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Lacrosse comes to Keizer

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School boys lacrosse team has only played one game at their home school in the more than five years the team has been around.

That's about to change, and Ryan Bowlby, McNary head coach, said the program is feeling extra pressure to demonstrate the game for a new Keizer audience.

"In past seasons, the kids have really been focused on winning games, but the seniors this season are really motivated to show their understanding of the game for the new fans who might come out and watch," Bowlby said. "The big thing we are focusing on is talking. I want them talking as loud as possible, making it known that we are on this field. We want to let the stadium know that we know the game and we're talking through it."

Last summer, the McNary volunteers, boosters and local businesses all chipped in to install a new turf field. The artificial turf, which can withstand more regular usage, allows the lacrosse team to play in Keizer rather than traveling to North Salem High School, as was the norm, for home games. If that wasn't enough reason to celebrate the sport, there's also a girls lacrosse club at McNary for the first time this year.

An all-North American game

Imagine a game played with teams ranging from 100 to 1,000 players on a field 1,600 feet to 1.9 miles long and contests lasting from sun up to sun down.

That's where lacrosse is believed to have its roots, as a ceremonial warfare to give thanks to a higher power. It later evolved into a form of intertribal sport with players taking on the role of warriors seeking glory and honor for their tribes.

It was played by indigenous people of the North American continent and first documented by Jesuit missionary priests before being described in detail by frontiersman James Smith in 1757. In those days, tribe members used five-foot staffs with nets on the top to move around a wooden ball.

The sport first became codified around the turn of the 20th century and it was included in the Olympics in 1904 and 1908 with teams from Canada, the United States and Great Britain competing.

Since that time, the game underwent further modifications and has been played at the college level for more than 100 years. In recent decades, the game's popularity has grown far beyond the Canadian and American Northeast regions where it was most popular.

The basics

In modern boys games, teams of 10 players set up on either side of the field. Girls get 12 players

"There's a bunch who are picking up the stick for the first time and they're playing pretty well, especially on defense"

— Jonathan Williams

on each team.

For the boys, helmets, gloves, shoulder pads, elbow pads and crosses (the poles with netted loops on the end) are the standard equipment and physical contact is encouraged. In girls lacrosse, the rules are specifically designed to limit physical contact and the only required equipment is a mouth guard and a faceguard or goggles.

For the boys, there are three defensemen, three midfielders, three attackmen and one goalie on the field at any one time. The girls get two additional midfielders. Players can move outside of their designated area on the field — goalies can even make runs on the opposing goals — so long as other players hang back.

"Our goalie (Marcus McCoy) happens to be freakishly athletic and he's known to make runs like that. He's probably our best athlete on the team," Bowlby said.

The crosses differ in size and sometimes shape depending on the role of the player on the field.

"Defensive players get 6-foot poles, while attackmen get a 42-inch stick. The goalie's stick can vary in length, but it always has a larger net at the top," Bowlby said.

The game is played with a small, solid rubber ball that is passed between players using the crosse and scored in a six-by-six goal. Players cannot touch the ball with their hands and are most often running with the

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Quick hits

Lacrosse is played with 10 players on each team: three attackmen, three midfielders, three defensemen, and one goalie

Checking — an attempt to dislodge the ball from another player's stick by poking or slapping their stick or arms with either end of their own stick.

Crease — The circular area surrounding the six-by-six goal. Offensive players are not allowed to enter the crease, defensive players are permitted so long as they don't have possession of the ball.

Crosse — the proper name of the netted sticks used in the game. There are two sizes of sticks, longer ones for defensemen and shorter ones for attackmen.

Faceoff — Play is started at the beginning of each quarter, and after each point, with a faceoff at center field. One player from each team meets at the center of the field on all fours and tries to gain control of the ball with their sticks, often using "clamping" techniques to trap the ball under the net of their stick or swing it out to a teammate.

Lacrosse ball — A solid rubber ball used to play and score the game.

Man Down/Man Up — If a team has a player in the penalty box, they are said to be playing Man Down, the opposing team is considered Man Up.

Pocket — The net on the end of a lacrosse stick.

