



LAX IS BACK

Boys lacrosse reloads
See p. 20

SWINGING FOR THE FENCES

See p. 20



FRIDAY
MARCH 27, 2009

THE Spoke

Volume 59 No. 4

CONESTOGA HIGH SCHOOL
BERWYN, PA
www.stoganews.com

Carrying *hope*

In this special report, The Spoke takes an inside look at the life of one 17-year-old mother, and explores how the issue of teen pregnancy plays a role within the Conestoga community.

Story by Seth Zweifler Photos by Henry Rome

Morning has just broken, but it is all the same for Melissa Coolbaugh, 17. Her 4-month-old daughter, Peyton, had been growing restless throughout the night, though she now seems finally to have settled down for a nap in the living room of their modest Berwyn apartment.

Coolbaugh, whose dark bags under her eyes indicate a series of recent sleepless nights, decides to use this break as an opportunity to catch up on her schoolwork. She lifts the cover of her laptop and quietly begins an essay for her Language & Composition class. Her typing, steady and deliberate, continues for a few minutes without interruption. Soon, though, Peyton's fussing returns. It is 8:30 a.m.—time to fix the first bottle of the day.

Slowly, Coolbaugh pushes the laptop aside on the navy blue couch, which she is using as her workspace for the time being. She rises, walking over to the pink-and-purple swing where Peyton is sitting, the baby's tiny hands groping outward for attention. As she reaches down to pick up her daughter, she sighs and says, "I'll have to finish the essay later. This comes first."

Coolbaugh, now a junior, once lived a very different life than she does today. She was a national cheerleading champion back in the sixth grade, competing against some of the highest ranking teams from around the country. She had a close, lasting rela-

tionship with her boyfriend, one that she said has been a major factor in shaping who she is today. She was part of a tightly knit group of friends at Conestoga, never having to worry about spending a Saturday night at home.

Now, all of that has changed.

This past November, she gave birth to a 7-pound baby girl, Peyton Elizabeth Coolbaugh.

Motherhood was never in the plans for Coolbaugh. She said she started dating Peyton's father during her freshman year at Conestoga. What once started as a casual relationship between the two, however, turned much more serious—quickly.

"We really hit it off soon after meeting," she said. "Looking back, I think the two of us rushed the whole process of forming a meaningful relationship."

At one point, Coolbaugh was taking no chances. She said that she took birth control pills every morning during a nine-month interval in which she and her boyfriend were sexually active.

See MOTHER, p. 4



Junior **Melissa Coolbaugh** feeds her 4-month-old daughter, Peyton. Coolbaugh, 17., decided to leave Conestoga at the end of last school year in order to focus her time on being a mother, and now takes classes with an online charter school.