

madison area

spring/summer 2008

Parent's Guide

FREE!

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The Fastest Sport
on Two Feet
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Survival Night**
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Support Groups**
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**Your Guide to Everything
Kid-Related in Madison!**

Birthday Parties • Museums • Swimming Lessons • Photography • And Tons More!

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Lacrosse: The Fastest Sport on Two Feet

By: Mary Ellen Schutz

When my then middle-school aged son first approached me about playing lacrosse, I had visions of bloodthirsty, half-naked, 13-year olds chasing each other, armed with long sticks. That vision couldn't have been further from the reality of the fastest growing youth sport in the country. Modern day lacrosse rolls teamwork, dexterity, speed, and the ability to think on your feet into one exciting game. It is a sport played by boys and girls alike, with more than 125,000 youth and 169,000 high school players registered nationwide. Participation has tripled in the last 10 years.

"Anyone can play lacrosse—the big or the small. The game requires and rewards coordination and agility, not brawn." says USLacrosse, the governing body.

Here in the Madison area, organized opportunities for play are available for youth from 3rd grade through the college level.

"Kids playing now are in at the ground level. Since the sport is so new and growing so fast, lacrosse can open up scholarship and club play opportunities for college that aren't available in other, older sports. Midwest players are being actively recruited by schools across the country. And the kids love the game: being part of a team, being part of something new, the speed and excitement of the game itself." says Lucy Russell, mother of six, with two boys and a girl now playing lacrosse at the college and high school levels.

The object of the game is to move a small, hard rubber ball down the playing field and into your opponent's six-by-six foot goal, without ever touching it with your hands. The ball is carried in an open net pocket attached to a wooden or metal stick.

For the boys, 10 players from each team take the field to begin the game: three attackmen, three midfielders, three defensemen, and one goalie. Girl's teams play with 12: three attackmen, five midfielders, three defensemen, and one goalie. Players scoop up the ball, then run, pass and catch using the stick; only the goalkeeper may touch the ball with his hands. Checking is allowed, but regulated in a manner similar to hockey.

"It's a great cross-training sport," says Ken Bice, lacross dad, former youth coach, and referee. "Kids use skills required for hockey, basketball, football, and soccer."

Equipment can be pricey. Boys are required to wear a helmet, mouthpiece, shoulder pads, arm pads, and gloves. Girls, who are allowed much less contact during the game, trade the helmet for an eye cage (reinforced goggles) and a mouthpiece to protect the face and eyes and wear gloves. All goalies wear helmets and add chest, thigh, shin, and neck protection to their game gear. Each player brings his or her own stick. Initial outfitting ranges from \$100 for late elementary/early middle-school players to \$300 and more for high school level play. League fees and travel can add to the expense of the game. Locally, Middleton Sports and Fitness carries good gear year-round and helps new players with fittings and recommendations, all at reasonable prices. Clubs can be a resource for good, used equipment for families on a tight budget.

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So, what's it like to be a lacrosse parent? At first, games resemble kindergarten soccer—a mob running from one end of the field to the other, sticks in hand, all trying to knock the ball out of their opponent's stick. If a player is fast enough to break out of the mob with the ball still in his stick, he can score. It can be tough for the uninitiated parent to catch on to game. Lucy Russell's advice to parents is: "You'll have a better time, get to know the game and other parents, if you're involved. Run the clock. Run the scoreboard. Those are easy ways to start to learn the game, to become part of the community."

As skills improve and players begin to understand strategy, the games open up. Lacrosse parents have a unique opportunity to witness the transformation from kids-in-a-mob to confident young men and women with the ability to think fast, move fast, plan ahead, and work together. An opportunity I'd recommend to any parent.

You Don't Have to Know It All!

There are some terrific web resources for parents looking for more information about lacrosse and Madison area opportunities for instruction and play:

- USLacrosse
www.uslacrosse.org
- Wisconsin Lacrosse Federation
www.wisconsinlacrosse.com
- Madison Area Lacrosse Association
www.madlax.org
- Middleton Lacrosse Club
www.middletonlacrosse.com
- Sun Prairie Youth Lacrosse Association
www.sunprairielacrosse.com
- Verona Lacrosse Club
<http://veronalacrosse.com/>
- Lacrosse America
<http://lacrosseamerica.cmiregistration.com/Wisconsin.aspx/>
- Lacrosse for Dummies by Jim Hinkson and The Editors of Inside Lacrosse
<http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesTitle/productCd-1894413490.html>
- Middleton Sports and Fitness
<http://www.middletonfitness.com/browse.cfm/2,40.html/>

Mary Ellen Schutz is a freelance writer and editor, who raised two active kids of her own in Madison, Wisconsin. Over the years, her children participated in soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, track, fencing, horseback riding, snowboarding, skateboarding, and lacrosse. You can visit her on the web at www.GentleEditing.net

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