

**REPORT OF THE US LACROSSE TASK FORCE ON  
YOUTH PLAYER SEGMENTATION:  
January 8, 2016  
Revised – January 1, 2018**

The US Lacrosse Task Force on Player Segmentation was formed in October 2015 and charged with making recommendations regarding the segmentation of boys and girls youth lacrosse players, defined by US Lacrosse as pre-high school and including eighth grade. This report contains the Task Force’s recommendations to the US Lacrosse Board of Directors as well as background information on the Task Force’s deliberations.

**SYNOPSIS OF TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to ensure a safe, sustainable, fair, developmentally appropriate, and fun playing experience for all boys and girls lacrosse players, the Task Force recommends age verified and grade affiliated player segments for boys’ and girls’ lacrosse in accordance with the following:

<b>US Lacrosse Player Segments<sup>(1)</sup></b> <i>(For play occurring between September 1, 2016-August 31, 2017)</i>				
	<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>Age Group<sup>(2)</sup></b>	<b>Grade Affiliation<sup>(3)</sup></b>	<b>HS Graduation Year</b>
<b>YOUTH<sup>(4)</sup></b>	Born 9/1/2009 through 8/31/2010	7U	1st	
	Born 9/1/2008 through 8/31/2009	8U	2nd	
	Born 9/1/2007 through 8/31/2008	9U	3rd	
	Born 9/1/2006 through 8/31/2007	10U	4th	
	Born 9/1/2005 through 8/31/2006	11U	5th	
	Born 9/1/2004 through 8/31/2005	12U	6th	
	Born 9/1/2003 through 8/31/2004	13U	7th	
	Born 9/1/2002 through 8/31/2003	14U	8th	
<b>SCHOLASTIC<sup>(4)</sup></b>	Born 9/1/2001 through 8/31/2002	15U	9th	2020
	Born 9/1/2000 through 8/31/2001	16U	10th	2019
	Born 9/1/1999 through 8/31/2000	17U	11th	2018
	Born 9/1/1998 through 8/31/1999	18U	12th	2017
	Born 9/1/1997 through 8/31/1998	19U	12th/PG	2017

(1) For paired segments, the even year age group is the maximum: 7U/8U, 9U/10U, 11U/12U, 13U/14U.

(2) Age Group reflects the maximum age of a player during the playing year. For example, 7U means that players 7 years and under are eligible.

(3) Grade Affiliation reflects the grade for majority of players in that age group. Birth date will be the final determinant of eligibility.

(4) US Lacrosse Boys’ & Girls’ Youth Rules are used for all play 14U and below. NFHS/US Lacrosse rules are used for all scholastic play 15U and above.

1. Youth Lacrosse is defined as 14U and under (8th grade and below) and Scholastic Lacrosse is defined as 15U and older (9th grade and above.) US Lacrosse Boys' and Girls' Youth Rules are used for all play for 14U and below. NFHS/US Lacrosse rules are used for all scholastic play for 15U and above.
2. Players are segmented by single age and affiliated grade. Date of birth is the final determinant of eligibility.
3. The official US Lacrosse playing year is defined as September 1 – August 31. This aligns with the September 1 cut-off date used by many states for school registration <sup>(1)</sup> and thus allows a significant majority of children to play with their classmates. If a state or locality uses a different cut-off date for school enrollment, then youth lacrosse organizations and schools may choose to align with their state or local school cut-off date for local league or community based play.
4. The recommended age variance for each level is 12 months (September 1-August 31.) Each age- group designation reflects the maximum age of a player during the playing year. For example, 7U means that players who are 7 years and under in a given playing year are eligible.
5. School-sponsored teams that segment by grade and do not adhere to the 12-month age restriction should limit the age variance of players on any one team to a maximum of 24 months and follow the US Lacrosse playing rules for the youngest age group on the team.
6. Youth lacrosse organizations may form teams with up to a 24-month age variance, if necessary, to field the team. For example, if there are not enough players to form single (12-month) age/grade segment teams, the organization may combine two age/grade segments to form a team until such time as participation growth allows 12-month player segmentation.
7. If two age/grade segments are paired, teams are grouped so that the even-year age group is the maximum-age for the paired segment (7U/8U, 9U/10U, 11U/12U,13U/14U.)
8. Youth lacrosse organizations or schools that form teams with up-to-a 24-month variance should have appropriate risk management policies in place to ensure that player safety is not compromised.

## **BACKGROUND**

In October of 2015, the US Lacrosse Board of Directors convened a Player Segmentation Task Force (“Task Force”) that was charged with developing a standardized national policy on player segmentation for boys’ and girls’ lacrosse. The Task Force reviewed and considered current scientific research and recommendations of the US Lacrosse Sports Science and Safety Committee <sup>(3)</sup>, existing segmentation policies of other National Governing Bodies, prevailing practices within the national lacrosse community and guidelines of the Athlete Development Model when developing this policy. The development of this policy was based on the overarching goal of providing a safe, quality and consistent playing experience for all youth lacrosse players in the country.

