

Try it . . . you might like it

PAL hoping area kids will give lacrosse a chance

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Lacrosse is boss. The boss is lacrosse. So says Paul and Larry. It's such a good sport it's downright scary.

Think about Dr. Seuss. Think about the story "Green Eggs and Ham." But don't think about lacrosse quite yet. Just like the theme of "Green Eggs and Ham," Paul Gazaleh and Larry Haddock want to make sure no one forms an opinion on lacrosse until they have at least tried the sport.

"It's a fast-paced game," noted Gazaleh, one of the coaches in the East Windsor PAL Lacrosse program. "The strategy is similar to soccer and basketball. It has the speed of hockey and the contact of football. It's all wrapped into one. Everyone that tries it loves it. We just have to get more kids to try it."

East Windsor PAL and Hightstown High have both been working on building lacrosse programs in recent years. In its fourth year of existence, the PAL program has grown to include three teams for the boys and three more for the girls. Gazaleh and Haddock, the PAL coordinator for lacrosse, note there are about 120 kids currently in the program and room for more.

In order to give kids the opportunity, PAL will be running a lacrosse camp on September 26, October 3 and 10 from 6:30-9 p.m. each night. The camp is open to boys and girls, ages 8-14. Indoor clinics during the winter time are also in the works. This will give kids an ample opportunity to try out the sport before making a decision of signing up for the primary spring season. More information about the lacrosse camp and clinics will be posted in the future on the East Windsor PAL Web site (EastwindsorPAL.org).

"As far as two sports go, we'll try and work it out that kids can play both," Haddock said. Haddock even seemed a little envious of this fact.

"I never got to play it," Haddock noted of lacrosse. "I play it at practice and it's a lot of fun. My sons love the game. By next year all three of them (Kevin, 14, Thomas, 11, and Sean, 8) will be playing it."

Gazaleh has two daughters. He's looking forward to introducing them to the sport when they get a little older. Right now, PAL offers lacrosse teams for 3rd-4th graders, 5th-6th graders and those in 7th-8th. Games are played at the Airport Road Complex on the soccer fields (or, as Haddock calls them, "the lacrosse fields"). Since part of the fields run across the softball playing surface, games can not overlap. Gazaleh and Haddock see that as a positive.

"We'll all meet and work it out with soccer and softball," Haddock said.

The two also stress the fact that new players should not be worried about lack of experience, especially since this is such a new sport in area Rec Leagues. Most of the surrounding town do have programs now — which is great for travel and arranging games — but with the exception of West Windsor they are all relatively new programs.

"Obviously, we have to start from the beginning," Gazaleh noted. "Of the 19 boys on the 7th-8th grade team, twelve never played before and seven had played one year. Fortunately, most of the teams we play are in the same situation."

Ideally, Gazaleh and Haddock would love to get players to work their way through the entire PAL lacrosse program and then turn over fantastic players to Hightstown High.

"Playing in high school, we always started lacrosse as freshmen," noted Gazaleh, who went on to play at Trenton State College. "Some of the teams we played started in Rec programs at a much earlier age and were so much stronger than us. You could see the difference in the play."

That would be a wonderful gift for Hightstown High and this community. At the very least, more kids would be playing a sport and having fun.

"We have 120 kids in the program," Haddock said. "Our goal is to double that. We think we have the capability to do that. We have interested coaches. We have fields. We're also working with the high school."

And with the camps, kids can find out firsthand if the sport is or isn't for them.

"The whole point of the camp and clinics is to give kids a chance to try the sport without having to commit to a season," Gazaleh said. "We're of the opinion that if they try it, they'll like it."

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