



## Huge Step Forward

**National standards, officials education curriculum boosts quality of youth lacrosse experience**

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In Alabama, where college football is king, some residents declare at birth if their children will root for the Alabama's Crimson Tide or Auburn's Tigers. Lacrosse doesn't quite have that clout yet.

Willie Prince, a football and basketball official in Alabama, had never even seen lacrosse until he received an email prior to the spring of 2009 asking if he wanted to officiate lacrosse. He began officiating boys' lacrosse and soon found himself covering girls' games too. "Luckily, it turns out that some of the terminology, mechanics and positioning on the field – along with communication with coaches and fans from other officiating experiences – transferred over easily," Prince said.

Prince got plenty of help from the US Lacrosse Officials' Education Program (OEP). After years of development, US Lacrosse, with the help of many of the top officials in the sport, has established certification requirements for officials for every level of play.

The OEP includes a start-to-finish process that revolves around national standards for rules knowledge and on-field competency, with requirements for recertification and a progression for officials wishing to ascend the career ladders. Certification includes online and in-person instruction.

On the women's side the rating is the on-field evaluation component of certification. High school students can obtain a youth/junior rating to officiate youth games, while adults must obtain an apprentice or local rating before moving up to district, national and international. District- or national-rated officials can work any game from youth through college.

The men's game employs numeric levels to designate certifications for officials. The level of evaluation is based on the skills officials demonstrate on the field, not the level of play.

"US Lacrosse continues to focus on elevating the quality of the lacrosse experience for players and families, and having officials meet national standards not only gives them what they need to make sure games are safe and fair, it also boosts the consistency of the lacrosse experience as the sport grows from coast to coast," said Lucia Perfetti Clark, manager of officials' education and training at US Lacrosse. Prince immediately worked to bring an OEP developmental clinic to Birmingham and received his local rating after just his second season. Since then, Prince has improved his game by officiating numerous summer recruiting events in Georgia, Florida and the Mid-Atlantic.



In 2011, Prince received a scholarship to attend US Lacrosse National Convention in Baltimore, hosted a second developmental clinic in Alabama and attended the US Lacrosse Local Enrichment and Development (LEAD) clinic in Orlando at the US Lacrosse Under-15 National Championships. “Whenever I get a chance to work at these tournaments, I feel like I’m getting better,” said Prince, who’s now a district-rated official following his successful completion of a clinic at the US Lacrosse Women’s National Tournament.

“Consistency is the holy grail of officiating – it’s what we strive for,” said Gordon Corsetti of the Georgia Lacrosse Officials Association. Officials want consistency through a whole game. Coaches may want it from game to game. Parents may want it from state to state or region to region. “There’s a disconnect in how each region officiates,” Corsetti said. “Having those national standards set by US Lacrosse is a huge step forward.”

Corsetti recalled reading the rulebook as a seventh-grader and being “thrown out there” to officiate a youth game in Georgia. A former college player, Corsetti became a member of the GLOA in 2008, progressed through training programs provided locally and through US Lacrosse and attended a Lacrosse Referee Development (LAREDO) Level 3 session in Colorado last summer – earning certification to work college games as part of a three-man crew.

Corsetti wanted to give back to the sport he loved. Others, like parents Pat Takahashi and Dave Bagdan, decided to don the stripes when their children started playing. “I just got hooked,” Bagdan said. Bagdan now is on the board of the Northern California Lacrosse Referee Association, which uses USL curricula for its training. Takahashi’s background as a physical education teacher helped her learn how to officiate girls’ lacrosse when her daughter decided to start playing in Walnut Creek, Calif. Takahashi helped develop a program that trains about 70 high school students to officiate youth games. Her local board recently won the Susi Ganzenmuller Observers Program grant, which provides for observation and feedback for officials. “We have a community of people who truly care about the game being played safely and fairly,” Takahashi said.

The US Lacrosse OEP staff includes active officials Charlie Obermayer and Liz Brush, who helped set national standards. “Recruiting, training and then certifying our US Lacrosse officials throughout Massachusetts and across the country is critically important to the continued responsible growth of the game,” said Tom Spangenberg, president of the Mass Bay Youth Lacrosse League, one of the nation’s largest. “We have a strong and growing partner relationship with the Eastern Mass Lacrosse Officials Association, and we have doubled down our efforts to train and certify junior officials to ensure we have a second official on our youth games. Eventually we look to have a steady flow of new quality referee candidates to add to our existing pool of quality referees to then assign to our 7,000-plus games each spring.”

It may be some time before Alabama hosts 7,000 youth lacrosse games in a spring. But when that time comes, Prince and others will be ready thanks in part to the US Lacrosse OEP.