



Wednesday, October 5, 2016

Brighton Lacrosse Parents & Players,

I wanted to reach out and provide insight and opinion regarding some recent questions from some players and parents regarding club lacrosse, multi-sport athletes, and recruiting to play lacrosse in college. Some of this information I've included in communication before, other parts are new. Regardless I think it is all important.

Club Lacrosse

As many of you know, in addition to being the Brighton Varsity Head Coach, I also coach with the Utah Prime Lacrosse Club. First, want to make it very clear that my approach to these coaching positions is very different. Further, I do not expect nor require Brighton players to play with Utah Prime (or any another club team for that matter) to be a starter on a Brighton team. Club lacrosse participation is a decision each family needs to weigh based on their own means and the goals of the player.

I also don't want parents and players to have the herd mentality either and think that because Joe Smith had success playing club lacrosse, travelling to four showcase tournaments a year and going to three summer lacrosse camps a year, that the same path will definitely work for them. Decisions need to be made based on an informed and logical approach, while considering the ability and goals of the player and the finances of the parents.

Club Lacrosse does have many positives, but it is not for everyone. When the best players in an area gravitate to a club program, they can be exposed to higher caliber play than what they see in their high school. And especially in areas of emerging growth (Utah), where there are only a limited number of truly qualified coaches, these same players benefit from being able to work more closely with them. Additionally, in order to play at the next level, high school players in Utah need to participate in lacrosse events where recruiters attend and club does offer these showcase events. But on the other hand, club lacrosse can be expensive and thus favors those with means to play (It's important to note that some club teams may work with you and be flexible regarding scheduling conflicts or financing issues. It never hurts to ask). Club can also impose passive pressure to drop other sports. And finally, the qualities of toughness, teamwork, and selflessness which are common in high school sports, may be lacking in the club environment. Again, the decision to play club, and for which team, should be based on ability, desire, goals of the player/parent, as well as the coaching staff of that club team. What is a multisport athlete to do who can't commit to club practices and events during their football season? Dom Starsia, (former head lacrosse coach at the University of Virginia) has a great perspective on this. He states, "What I suggest is the player goes to meet with the high school football or soccer coach and tells him, 'I am absolutely committed to our high school football team. At the same time, I am absolutely committed to going to college to play lacrosse. On our off day, on these two weekends, I need to play in this particular tournament.' Some coaches will be reasonable, some will not. Your son may now be learning to make important decisions for himself."

Using Utah Prime as an example, our coaching staff wants only the premier players in Utah - the players that take lacrosse seriously and most often want to pursue lacrosse in college and thus need assistance with recruiting. We feel like the Prime coaching staff, made up mostly of coaches that played lacrosse in college, are able to accurately evaluate and then connect players with appropriate colleges. If what you are looking for from a club team is more of a laid back, social event, than Utah Prime may not be for you. There are other clubs in Utah that focus on that approach. But if you are a serious player, Utah Prime tryouts are this Saturday, October 8th. I'd love to see you there. Check out the Utah Prime website for more details.

Multi-Sport Athletes

For perspective, I was a three-sport athlete in High School. During the fall, I played football all four years; in the winter, I played basketball two years and track two years; and then in the spring, I played lacrosse all four years. In the summers, I attended multiple lacrosse camps but then put my stick down and focused on other sports. I never played club lacrosse. Additionally worth noting, my freshman year was the first year I played both football and lacrosse. In middle school, I played soccer, basketball, and baseball. I went through the recruiting process, almost attended a DIII college to play football and lacrosse, decided to do a post-graduate year at an all-boys school in Maine, then attended Johns Hopkins University on a lacrosse scholarship for two years till an injury at the end of my sophomore year ended my athletic career. And as I look back, and if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing. But that was my story. It worked for me. And I understand that everyone is different and there are a thousand different paths for scholar-athletes to take.

Players – if you have committed to another sport at Brighton during the Fall and/or Winter seasons, I'd rather you do not attend lacrosse practices or games during that time. Just as I expect you to be fully committed to lacrosse during the spring, I expect the same level of dedication to other sports if you choose to participate in them. Those teammates and coaches deserve your respect and dedication. Further, parents please discourage your players from quitting any commitments after they have begun. This is different than deciding not to play football in June. What I'm talking about is if the decision has been made to play, then quitting during the season should be discouraged. See it through. This is an important approach to life.

Below are four perspectives that I find very thought provoking:

- Dom Starsia, former University of Virginia Head Coach Men's lacrosse

"My trick question to young campers is always, 'How do you learn the concepts of team offense in lacrosse or team defense in lacrosse in the off-season, when you're not playing with your team?' The answer is by playing basketball, by playing hockey and by playing soccer and those other team games, because many of those principles are exactly the same. Probably 95 percent [of our players] are multi-sport athletes. It's always a bit strange to me if somebody is not playing other sports in high school."

- Urban Meyer, The Ohio State University, Head Coach Football

Coach Meyer simply has the following on a white board in his office:

OHIO STATE RECRUITS BY URBAN MEYER: 42 Multi-Sport in High School 5 Football Only in High School
--

- Pete Carroll, Seattle Seahawks, Head Coach Football

“The first questions I’ll ask about a kid are, ‘What other sports does he play? What does he do? What are his positions? Is he a big hitter in baseball? Is he a pitcher? Does he play hoops?’ All of those things are important to me. I hate that kids don’t play multiple sports in high school. I think that they should play year-round and get every bit of it that they can through that experience. I really, really don’t favor kids having to specialize in one sport. I want to be the biggest proponent for two-sport athletes on the college level. I want guys that are so special athletically, and so competitive, that they can compete in more than one sport.”

