

Lacrosse Doesn't Discriminate

by Ray Carnicelli | special to iJax.com

When explaining the off sides rule in lacrosse to new players, parents or fans, I will often use the phrase “lacrosse doesn’t discriminate.” What I mean is that the rules apply equally for all players regardless of position. You must have four players on your defensive half of the field and three people on your offensive half. It does not matter what position you play. If a goalie wants to run all the way to the other end of the field and attempt to score, there is no rule stopping him. He



will not be called off sides unless four players do not remain on the defensive half of the field.

Lacrosse does not intentionally discriminate off the field either. Any eligible player is allowed to participate if they meet their particular league’s registration guidelines, they are able to pay the fees and they can outfit themselves with the proper equipment. That is the catch.

Lacrosse can be an expensive sport to play due to the costs for a helmet, shoulder pads, gloves, arm pads, stick, cleats, field space, league registration and other ancillary costs. Growing

up in Upstate New York, we had similar concerns. The difference is that there always seemed to be used, hand-me-down equipment to be found.

A brother’s old helmet, a neighbor’s stick and a cousin’s beaten up old pads were a godsend for parents trying to outfit their child. That is not the case in North Florida, especially in parts of town where the appearance of a lacrosse player in pads would result in calls of an alien invasion.

Randy Evans is trying to do something about that. Randy has made it his mission to bring lacrosse to the masses in North Florida. The former CSX executive who relocated to Jacksonville from Maryland nearly twenty years ago has seen many changes in the sport of lacrosse over the last forty years.

As a captain of the Ivy League Champion Princeton Tigers in the late 1960s, Randy witnessed first hand the transition from classic wooden sticks made from all natural materials to the evolution to plastic and composite, mass produce sticks. Randy saw lacrosse transition from a regional game foreign to many outside of Upstate New York, Maryland and Long Island, to an international game which now ranks as the fastest growing team sports for children from grades K-8.

In 1994 Randy spearheaded the effort to start the city’s first school team with the creation of The Bolles School club team that paved the way for the creation of teams at Episcopal and Nease High. There are now over 20 high schools in North Florida offering lacrosse as either a sanctioned sport or as a club. This includes both boys’ and girls’ lacrosse.

Now Randy is the driving force behind an effort to make sure that the sport of lacrosse is available to children throughout North Florida regardless of the cost. This takes us to Randy's latest undertaking, The Lighthouse Lacrosse Foundation. The Lighthouse Lacrosse Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 2007 whose stated mission is "to broaden the exposure of lacrosse in the Jacksonville market and to utilize the game as a tool to encourage positive life choices and academic achievement in youth of all economic, ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds."

With the assistance of the law firm of Foley and Lardner, and particularly partner Matt Breuer, a former lacrosse goalie at Duke University, Lighthouse Lacrosse became a non-profit, eligible for tax-exempt giving in December of 2007.



A sponsorship from the Jacksonville Police Athletic League soon followed. Assistant Chief Bobby Deal from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office is a member of Lighthouse Lacrosse Foundation's Board of Directors and has been instrumental in securing field space and insuring PAL involvement. The efforts of Randy and all of the volunteers at Lighthouse Lacrosse have paid off.

The growth of lacrosse into new, previously underserved areas of the city has been extraordinary. Players who previously had no idea what lacrosse was are making new friends, experiencing competition in a safe environment, learning life lessons under the supervision of strong adult role models and most importantly having fun doing it. The same things that drove Randy Evans to the sport of lacrosse over forty years ago are making a whole new generation of players fall in love with the game.

Lacrosse is called "America's First Pastime" due to its Native American roots. It can now be referred to as "North Florida's Newest Pastime" thanks in large part to the efforts of the sponsors, volunteers and mentors who are involved in the Lighthouse Lacrosse Foundation. For more information, learn about volunteer opportunities or to donate, please visit lighthouselacrosse.org.

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