

Oshkosh Northwestern

May 2, 2004

# Lacrosse continues to grow as an alternative sport

BY CHUCK CARLSON  
of The Northwestern

It combines aspects of football and basketball and it has some passing resemblance to soccer and hockey, but the game of lacrosse is really unlike anything else.

"They look at it initially and think, 'This can't be that hard,'" said Neenah High School club lacrosse coach Paul Zielski. "But you really need a lot of hand-eye coordination. I don't know anybody who's mastered it. But it's the excitement of it because it's something new."

Lacrosse, in its essence, is another game about putting the ball in the goal. But getting there is half the battle.

The field is 110 yards

long and there are goals on either end of the field. Each team is made up of 11 players: A goalie, three defensemen, who stay on the defensive side of the field; three midfielders who can run the entire field and play offense and defense, and three attackmen who stay on the offensive end of the field.

Only six players can be on the offensive side of the field at one time and the point is to score as many goals as possible.

Like hockey, there are faceoffs after every goal and line changes on the midfield and a penalty area and "power plays" and, like soccer, there are offside penalties. Like basketball, players set picks to get their teammates open and like foot-

**"We're not here to take athletes away from other teams. We just want to provide an opportunity to play something different."**

Paul Zielski

Neenah High School lacrosse coach

ball there is enough physical body checking to keep everyone paying attention.

And then there's the most unique aspect - the lacrosse stick itself.

Ranging in various lengths - defensemen have longer sticks, attackers shorter ones - the ball must be caught in the netting and it's nearly impossible to run and carry the ball without a "cradling" motion that allows centrifugal force to

keep the ball in the webbing.

The ball can be knocked loose by defenders and the ball can be scooped up in what's known as a ground ball. Indeed many games are won and lost by which team gains more ground balls.

Teaching those basics is easily the toughest part for the local coaches.

"It's the catching and throwing," Zielski said. "We're like any grade

school or middle school team back east (where the game has a long history)."

And because there is no WIAA sanctioning, every player is responsible for purchasing their own equipment - and it's not cheap. Buying a helmet, stick, and shoulder and arm pads can cost \$250 and that doesn't include the \$55 to purchase a jersey and shorts.

But fund-raising efforts have helped defray some costs, including the money for two goals.

"We fund-raise everything we have," Zielski said.

Apparently the cost hasn't been an issue since every team has seen its numbers grow from the year before and the newest team in Appleton may have

to split into two teams.

And while lacrosse is an addition to a crowded spring schedule that features baseball, softball, track, golf and tennis, Zielski insists the newcomer hasn't taken athletes away from other sports. In fact they can play other sports and lacrosse (and girls are welcome on the lacrosse team) as well and he's heard no complaints from other coaches about the new game.

"We're not here to take athletes away from other teams," Zielski said. "We just want to provide an opportunity to play something different."

Chuck Carlson: (920) 426-6662  
or ccarlson@thenorthwestern.com.

Sports Editor Dan Kohn (920) 426-6657 or Oshkoshsports@thenorthwestern.com