



National Headquarters
113 West University Parkway, Baltimore, MD 21210

An Open Letter to High School and Youth Coaches,

As a coach of the women's game, you know that teaching, following and enforcing the rules of women's lacrosse means that you share the responsibility to honor the origins of the game, commit to the core values of the game's culture, respect all participants and recognize the value of fair play in the letter and the spirit of the game.

There has been growing concern in recent years over the reality/perception of **head injuries in the women's game**. The **integrity of the women's game is seriously threatened by this issue**, and the threat is caused by both the perception and reality of head injuries in the women's game. US Lacrosse is working to quantify head injuries empirically through collaboration and investment in injury research at the college, high school and, soon, youth levels. But we also have to face the facts – parents, administrators and bureaucrats don't care about the history and culture of women's lacrosse. The thing they care about most is the health and safety of the athletes under their care. We have to mobilize the leaders of women's lacrosse, especially coaches and officials, to address this issue comprehensively and proactively while we wait for additional empirical research to develop. We all must focus our attention on achieving an appropriate balance between the reasonable safety of players, winning, and the integrity of the sport.

This is not an issue that was caused or accelerated by the decision to mandate eyewear in 2004 – it's much more complex and multi-faceted; factors include: the dramatic growth of the women's game; inconsistent coaching and officiating; greater pressure to perform as a result of recruiting tournaments and private clubs; the societal acceptance of girls and women in sport over the last 20 years; and the fact that the typical girl playing sports today cares less about tradition than about being the best athlete she can be. The issue is also compounded by team and tournament administrators, coaches, and officials who are allowed to completely disregard rules and mechanics intended to emphasize player safety. Instead, these groups or individuals who either don't understand the ramifications of their actions or don't care about the integrity of the sport or player safety are allowed to continue to behave irresponsibly.

The Women's Division of US Lacrosse is asking all members of the women's lacrosse community, including high school and youth coaches, to take this threat seriously and commit the time, energy and personal integrity to address these concerns. USL continually fields questions regarding the consideration of helmets, and this past **year New York first voted in helmets for high school girls, then rescinded the vote while waiting to see what will happen in the coming season.**

This effort will be difficult and must be multi-faceted. Tough rule changes, accountability of umpires to officiate games only according to NCAA or US Lacrosse rules/mechanics or else lose their rating and assignments, accountability of coaches who participate in or attend games/tournaments in which uncertified umpires are used, accountability of coaches whose teams demonstrate reckless play, etc. **We must be leaders in this area or risk losing the women's game as we believe it should be played.**

Thank you for your attention to these issues and for considering integrating them into your coaching and teaching.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Hebert".

Laura Hebert
President, Women's Division
US Lacrosse