

# A sport at lacrosse roads



Post-Crescent photo by Dan Powers

NEENAH'S DAN STANKIVITZ (left) and Eric Heywood race to gain control of the ball during lacrosse practice at the high school.

## Active area teams hope sport breaks through to WIAA status

By Jerry DeRoche  
For The Post-Crescent

The idea seems to make sense.

Sports like basketball, football, hockey and soccer are all popular with athletes in area high schools, so why not try one that combines elements of them all?

Why not lacrosse?

That's what folks like Paul Zielski, Mike Wenzel, Chris Schwab and a host of local youngsters are asking as they try to move what's been called "the fastest game on two feet" into the culture of

area prep sports.

That venture continues Saturday with the opening game on the Bay-Valley Conference lacrosse schedule when Neenah faces Appleton at 11 a.m. at the freshman football field at Neenah High School.

Neenah, guided by Zielski, begins its second year of club play, while Wenzel's Appleton squad starts its initial season.

"We're very excited," Wenzel said. "A lot of our players have been looking forward to Saturday for a long time. They've seen other area teams play and

### A game born in America

The evolution of the Native American game into lacrosse began in 1636 when Jean de Brebeuf, a Jesuit missionary, documented a Huron contest in southeast Ontario, Canada.

A lacrosse team has 10 players. There are three attackers, three midfielders, three defensemen and one goalie. The object is to throw a hard rubber ball into a 6-foot by 6-foot goal using a stick with a pocket on

the end (crosse).

Players may run with the ball in the crosse, pass and catch it. Only the goalkeeper may touch the ball with his hands.

The game is usually divided into four 12-minute quarters. Each quarter starts with a face-off between two midfielders. A face-off follows every goal.

Source: Wisconsin Lacrosse Federation Web site.

mates, the sport is about halfway there.

"Right now, there are somewhere between 24 and 26 teams in the state," Zielski said. "The Madison area has 11 or 12 different high school teams, but we don't always know exactly how many because down there the teams seem to come and go."

The Bay-Valley Conference is comprised of six teams - Appleton, Menasha and Neenah from the Fox Valley and Bay Port, Green Bay Notre Dame and Green

now they're about to, too." Lacrosse is not a WIAA-sponsored sport. To be sponsored by the

governing body, 10 percent of the 499 member schools need to have teams. According to esti-



# LACROSSE: Menasha students form team

From D-1

Bay Southwest from the Green Bay area.

The teams will play a 10-game schedule, with each team playing the others twice. At the end of the season, an all-star game between the Valley teams and the Bay teams is planned.

Schwab and his Menasha team are the forerunners in the area. Four years ago, the New England native stumbled onto a group of Menasha students playing at the Neenah-Menasha YMCA and a team was soon born.

"The unique thing about Menasha is the kids themselves started this team," Schwab said. "I ran across these kids, about 16 of them, at the Y. They said they were trying to get a team started and asked if I could come join their practice."

Menasha's success in forming a team spun toward Neenah.

Zielski, a Milwaukee native who played club lacrosse at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, was one of Schwab's assistants and became part of the effort to form a squad at Neenah. After some introductory meetings to explain the sport, there was an immediate response.

"We had heard about the team in Menasha and knew some kids who talked



Post-Crescent photo by Dan Powers

**NEENAH COACH PAUL ZIELSKI** offers advice to Ben Van Oudenhoven during practice at the high school. Zielski played club lacrosse at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

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**ERIC HEYWOOD, Neenah Junior**

about it," said Neenah's Brendon Otto, a junior defenseman. "It sounded like a lot of fun to us, and we eventually had enough to form a team."

The frenetic pace of the sport drew in Neenah junior Eric Heywood.

"The game's moving so fast, the ball can be on one end of the (110-yard) field and then, all of a sudden, somebody heaves it and you've got to get all the way on the other end."

"I like how it's different,"

Neenah junior Adam Deleeuw said. "It's quick, you get to use your hands and you get to run around a lot. It's easy to get the hang of it, but it's really hard to master it and get everything working."

The sport, at this stage anyway, is coed. Neenah and Menasha each have two girls on their rosters, while Appleton has none but is open to female players. Neenah hockey player Chelsea Mayer said she didn't know much about

the sport when she joined last year but has quickly come to enjoy it.

"It's kind of a combination of a whole bunch of sports put into one," said Mayer, a sophomore who also used to play soccer.

Neenah has 28 players, while Appleton, which has players from its three public schools, has 33. Schwab said Menasha has 37, with anywhere between 20 and 25 showing up regularly for practice and games.

The growing interest is something Schwab enjoys.

"I think it's great to see the sport spread," he said. "I think, Paul at Neenah and Mike at Appleton, we're all hoping to see the sport continue to grow and eventually become a WIAA sport."

Jerry DeRoche can be reached at 920-993-1000, ext. 230, or by e-mail at [pcsports@postcrescent.com](mailto:pcsports@postcrescent.com).