

Edwardsville YMCA camp tries to increase interest in lacrosse

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – The sport of lacrosse has been growing throughout the nation the past several years, breaking away from its traditional American stronghold of the New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

Interest in the game is expanding to the point where high school teams are forming throughout Illinois, mostly in the Chicago area – O'Fallon is the only school in the area that has official boys and girls lacrosse teams – and next May, the Illinois High School Association will begin a state championship series in both boys and girls lacrosse.

A lacrosse camp was held recently at the Edwardsville YMCA Meyer Center to introduce youngsters to the basics of the game, attracting a good number of participants. “When I started playing outside of Chicago, there were 16 teams,” said Keith Schmidt, one of the coaches for the camp. “Now, there's over 60; there's a team in O'Fallon. It's just a matter of time before it made its way over to Edwardsville. That's our plan, to have a team here.

“We're going to start with the youth game and hopefully grow it that way and eventually, as these kids grow older, there will be a demand for an Edwardsville team too.”

There are many reasons why lacrosse has grown nationwide in recent years. “I think it's because it's fast-paced and exciting,” Schmidt said.

The game has grown both on the men's and women's side; at Wednesday's session, the participants included some prospective female players. “We've actually had a few girls come out; there's actually a couple of them who are every bit as good as the boys are,” Schmidt said.

“We've got about 10 here today,” said Jeremy Kenny, who also helped coach the camp session Wednesday. “These are the 7-to-10-year-olds (taking part in Wednesday's session).”

Both Schmidt and Kenny played in high school, Schmidt in the Chicago suburb of Barrington and Kenny at DeSmet in Creve Couer, Mo. “I'm in a men's league right now,” Kenny said. “Part of that (for the game's breakout from its traditional strongholds) was probably my old high school coach, Mike Sennett,” Kenny said. “He was one of the ones who brought (lacrosse) to St. Louis; I joined the team when it was in its second year of existence, so that was really the second year for lacrosse (in the area).”

“I started playing in high school,” Schmidt said of how he got interested in the game. “We started a team when I was a freshman and I was one of those kids who got tired of baseball; I played football and I liked the hitting aspect of it and how fast it was. I liked hockey too, so we started playing.”



As far as the potential for the growth of the sport in the Metro East area, “there's a lot of potential because there's not that many teams,” Kenny said. “That's kind of why I've worked to help get it going so there's more Illinois teams; all you really have over here, in terms of youth, is O'Fallon, so all those kids have to go to St. Louis to play anybody. We're trying to get more local (sides).”

“The hope is to grow it so that it's no different than any other sport,” Schmidt said. “All the high schools will carry it and the youth programs all the neighboring towns won't have to go to St. Louis every weekend to play.”

For more information on lacrosse in Edwardsville and future camps and activities, visit the Edwardsville Lacrosse page on Facebook. For more information on the history of the sport and more information on lacrosse, visit the US Lacrosse (the sport's national governing body) web site at www.uslacrosse.org.

