

# Lacrosse Grows in Popularity, Offering Fast Fun

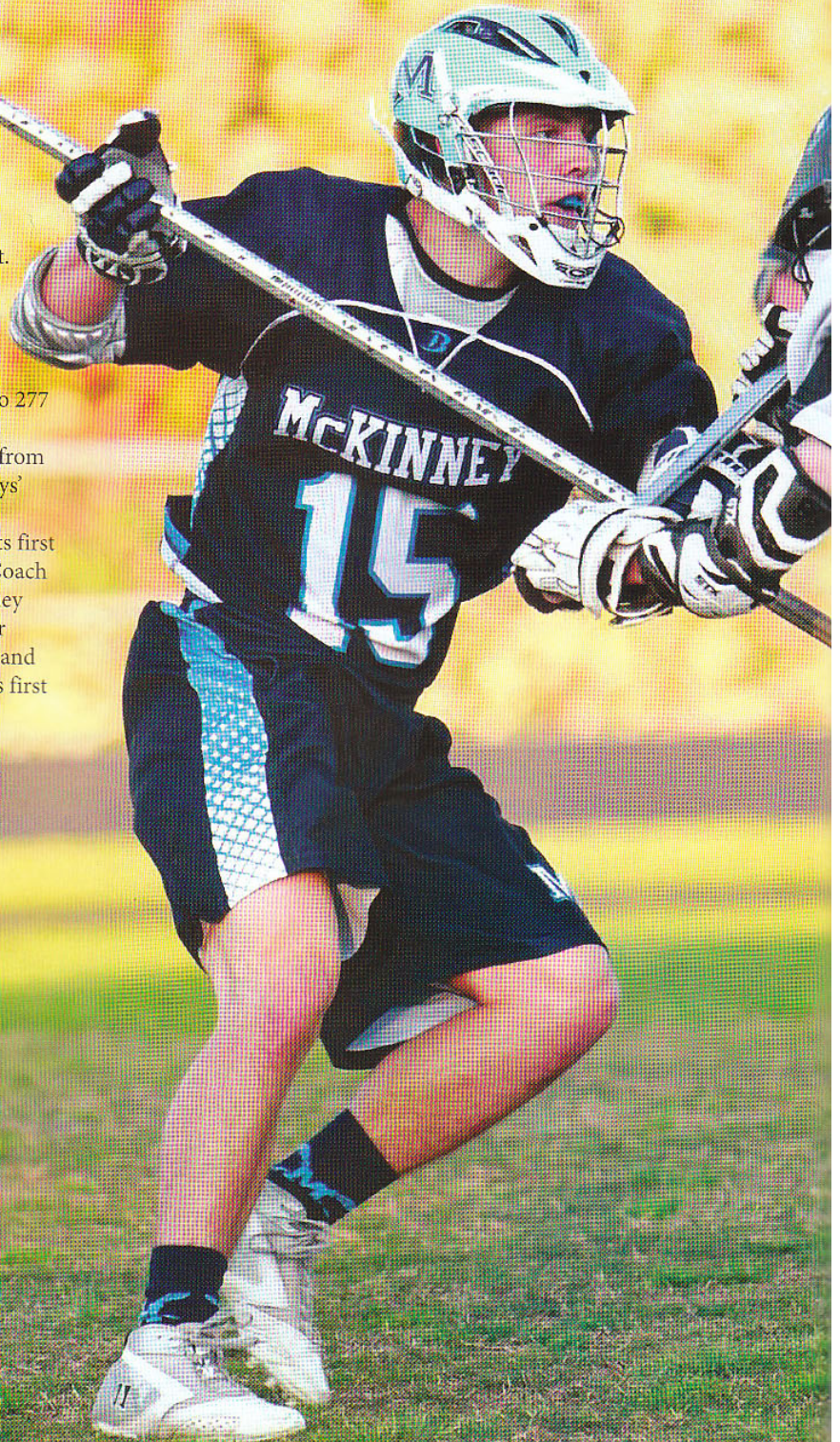
By Steven Nester

Combining the tenacity of a contact sport with the dexterity of a racquet sport, lacrosse is perhaps the fastest game on two feet.

Its appeal in McKinney is equally swift; it's rapidly becoming one of the hottest sports in town.

