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Students as teachers: Sharing a love of lacrosse

Mention lacrosse to Samir Jones and the 10th grader thinks of someone other than himself, a fictional character named Scott who plays the sport on MTV's Teen Wolf.



ED HILLE / Staff Photographer

Nysear Byrd, 15, was one of 41 Boys' Latin students taking part in the lacrosse clinic.

But for Gideon Brockenbrough, the game evokes memories of the days when he hurled goals into the net for the Chestnut Hill Academy lacrosse team.

The two 15-year-old students at Boys' Latin of Philadelphia Charter School walked onto a football field in Haverford on Saturday with different connections to the sport but the same hopes for playing in days to come.

Jones and Brockenbrough were part of a group of 41 students from Boys' Latin attending a clinic at the Haverford School organized by two players only a few years older than them.

The two-hour lacrosse primer was an effort by best friends Jacob Landman and Nick Wojdak to spread the gospel about a sport they love. Lacrosse is fast-growing but remains a mystery to many outside the suburbs, the friends said.

"I was never too much into sports, but lacrosse has loved me and taught me so many things," said Landman, 18, a goalie for the Haverford School. "It's taught me hard work and loyalty."

Landman and Wojdak, a 17-year-old who plays the attack position at Episcopal Academy in Newtown Square, drafted volunteers, secured a venue, and found sponsors for the clinic, which taught basic skills such as scoring

and passing.

The session was a welcome first step because Boys' Latin is preparing to start a lacrosse program, said Amy Guidi, director of development for the 500-student school.

The sport will become one of 10 offered by the school when the program begins in the spring.

"We had guys who were interested and played before," said Dan Bluth, football coach at Boys' Latin. "If the kids want something, we try to get it for them."

When Landman and Wojdak heard that the school was considering a program, the two veteran players called Boys' Latin and offered to put on a clinic.

Last year, Landman and Wojdak helped out in a similar program put on by the Lacrosse Education Attitude Perseverance Success program (LEAPS), a lacrosse youth enrichment initiative. About 180 students attended the clinic at Girard College in Philadelphia.

This time, Landman and Wojdak, both of Haverford, wanted to lead the program themselves.

The two have known each since they were 3 and hit balls together at a children's tennis clinic. They went on to play lacrosse, but at rival schools.

Working their connections, Landman and Wojdak got sponsors, including the Philadelphia Lacrosse Association; NXT Sports, a Bala group that runs lacrosse clinics and camps; and New Balance, the sports-gear company.

Each Boys' Latin student received a T-shirt and lacrosse stick. Other donated gear was given away in a raffle.

On Saturday, the Boys' Latin students hurled sticks toward a goal, scooped up stray balls, and pivoted to avoid defenders.

Volunteer teachers yelled out "Good shot!" when goals were made and "Stay with it!" when balls fell from the netted stick before a throw was complete.

Max Brown, a 15-year-old sophomore, signed up for the clinic because he "wanted to learn something new."

Brown has never played the game, and most of his knowledge of lacrosse comes from his "god-brother" who plays for Delaware Valley Friends School in Paoli.

Schoolmate Nasif McPherson, a freshman, says he loves playing the sport, which he says has a reputation for being "preppy and white." McPherson has played for a club team and also played the sport when he was a student at Friends' Central School in Wynnewood.

The hardest part of the game is "playing as smart as possible," said McPherson, 15.

Brockenbrough describes the sport as a combination of games with bigger followings and higher profiles.

"It's the strategy and moves of basketball, the physicality of football, and the running of soccer," Brockenbrough said.



The best part of the afternoon was seeing his friends find joy in the sport, Brockenbrough said. "People in urban areas don't always get a chance to play different kinds of sports and try things outside the box."

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