



Photos courtesy of Bernie Clasing



Growing interest in lacrosse coming soon to a field near you

THEY DIDN'T HAVE HELMETS OR GOGGLES. They didn't have mouth guards or cleated shoes. But the original Native Americans, who invented the game of lacrosse, had perhaps the most important thing of all: abundant open space to play in.

These days, our lacrosse fields have to be built to precise specifications concerning size and slope. But the game remains with us, and it certainly does continue to grow. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), more than 170,000 boys and girls played lacrosse competitively last year. In fact, among the girls, the sport vaulted into the top 10 most popular during the 2010-2011 school year.

Reflecting this interest, an increased number of lacrosse camps and clinics are being offered, as are more travel teams

and opportunities for athletes. What does that mean for a field manager? Better get ready for the invasion.

THE BASICS

Lacrosse requires a large amount of space to be played ac-

ording to the rules. High school boys' lacrosse fields must be 330 feet (minimum) in length, and 160 feet in width. NCAA men's lacrosse fields are 330 feet minimum length and 180 feet standard width. For both high school and NCAA

girls/women's lacrosse, the dimensions are length 300 feet minimum/360 feet maximum, and width of 180 feet minimum/210 feet maximum. Outside of the field itself, there are specifications governing the size of the coaches' area, and specific clearances around the field are recommended for athlete and spectator safety.

Beyond those basics, there are requirements (as there are for all sports fields) concerning slope and drainage. These requirements will vary according to whether the field is natural grass or artificial turf (and if natural grass, whether or not it has



>> HARVARD SOCCER FIELD. Photo courtesy of Stantec, Boston, MA

High school boys' lacrosse fields

Length - 330 feet (minimum)
Width - 160 feet

NCAA men's lacrosse fields

Length - 330 feet (minimum)
Width - 180 feet

High school and NCAA girls/women's lacrosse fields

Length - 300 feet (minimum)
- 360 feet (maximum)
Width - 180 feet (minimum)
- 210 feet (maximum)

subsurface drainage, whether or not it is crowned, etc.)

Many field builders note they are seeing a preponderance of synthetic fields being installed, and being designated for lacrosse. They also note that lighting is being added to many existing fields; lighting extends the playing hours and allows one field to host more activities, thereby making it a more cost-efficient investment.

THE MARKINGS

“We definitely see an increase in the sport of lacrosse,” notes Dan Wright, whose company, Sports Turf Company, Inc. in Whitesburg, GA serves the Atlanta area. “More and more synthetic fields installed are requiring the markings for lacrosse.”

In such cases, he adds, men’s lacrosse lines are inlaid and women’s lacrosse is “tick-marked” for painting.

Field builders note that if a facility will accommodate multiple sports, such as soccer, football, field hockey and lacrosse, care

should be taken in lining it. Multiple sets of lines in varying colors can leave the field with what has been called a “playground” or “gymnasium floor” look.

Instead, say the pros, field managers need first to decide which sport the field will host the most often (or perhaps which is most important to the owner, such as the high school or college whose property it is). That sport, then, is designated the “primary” sport, and those playing lines should be marked in the brightest color. The primary field colors are typically white and yellow if there are two sports on the field.

Don’t be surprised if lacrosse is one of those primary sports. And don’t be surprised when you see what isn’t.

“We are seeing a large increase in men’s and women’s lacrosse around here,” says Lance Rosenberger of Medallion Athletic Products in Mooresville, NC. “Almost every university we did last year included lacrosse lines as part of their soccer field. In Geor-

gia, we did three fields with football and men’s lacrosse, but no soccer.”

Additionally, he notes, “a few universities are planning on upgrading their lacrosse programs from a club sport to an NCAA program.”

Once the primary sport(s) have been determined and marked in the brightest and most visible colors, the secondary sports can take more muted line colors such as blue or brown. Another option is to provide limited field markings (hash marks or tick marks) that are inlaid into the turf, allowing for temporary markings to be placed.

THE EQUIPMENT

While players will carry around plenty of their own sports equipment, including sticks, balls and personal items such as uniforms, gloves, helmets, goggles and so on (plus the added protective equipment carried by goalies), the equipment necessary to the sport itself is rather light. It may include goals, backstops, targets and rebound nets



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(used in practice) and so on. The equipment itself, being light and portable, is often brought to the field or stored nearby. Storage cages or sheds may be necessary if multiple teams will be using the field.

Because games move quickly, spectators enjoy lacrosse. And while folding chairs and picnic blankets are a time-honored tradition, your players' families and friends will enjoy the experience more if there are bleachers available. (In this respect, lacrosse is no different from any other spectator

sport, where the wish list includes concessions, rest rooms and shaded picnic areas as well).

"An item we feel would be particularly useful would be high nets beyond the end of the field to catch those balls that are overshot," notes Jeff Shyk of K&W Engineers in Harrisburg, PA.

FIELD MAINTENANCE

As with all sports, lacrosse causes wear in specific areas of the field.

"Care should be concentrated in the goal crease area," says Wright. "The goal crease area is where the majority of concentrated play occurs. For synthetic turf fields, this area requires additional grooming to keep the infill material depth consistent. This is where the most damage will occur on a natural turf field. Re-sodding and/or re-seeding may be required to bring these areas back to a condition suitable for other sports."

Part of the reason for the wear and tear is the pace and positioning of the game, says Lee Narozanick of American Athletic Courts in Vincentown, NJ.

"There can be 50 shots on goal in most games. Shortly after the season begins, the goal areas on grass fields lose their grass and by the end of the season, it can be treacherous during a rainy game. Most synthetic turf fields hold up well, but the area still gets the most wear."

Besides, Narozanick notes, he has a unique perspective. "I know a lot about the goal area because my daughter took up the illustrious job of being a lacrosse goalie. Go figure."

As with all athletic fields, regular maintenance is needed to keep the field in good condition generally. Natural grass needs mowing and irrigation as well as seasonal fertilizer and repair of worn areas. Synthetic turf should be groomed, cleaned and checked on a regular basis. In all cases, good drainage will be tied to the performance of the field throughout its useful life.

A shortcoming all field managers have to deal with is the constant use of facilities. Whereas the Native Americans who invented lacrosse could simply move on to another area when their field became denuded of grass or looked a bit worn, many of today's facility managers are land-locked. But for those who are in the enviable position of being able to redistribute play among different fields, the pros urge taking full advantage of that ability.

"If I could give any extra tip, it would be to have more maintenance, and to rest the field and let it recover from usage," says Dan Wright.

"The more rest a grass field gets, the better it will perform," says Narozanick. "So rotate, rotate, rotate."

>> **BOSTON COLLEGE.** Photos courtesy of Stantec, Boston, MA



No matter what other sports take place, there's one you should nip in the bud: prohibit local dog owners from using the facility as a place to play fetch or get some exercise (a euphemism for activities that result in unpleasant playing conditions for athletes).

Keep a close eye on the field. Clean off litter and debris, and keep a lookout for problems like pests, weeds, drainage issues and other problems. If you see trouble brewing, address it immediately. It is easier to prevent an injury than it is to deal with the aftermath.

Oh, and one more thing, say field pros. No matter what other sports take place, there's one you should nip in the bud: prohibit local dog owners from using the facility as a place to play fetch or get some exercise (a euphemism for activities that result in unpleasant playing conditions for athletes).

Mary Helen Sprecher wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the ASBA, as well as their Membership Directory. For info, 866-501-2722 or www.sportsbuilders.org.



>> **VERT TRACK SOCCER LACROSSE STADIUM.** Photo courtesy of Medallion Athletic Products, Inc., Mooresville, NC



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