

Recruiting U: Beyond Big Time, Opportunities Abound

by Nelson Coffin | Special to Lacrosse Magazine Online

Out of the sphere of influence of the Eastern establishment, lacrosse is booming across the rest of the country for an increasing number of high school standouts in the Midwest, South and West to enjoy.

Between the Men's Collegiate Lacrosse Association and the US Lacrosse Women's Division Intercollegiate Associates, schools from big-name conferences (Big Ten: Minnesota, Michigan, Michigan State), (Big 12: Texas, Baylor, Kansas), (Pac 10: Stanford, USC, UCLA) and (SEC: Vanderbilt, Florida, Ole Miss) mingle on a regular basis in non-varsity, lacrosse-only leagues with less heralded rivals from, say, Lindenwood, Texas State and Chico State, in one big melting pot.

It makes for a fun mix in which, as happened last season, the national club Division I semifinals featured Simon Fraser vs. Michigan in one matchup and Arizona State vs. Chapman in the other.

Moreover, NCAA Division III programs from Adrian (Mich.) to York (Pa.) broaden the horizons of potential recruits who prefer to participate at schools not generally known in East Coast strongholds.

As the sport continues to grow at the prep level, finding a home for those who intend to play in college can be a daunting but rewarding journey that needs to be taken with a few tips in mind.

First, according to one coach, finding a collegiate destination should go way beyond the success of its lacrosse program.

"The majority of kids choose a school based on the academic programs offered," said Jack Cribbin, the women's coach at Lindenwood University in the western St. Louis suburb of St. Charles. "The lacrosse club program is a second priority in the decision. Rightfully so."

With that in mind, the search can begin in earnest for prospective players from off the beaten track looking for a winning collegiate lacrosse experience. LM

Four Things Every Incoming College Club Player Should Know

1. There are more than 200 teams in the MCLA and nearly that many in the US Lacrosse WDIA, giving prospects a wide array of choices. Check out websites www.mcla.us or www.uslacrosse.org/wdia to see if your target school is in the lacrosse loop.
2. Each club has its own policy regarding cuts. Know them if you weren't recruited.



Clemson and Georgia field men's club teams in the MCLA. © Dave Adams

"Some do, some don't (make cuts)," said Michigan men's coach John Paul, who guided the Wolverines to an 18-1 record and a narrow victory over Arizona State in the MCLA Division I title game. "The vast minority (ours included) recruit extensively, which makes tryouts a very tough way to make the team."

3. Time spent practicing, traveling and playing should be a major part of the decision-making equation. Especially for those new to the college experience, budgeting time is key.

"Most conferences have rules on the amount of practice time allowed," Cribbin said. "However, it is much more lenient than in the NCAA."

4. Check out financial obligations, considering club lacrosse is a pay-for-play deal. According the LSU men's team website, in addition to money already spent on personal equipment, such as a stick, "team's dues are set at \$400 for the year. This covers gloves, elbow pads, shorts, bag, and other apparel." Yet, Paul cautions that every program is different.

"Some operate with very low dues. Others charge very high dues. Some work out plans for the families of players who make their teams, but can't afford to pay full dues," he said.

Differences for Varsity

Some of those tips for club players also apply to potential NCAA Division III players, although the major differences are that recruits from heretofore non-hotbed areas must be prepared to:

1. Meet NCAA requirements for admission and conform to eligibility standards. Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships.

2. Dedicate themselves to being a member of a full-fledged program representing the school at the varsity level.

"If a recruit is trying to decide between us and a club program, that's not the kind of kid we want," said Adrian women's coach John Sung, whose up-and-coming Bulldogs were 14-3 in 2010. "When a kid commits here, we take it very seriously."

3. Compete at a higher level.

"Most of these kids not from Baltimore or New York travel to summer tournaments where they see what it's like to play against kids from traditional areas," Sung said. "They pretty much know that (playing in) college is going to be a big difference from what they've been used to."

That said, all of the Bulldogs will learn what it's like to face the best when they help defending national champ Salisbury open its home slate March 2 in Maryland.

4. Receive aid, financial or academic, as part of the benefits of joining the program. Sung said some of his players qualify for as much as half of the school's \$33,000 tuition tab via grants or financial aid (not linked to athletics).

"We have the ability here to keep a kid on (academic) track, too, because all our coaches are full time. We also make sure (recruits) get their transcripts and (SAT/ACT) test scores in on time."

5. Believe in themselves.

"I don't care if a kid is from Colorado or Kansas City, we look at them if we think they can play," Sung said. "We try to get the right pieces to fit, and teach them to be the best they can be. And that's a good thing, no matter what division you're in."