



# LACROSSE COMES TO COWETA

By Leigh Knight

Native Americans sometimes played this sport for days to prepare for war, resolve conflicts and to heal the sick. Today, Coweta kids play it just for fun. It's lacrosse, one of America's fastest growing team sports, according to U.S. Lacrosse. The game is a neat composite of basketball, soccer and hockey. It's fast, easy to learn, and players don't have to be tall like basketball players or big like football players in order to excel.

"Any child of any athletic ability can participate," says Tom DeBole, senior director at the Summit Family YMCA. "There is a position for everyone. Kids

who may not have excelled in sports before can excel in lacrosse. I have had parents tell me, 'My child has not been more passionate about anything, much less a sport.'"

DeBole, who began playing as a sixth grader in upstate New York, has been instrumental in introducing the sport to Coweta through the Summit Family YMCA's programs. U.S.

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Summit YMCA Senior Director

Lacrosse recently presented DeBole with an award for "outstanding growth of the game" for his efforts. Some of the YMCA's programs include free "learn to play" clinics, youth leagues offered in the spring, summer, and fall, nationally recognized camps featuring the biggest names in the world for men's and women's lacrosse, and middle school club programs, based on the high school club program.

In spring of 2005, the Summit Family YMCA developed six new high school club lacrosse programs. Through the support of school administrators, students in

Coweta's three area high schools competed in the North Georgia High School Lacrosse League (NGLL), wearing uniforms supplied by the YMCA with their school name and colors, according to DeBole. The YMCA also recruited and trained volunteer coaches for the teams.

"Their [coaches'] enthusiasm and excitement proved to be contagious with the new players," says DeBole. "Lacrosse players want to grow the sport. The story I like to tell is when last year, Newnan High School didn't have a goalie, so Lucy Hensley volunteered. Katlyn Woods, East Coweta's goalie, volunteered to come

over and train her. Here you have typically rival schools helping each other. With lacrosse, it's more about the sport than the rivalry. Hensley later won the MVP in the NGLL annual high school club tournament hosted by the YMCA."

Next year, lacrosse will be a sanctioned varsity program at all three area high schools, according to DeBole. All three teams will compete in the same division, says DeBole, who predicts the division winner will be from Coweta.

"We will still offer club lacrosse and continue to be a feeder program for the high schools through our

middle school program," explains DeBole. "The YMCA will still be involved and work closely with the booster club presidents to grow the sport."

Overall, the YMCA's lacrosse program has grown from 46 players in 2004 participating on one field to over 400 players on 17 different fields. In



addition, the YMCA has trained 34 volunteers.

"We have grown because of our volunteers. I have to give our volunteers the utmost credit, particularly at the high school level, for learning a sport most of them knew nothing about," says DeBole. "It has been a true collaboration. The Coweta County Recreation Department let us utilize their fields from day one. Kids don't get the opportunity to learn a new sport without the support of the community, the Recreation Department, and the schools."

For more information, call the Summit Family YMCA at 770-254-9622 or visit [www.ymcaatlanta.org](http://www.ymcaatlanta.org).

