

Lacrosse

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leaving town the following morning for their next destination.

The NLCS is one of England's top academic schools—40 percent of its grads go on to Oxford or Cambridge. The teams (U14 and U15 age groups) were visiting various California cities during a 10-day spring break, playing squads in the San Francisco and San Diego areas as well as in El Segundo, while also managing side stops at Sea World and Universal Studios.

During their time in El Segundo, the NLCS players stayed with host families—at the homes of the players they competed against in the exhibition matches. Reportedly the parents were very impressed by how polite the visitors were, and were pleasantly surprised to receive gifts from their guests. The British youngsters were also overwhelmed by the reception. "They told us that nothing was like the welcome they got in El Segundo," said El Segundo Starz Lacrosse program administrator (and, along with Wood, coach of many of El Segundo's teams) Brooks Roscoe. "We had a banner made up, the Mayor speaking, a parade onto the field, special T-shirts made that we gave them, TV coverage, pizza and a beach bonfire after the game with s'mores."

The visit was just another step in lacrosse's evolution into a major player in American youth sports. It has taken the country by storm and there are close to 400,000 kids now playing on teams nationwide. Youth participation in lacrosse has grown over 500 percent in the last decade, and the sport's popularity has quickly spread from its traditional East Coast hotbeds (e.g. Maryland and New York) to West Coast states like California.

Called "the fastest sport on two feet," lacrosse is a combination of basketball, football, soccer and hockey that rewards speed and agility over brawn. It was originally developed by Native Americans many centuries ago to resolve tribal conflicts and for ceremonial or spiritual purposes. Back then poles, trees or rocks served as goals and balls were made of wood, clay, stone or deerskin.

Nowadays the sport is played on a grass field with a long-handled, netted stick known as a "crosse" (French for stick) that is designed to catch and pass a small, solid rubber ball in hopes of eventually scoring a goal. Men's teams have 10 players on the field at a time while women's teams have 12, and there are slight variations to the rules and safety regulations depending on level and gender. Despite the speed of the game and the propensity for physical contact between players, a recent study by Johns Hopkins University rated men's lacrosse safer than football, ice hockey, basketball and even soccer. Of the upper school sports, lacrosse also boasts the highest percentage of high school players who go on to play in college and receive scholarships—making it a particularly appealing option for teens looking to compete athletically. "One of our high school players, Jonathan McDonald, was offered an NCAA Division I scholarship after having only played the sport for one year," said El Segundo Recreation Supervisor Jeff Van Fossen.

Van Fossen noted that local lacrosse got

its jumpstart in 2005 through the aforementioned Starz Lacrosse Foundation, one of the West Coast's premiere organizations for the sport. "It's kind of like the Little League for lacrosse," he explained. Many of the kindergarten through eighth grade players are enrolled through Starz, with approximately 165 kids over 11 teams. "When they started, there were only two teams and they (Starz) have increased participation each year," added Van Fossen.

The league teams play squads from neighboring cities during a season that runs from March through May. The middle and high school age club teams are considered separate but are also sanctioned by Starz. "The four club teams (two each for boys and girls including the two girls teams that played in the exhibition last week) are part of the El Segundo Lacrosse League, which is incorporated and is a non-profit venture," explained Van Fossen, who added that the club players overlap into the regular league games but also take part in extracurricular activities. "The club teams are considered more elite, so they practice more and can play in special weekend-long tournaments or jamborees," he said. "Some of the teams we play are from as far away as Texas and Washington."

How are the teams doing? Better and better, it seems. For instance, the boys' high school team (coached by Matt Wood, Woodie Wood's nephew) finished second last year despite fielding an all-freshman squad playing in its very first year in the Pacific Lacrosse League. This year, that team has a strong chance to win its division, depending on the outcomes of the last two games, and perhaps vie for a state title. Yet there is still a ways to go. "Our teams are doing well, but when you compare us to Manhattan Beach, they are CIF (California Interscholastic Federation) and have 60 kids try out for high school varsity," said Roscoe. "So they're a little ahead of us, but we give their youth teams a good game." The next goal, according to Roscoe, is to petition for CIF status to really take lacrosse to the next level. Wood hopes this will happen in the near future. "The CIF teams in the South Bay have already voted El Segundo to go CIF, but we will need to approach the school to get approval," he said. "We may decide to go with the girls' program first, but once we do go CIF, the sport will really take off and we'll have to expand our program to fit everybody in."

In the meantime, the sport's rise from virtually nothing to its current level of interest is cause for celebration in Van Fossen's eyes. "It has been quite amazing from my perspective to see the growth of lacrosse," he said. "It gives the kids another outlet for sports out here."

Wood echoed the sentiment. "Every time I see them on the field, it warms my heart to know that these kids can play college sports," he said. "The chance of them getting on the team, even without a scholarship, is close to 100 percent."

For more information about local lacrosse, log onto www.elsegundolacrosse.com, or call 1-310-322-8393. •

Business Briefs

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The overall approach for the COLBERT project is to utilize as much existing NASA program hardware as possible and couple it with an existing, commercially available high reliability treadmill. The treadmill and supporting subsystems (power, avionics, cooling, etc.) will be housed in an International Standard Payloads Rack and the vibration isolation system will be a modified Passive Rack Isolation System. The entire assembly is planned to be housed in the Node 2, and will then be moved to Node 3 ("Tranquility") upon its arrival to the International Space Station.

Development of the COLBERT is being completed by Wyle at its Houston operations where it has supported the nation's space program for more than 40 years. It is based on an athletic treadmill produced by Woodway, one of the leading providers of athletic and medical treadmills.

Wyle is the prime contractor on two premier NASA Johnson Space Center contracts. Under the Bioastronautics Contract, Wyle provides medical operations, ground and flight research, space flight hardware development and fabrication, science and mission integration for flight, and habitability and environmental factors in support of the Space Shuttle, International Space Station, Constellation and Human Research programs. Under the Occupational Medicine Occupational Health contract, Wyle provides clinical and occupational health care for NASA personnel and the astronaut corps.

Wyle, a privately held company, is a leading provider of high tech aerospace engineering and information technology services to the federal government on long-term outsourcing contracts. The company also provides life

sciences services for NASA's astronaut corps as well as mission critical support services and space simulation; test and evaluation of aircraft, weapon systems, networks, and other government assets; and other engineering services to the aerospace, defense, nuclear power, communications and transportation industries.

GO METRO TO THE ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY FESTIVAL AT WOODLEY PARK IN VAN NUYS SUNDAY, MAY 3

Go Metro and join the festivities at the 61st Annual Israel Independence Day Festival on Sunday, May 3, from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Woodley Park in Van Nuys. Avoid the traffic hassle at Woodley Park and save money by parking at the Sepulveda Park-and-Ride Metro lot located at 15430 West Erwin St. From there, hop on the Metro Orange Line and get off one stop later at the Woodley stop. Metro patrons who park at the Sepulveda Park-and-Ride Lot can purchase their admission tickets there and receive an exclusive 10 percent discount.

The festival will feature street artists, musicians, Israeli folk dancing, and an amusement area for children, and more than 250 booths representing various Jewish and Israeli organizations. The event also will feature a large variety of Kosher Israeli and Middle Eastern food booths for a true culinary experience.

Woodley Park is on Woodley Ave. between Burbank Boulevard and Victory Boulevard. For more information on the Israel Independence Day Festival please call (818) 757-0123 or visit www.israelfestival.com.

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