An athlete's physical and cognitive maturity and development has a significant impact on overall player safety in both practice and competition. When players are grouped on teams without consideration of the significant differences in the physical and emotional maturity of players competing with and against each other on the field, safety and quality of play may be jeopardized.

Historically, teams, leagues, and tournaments have grouped lacrosse players inconsistently using several different systems, including graduation year, multiple or single grades, and multiple or single age categories. In the absence of a verifiable, standardized national approach to organizing lacrosse players, the sport has experienced tremendous challenges promoting and enforcing its current set of standardized boys' and girls' youth rules and best practices. Children have experienced and parents have witnessed the impact that wide age variances can have on player safety, development and enjoyment in all settings and in both practice and competition.

### **RATIONALE: WHY AGE MATTERS**

Age is the best indicator for determining how to group children in many social institutions outside athletics, including school, recreation and legal judgment. Typically, three or four broad stages of development have been universally accepted; early childhood (sometimes divided into pre-school and school-age), middle childhood, and adolescence. These defined stages are organized by age, although there is some age overlap between the stages. These stages encompass physical, emotional, and cognitive development. In sport, the primary focus has been on grouping players according to their stage of physical development to maximize safety and fairness in competition. The grouping of youth athletes by age by other national sports organizations and governing bodies is standard practice in organized team and individual sports in the United States in order to preserve competition integrity and maximize the safety of participants.

Another advantage of using age to segment players is that age can most easily be verified on a consistent, national basis using players' birth certificates. This is common practice in other youth sports. When the first standardized youth boys' and girls' lacrosse rules were established by US Lacrosse in 2011, the US Lacrosse Sports Science and Safety Committee recommended age groupings of U15, U13, U11 and U9 because the medical research and data indicated that the physical and emotional developmental stages of children are most similar for these age groups.<sup>(3)</sup> It is important to note that the medical research and data also indicate that it is most appropriate to group young athletes by single age. However, it was determined at the time that the participation numbers in many leagues across the country would not yet allow single age groupings, so two year bands were recommended until such time as participation numbers allowed single age groupings.

This new Player Segmentation Policy distinguishes Youth Lacrosse, defined as 14U and under (8th grade and below), from Scholastic Lacrosse, defined as 15U and older (9th grade and above.) The previous U15 grouping that was traditionally considered the cutoff for youth lacrosse (8th grade and below) actually included a majority of age eligible 9th graders and thus caused considerable confusion. The new 14U and younger cutoff more closely aligns with the majority of 8th graders nationally.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **RATIONALE: WHY GRADE MATTERS**

While research tells us that age is the best and most practical way to group children of similar physical, cognitive and emotional maturity, it also tells us that a primary reason that children choose to play sports, including lacrosse, is to have fun. We also know that a significant part of having fun while playing youth sports means being able to play with friends and classmates. While age is the final determinant of eligibility, grade-based play continues to be important for some children and for some community-based programs. To that end, the official US Lacrosse Playing Year is defined as September 1-August 31; this aligns with the September 1 cut-off date used by many states for school registration, allowing a significant majority of children to play with their classmates.<sup>(1)</sup> If a state or locality uses a different cut-off date for school enrollment, then youth lacrosse organizations or schools may align with their state or local school cut-off

date for local league or community based play.

### **CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD**

This US Lacrosse Player Segmentation Policy is just one component of ensuring a safe and quality playing experience for all youth players; age appropriate rules, educated coaches, and trained officials are equally important. US Lacrosse should continue to annually review rules of youth and scholastic play and promote the training of coaches and officials to maximize safety, and improve skills and the overall enjoyment of participants.

As lacrosse programs across the country work to evolve their current organizations to embrace this segmentation policy, US Lacrosse should provide guidance and support to those local groups seeking reasonable alternative strategies to address issues that may arise with implementation of these new player segments. The Task Force does not intend for these segmentation policies to prevent any youth players from playing lacrosse. The Task Force seeks to ensure that all boys and girls lacrosse players have an opportunity to play lacrosse in a safe, fair, developmentally appropriate and fun environment.

*The US Lacrosse Player Segmentation Task Force was convened by the US Lacrosse Board of Directors in October, 2015. The Task Force included the following lacrosse community leaders: Kristen Murray (Chair), Don Aiello, Melissa Anderson, Jack Couch, Ruthie Lavelle, George Leveille, Dr. Doug McKeag, Joe Spallina, Tom Spangenberg, and US Lacrosse staff: Ann Kitt-Carpenetti, Melissa Coyne, Bruce Griffin, Mark Hogan, and Kim Rogers.*

- (1) Education Commission of the States (ECS) 50 State Comparison; Kindergarten Entrance Age, 2015.
- (2) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010.
- (3) US Lacrosse Sports Science & Safety Committee Age and Eligibility Position Paper (dated 8/25/2015) and the US Lacrosse Position Paper: Boys' and Girls' Youth Lacrosse Participation Recommendations (dated 10/30/11.)