship at Hofstra in 1995 and 1996, then went on to win a world championship with the U.S. national team in 1998.

Last year, as he led the Philadelphia Barrage to the MLL title, he set the league seasonal record for goals by a midfielder with 46. And out of 10 Miller siblings who play lacrosse, he is the star of the family.

And to think Miller wanted to quit the sport in 1993, his freshman season at Nassau Community College, because he thought he wasn't good enough.

His mom convinced him otherwise. Angela Miller had lots of parenting experience — Blake is the fifth youngest of 11 children fathered by Bill Miller, a patriarch of Manhasset youth lacrosse — and wouldn't let her son give up.

"My whole family is supportive, but my mom is always the one who said, 'You can't listen to anybody,'" Miller said. "It seemed I was getting better as I got older, and I think with her in my corner — with her telling me, 'No one can tell you what you can and cannot do' — I started to believe."

Angela Miller, 65, died this winter of severe rheumatoid arthritis. So when Miller takes the field at Mitchel Athletic Complex tonight for the Lizards'

Look at Lizards

What: Lizards vs. New Jersey, MLL season opener

When: Tonight, 7:30

Where: Mitchel Athletic Complex, Uniondale

Key matchup: Lizards defense vs. N.J. attackman Jesse Hubbard and midfielder Adam Donegar. "We definitely have to stop the two of them," coach Jim Mulé said, "because they could easily score four, five goals each." Nicky Polanco, the 2004 MLL defensive player of the year, gets the nod against Hubbard, whom Mulé called "one of the best pure shooters in the league."

opener against New Jersey, the word "Mom" and the date she died — 1-28-05 — will be etched onto his helmet.

"I think it's going to be hard out there on the field knowing she's not going to be there watching," said Miller, "but I think I get a lot of strength from her."

The Lizards should get plenty this season from Miller, one of three key off-season acquisitions along with MLL goalie of the year Greg Catrano and defensive player of the year Nicky Polanco, who will mark New Jersey sharpshooting attackman Jesse Hubbard tonight.

First-year coach Jim Mulé said Miller, Jay Jalbert and A.J. Hogan will be the key to the Lizards' transition offense, which he called the key to the season.

"With the speed and athleticism that we have at the midfield, we're going to look to run people off the field," Mulé said. "With the goalie play and defense we have, we should fare well as long as we get some transition."