

Mark Hellenack's Tale

The legacy I want to leave behind is that under my administration of the Minnesota Lacrosse Association (1993-2004), things got started and the game grew at a tremendous rate. In 2001, the MLA (MN Chapter of US Lacrosse) had the 3rd highest increase of member growth, 71%, in the nation and a 45% increase in high school players. The funding for the MLA back then was generated by a rebate of one dollar for each Minnesota member of US Lacrosse, in addition to revenue generated by the leagues and clinics we would run. So, the more things we ran and members we had, the larger our budget would be.

We communicated with our members with the annual "Minnesota Lacrosse" newsletter and then eventually moved to the mnlacrosse.org website, which ate up all the US Lacrosse rebate money in our budget. The revenue from box and field leagues, coaching, official's and player's clinics, tournaments and camps funded everything else the MLA did: the first All-Star weekend, the Spectator's Guide, the small stipend I was paid to be the executive director, the in-school clinics, the stick and video loaner program, the MN Chill Travel team scholarships, and the Hall of Fame banquet.

My primary focus was on growing the game and always has been. I remember teaching lacrosse in local gym classes all over the metro area and following them up with clinics and team registration in the school cafeteria. The trick to growing the sport was to motivate and support others (parents and students) to do the same thing in their community. Once they generated enough interest, the MLA would provide a league for them to compete in.

As the sport continued to grow, the administration of the various levels of the sport began to split off from the MLA. During the years of 2002-2004 the girls' high school coaches formed the Northcentral Schoolgirls Lacrosse Association (NSLA), while the boys' coaches formed the Minnesota Boys' Scholastic Lacrosse Association (MSBLA) and two groups of motivated parents started Youth Lacrosse Minnesota (YLM) for youth boys' summer field lacrosse and the Middle School Schoolgirls Lacrosse Association (MSSLax) for girls' youth. It was natural for all of these groups to be formed to address the growing needs of their players, coaches and community associations. One person could not do it all.



My administration of the MLA ended in 2004 when the national governing body (US Lacrosse) demanded that the chapters focus less on running things (leagues, camps, clinics and tournaments) and more on the equal distribution of the chapter membership rebate money to all the constituents. So, the new board was formed to focus on that. From that point on, I took the leagues and other events I was running and formed Lax Loons.



Mark Hellenack at a lacrosse clinic at North Jr. High in Hopkins

The MLA has provided financial assistance to college teams making it to the National Championships and hosted events like the annual LAXtravaganza and the Hot-Dish fundraiser tournament for the American Cancer Society, which I happily ran for many years. The problem is that funding for the MLA is limited because it only comes from the one to three dollar rebate received for each Minnesota member of US Lacrosse. This does not add up to a budget to do much with.

The only regret I have is that I was not able to help keep all the organizations under one umbrella organization similar to the model used by soccer. US Soccer has a more hands-on role with its state-run Minnesota Youth Soccer Association, providing a full-time paid staff person to run leagues, development clinics for players, officials and coaches and promote, fund and start men's and women's associations and programs throughout the state at all age levels.

The MLA's role in accomplishing this sort of growth in recent years has been hampered by the lack of a budget and staff to make it happen. However, there is a plan to grow lacrosse statewide from the MBSLA (the boys' HS club and youth spring leagues). With the money generated from MBSLA association and team dues, MBSLA President Kevin Reed has put together a funding initiative to pay Homegrown Lacrosse to go to out-state Minnesota middle and high schools to teach the game in gym classes for a week, followed by a clinic and player sign-ups for the spring. Homegrown is also very active in finding funding to run gym programs in inner-city elementary and middle schools. This tried and true systematic approach will help start youth associations and high school programs throughout the state.

The growth and development of the game in Minnesota would happen even faster and reach more potential players quicker if all the organizations (Homegrown, MLA, MBSLA, NSLA, MSSLax, MSHSL, YLM, etc.) were to pool their resources and work together on one plan to grow both the men's & women's games.

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