- Tony Strudwick, Manchester United Performance Coach

“More often than not,” he stated in a recent interview with SoccerWire.com, “the best athletes in the world are able to distinguish themselves from the pack thanks to a range of motor skills beyond what is typically expected in a given sport.” He recommended tumbling and gymnastic movements, as well as martial arts, basketball, and lacrosse as great crossover sports for soccer. His advice was that a multi-sport background set up soccer players for long-term success by lowering the rates of injuries and making them more adaptable to the demands of elite level play.

So what do these perspectives mean? Do you need to be a multi-sport athlete? The answer is no. But there seems to be many with the opinion and evidence that it is advantageous. They collectively state to be an elite level player at a college or professional sport, you need a degree of exceptional athleticism and mental toughness. And the best medically, scientifically and psychologically recommended way to develop these traits is multiple sport participation. But again, everyone’s path is different and I understand the specialization approach in some cases.

College Recruiting

As a player, the first question is “do you want to play lacrosse at the next level?” And before you answer that question, let me remind you that the majority of high school students who think they want to follow a certain path of studies in college often change course along the way. My point being, you don’t have to be certain as a freshman, sophomore, or junior. Why not keep the option open rather than closing the door too early and regretting it later? Additionally, ask yourself what investment (practice, travel, etc.) you are willing to make in high school to reach that next level? What are your current grades, what is a realistic GPA at graduation, what are realistic SAT/ACT scores?

Parents – The first and most important advice I can give you is be informed about your options. Lacrosse can be expensive. Team fees to play during the spring, fees to go to a camp, fees to play on a club team, etc. I get it and I’m concerned. Second, players and parents need to be on the same page in regards to realistic and achievable goals. I can’t tell you how many times I have spoken with a player about goals, and then to one of their parents, only to be shocked when the parent replies, “he’s never told me he wanted to do that before.” Be honest and get on the same page.

Let me backtrack a little. If I were asked after my freshman year of high school lacrosse (my first year playing) if I wanted to play at the next level, I honestly would have laughed at the question. I was pretty terrible at lacrosse. My stick skills were bad; I was growing physically and my coordination was a bit off, and the game seemed to move faster than I could keep up. But for some reason I couldn’t get enough of the game. I can’t tell you why, but I was motivated and determined to get better. And so I practiced – by myself many days in my backyard pretending that tree stumps were offensive players I was defending. Or I’d go for jogs in my neighborhood with my stick and stop at mailboxes to breakdown and throw a poke check. The point is, I

worked my butt off to get better and I didn't give up. We had cuts at my high school. And my sophomore year I barely made the JV team. My coach after posting the depth chart, in which I was listed as the last player, looked at me and said, "it was between you and Steve. I chose you because I saw better heart and work ethic - make sure I didn't make the wrong choice." I'll never forget that. By the start of my junior year I was a Varsity starter on one of the best High School programs in the country. It wasn't easy, but it was my goal that my parents helped me achieve.

My advice for those that want to explore the recruiting process - First, you must be aware that your high school coach/club coach is not going to proactively market you to colleges. They can assist you, but this is your responsibility to drive the process. Second, based on 2014 data there are approximately 171,000 high school players and about 32,000 college lacrosse spots. Thus, right off the bat you will notice that 82% of high school lacrosse players do not play in college. Additionally, when you add that most recruits for the elite schools still come from the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, there is a small chance of playing DI coming from Utah. It is not impossible, but it is difficult. That said, it is worth mentioning there are many western schools that have new or young programs that allow players that want to remain local a chance to play. Additionally, be sure you are a college-ready lacrosse player. Yes, this means having a great stick and being a good athlete. But it also means that you pay attention, have a good work ethic, you are a good teammate, you are a good student, and you are a good person. The latter qualities are those most inquired about by college recruiters. Again, I have more on this topic if you are interested.

In Summary

Some of you may want to go to college and be on a lacrosse team. Others may want to play another sport in college, like football. While others may not want to play sports in college at all. I get it, but keep your options open by daring to be great at whatever you sign-up for. Give it your all. This approach is not only your best shot at earning a starting spot on varsity, it is also a method that will serve you well throughout your life. Talk to your parents about your goals and involve your coaches to see how they can help. Effort and work ethic are just as important to me as talent and athleticism. In other words, if you have decided that you aren't going to play in college and thus aren't going to work any harder than to "get by" in practice, then I and the other coaches can see it. The result is often a player who plateaus in their development and becomes in some ways difficult to coach. And these are the players that have difficulty seeing the field on game day. Instead, love and respect the game. Give it the attention and effort it deserves. Dedicate yourself to the team and the relationships you'll develop. By doing so you never know who or what will come along in your future that may be an opportunity you never thought possible. It happened to me.

Hope this was helpful. Feel free to reach out if you'd like to discuss anything in more detail.

-Coach Schafrath

Go Bengals!
Band of Brothers!