The McKinney Lacrosse Association youth program has grown from an initial 16 players to 277 young men and women. And, the sport has extended to the high school level as well. Players from McKinney's three high schools make up the boys' and girls' high school teams.

The girls' high school program completed its first junior varsity season last spring. High school Coach Morgan McDonald, who also runs the McKinney Lacrosse Association girls' team, says the junior varsity squad began the season with 11 players and ended with 18. The girls' varsity team begins its first season in fall 2012.





McDonald is optimistic about the future of lacrosse in McKinney, saying that since the spring 2012 season ended, young women have been calling to ask how to sign up. Anyone with an interest is welcomed, she says.

She and Alex Heppner, who helped organize McKinney's first lacrosse teams, say players' attraction to the sport is varied.

"Lacrosse appeals to the kids who are looking for something different," says Heppner. "Many kids aren't satisfied with other sports because there often isn't that much hustle and go. But lacrosse is something different. Many of the skills are those used in other sports."

McKinney Boyd High School senior Nick Creedon, a varsity lacrosse player, agrees.

"I grew up playing football, basketball and soccer in McKinney," Creedon says. "Lacrosse is basically a combination of them all. So, once I got bored with baseball and picked up a stick, I was hooked. I just wish I listened to my Dad and started playing five years ago. It's fast, physical and fun – I love it."

While lacrosse is indigenous to North America, it arrived in McKinney in 2005 when parents Heppner and Al Martin saw a need for it and recognized a huge local talent pool to fill team rosters.

#### The McKinney Lacrosse Association has squads for everyone



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"I moved to McKinney in 2003 from Maryland, where lacrosse is a major sport," Heppner explains, "but I had to take my son down to Plano for him to play. My friend Al Martin and I got together with his son in the spring of 2005 and started the McKinney Lacrosse Association youth program. We began with 16 high school boys, and only three had played before."

Long regarded an East Coast sport and resembling football, basketball, soccer and hockey, lacrosse is a great way to stay in shape, says boys' high school Coach Brendan Carney.

"Lacrosse is a great sport for athletes who want to stay in shape during the off season," Carney says. "They'll come back to their main sport in shape and they won't lose any of the skills their sport requires because lacrosse uses many of those same skills."

Lacrosse is a game of constant movement – and there's never a dull moment.

McKinney Boyd junior Brody Kovacs has been playing lacrosse for eight years. He enjoys it not only because it takes physical ability, but also because players need to get their heads into the game and think.

"You don't have to be the biggest guy to be the best; you just need to have your skills down and know when to use them," Kovacs says. "Being quick on your feet is important, but you also need to be mentally quick, too, and have a good lacrosse IQ. That means you know where to be on the field and that you can see the plays coming before they happen. Having a good head on your shoulders is as important as being a good stick guy."

Lacrosse has educational benefits as well. As high school programs grow across the area, colleges are beginning to recruit lacrosse players in North Texas.

"Lacrosse is a sport with great opportunities for college scholarships," says Heppner. "More colleges and universities have added lacrosse as [an] NCAA-sanctioned sport or club sport in the last five years than any other sport."

Players need not look any further than McDonald, the girls' coach, to see the benefits of hard work on the lacrosse field. In 2005, McDonald played a total of 19 minutes during a high school tournament in New Jersey before the game was called due to bad weather. But that was all it took





to get the attention of college scouts, she says. When she returned home to California, her answering machine was loaded with colleges wanting to talk scholarship.

The opportunities lacrosse offers to McKinney athletes continue to expand as the sport grows here and on the national level. Chris Creedon, a McKinney coach and a McKinney Lacrosse Board Member, says the community and its players are in a position to succeed on all levels.

“Now that we are offering the sport to all age groups, are able to play nearly year-round, [and] have experienced coaches leading the players’ development, it won’t be long until we are playing at the highest level nationally, and sending student athletes off to major college programs,” Creedon says.

For more information about the McKinney Lacrosse Association, go to [mckinneylacrosse.com](http://mckinneylacrosse.com).

*About the author: Steven Nester is an educator and freelance writer who hosts “Poets of the Tabloid Murder,” a mystery author interview show that can be heard on public radio.*