



## YORK COUNTY LACROSSE ASSOCIATION

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**ISSUED BY:** Bob Rhein

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TO: YCLA Board of Directors, CPLOA E-Board,

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO ALL YOUR COACHES, PARENTS, PLAYERS, VOLUNTEERS AND CLUB PARTICIPANTS**

As President of the York County Lacrosse Association, I am asking all those involved in the sport of lacrosse for your help. As we approach the end of the third quarter of play and have just a few weeks left in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of our spring season play, I am calling a TIME OUT. The reason for the TIME OUT is so that every Board Member, every Coach, every Official, every Player and every Parent can pause to ask the question “are we satisfied with where we are as a lacrosse community in regards to our 2008 spring season?”

The York-Adams County area this spring is made up of 13 Clubs (Communities), 92 teams from U-9 up through High School with 1,855 boys and girls who are involved by participating in the sport of lacrosse. The YCLA (York County Lacrosse Association) represents the boy’s portion of that total number. This spring, we have 13 Clubs, 67 teams with 1,234 boys playing...our highest number in the last 12 years.

Based on my personal involvement in helping to promote the sport of lacrosse over the last 10 years in the area, I am calling this TIME OUT knowing what already exists and what potentially will occur if we collectively do not re-focus our attention. We are here for one reason and that is to make it the best experience for the players and families so we can continue to grow the base of players for future years. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, nearly 100 coaches attended a four hour mandatory meeting that involved PCA – Positive Coaching Alliance. We made the Executive decision prior to our season starting to require all coaches to attend this outstanding workshop. The feedback from the 2 hour workshop was outstanding and as a result, we have engaged PCA in working with us again next year in a three part series of workshops involving Coaches, Board Members and Parents.

PCA focuses their energy and helps us to “HONOR THE GAME” by following the ROOTS philosophy. This is clearly outlined on our Association website for those who may not be familiar with it ([www.yorkcountylacrosse.org](http://www.yorkcountylacrosse.org)). Entering the first week of March, our coaches were excited, energized and focused on the two key elements of a Double-Goal Coach who strives to win and, even more importantly, uses sports to teach life lessons through Positive Coaching. Every one of the Club’s Board Members felt the workshop would have a positive impact on their program and teams.

Unfortunately, I am now going to share a few observations based on my role as President in this Association:

\*\* Injuries – we have more significant injuries in all levels of play this spring than ever before.

\*\* Incidents – we have an increasing number of incidents occurring on the field between teams, coaches, officials and players.

\*\* Sidelines – we have more spectators (parents, friends, family members) taunting, bullying, screaming at players, officials and coaches than ever before.

\*\* Coaches – we have easily tripled the number of coaches in the coach’s box as compared to the 100 who attended the PCA Workshop and were certified and many have no understanding of PCA.

\*\* Players – we are seeing players at all levels start to adjust their style of play to account for the variances that may occur from one official’s experience to the next.



\*\* Officials – we are experiencing a significant number of game incidents as a result of newer officials not able to keep control of the game.

I can probably go on to share dozens of stories of events that have taken place this spring on and off the field since I get the phone calls, the emails and the stories from opposing coaches who would like to “vent” to me prior to our games, and so on. So it is time for all of us to take a TIME OUT and ask again, “how can we improve?”

Based on my history, here is another observation. Please allow me to take you through why we are at the most critical point in our season based on past history. Most organizations have limited resources and the most valuable of those resources are people. For many, the people coaching are also running their clubs, managing the administrative part of their programs and dealing with a lot of topics far beyond just being a coach on the field. A lot of this starts in January with the behind the scenes work being done to prepare for March 1<sup>st</sup> practice. After seven weeks of practices and games, the coaches are becoming tired (not unusual) due to their personal time commitments. In addition, the coaches have experienced games where the officiating may not have been at a level to meet or exceed the expectation of good officiating. As a result, players are getting hurt, parents are getting frustrated and lashing out against the officials and the opposing players, coaches and spectators. Coaches begin to modify their game strategies based on the inconsistency of the officiating and as a result, the problem perpetuates itself. Again, we are at a critical time where we can continue to see it escalate as the coaches get more tired in May and continue to get more frustrated.

For anyone reading this, you are most likely a coach, a player, an official, a parent or a volunteer. As President, I am not pointing the finger at any of you individually. However, I will take the personal responsibility to share that it starts with leadership and that we all have 100% responsibility to make the behavioral adjustments to improve. In the observation above, everyone can easily point the finger at someone other than themselves.

I am asking that we all re-focus our attention, effort and energy on making the final month of the season the best it has ever been. My fear is that based on history, we have more incidents in late April and May between Clubs and teams than we typically do in the first two months of each season. If we do nothing to change at this point, I can assure you that we will have more injuries, more problems, and ultimately more people at the end of the season saying “I don’t want to be involved anymore”. We would love everyone involved in lacrosse this spring to come back next year (players, coaches, officials, families) so that we can exceed 2,000 boys and girls for the spring of 2009.

During our Board Meeting on May 4<sup>th</sup>, we will discuss this along with several other topics. On a positive note, there is interest from people in York City to start the 14<sup>th</sup> Club in the YCLA and we believe that Dover may also be starting the 15<sup>th</sup> Club in time for the 2009 season. Last weekend, thanks to the generous support of the York Adams lacrosse community, we donated nearly \$2,000 to the Ryan Whitzel Foundation to help with cancer research. There were over 2,000 people attending the Penn Manor – Lampeter Strasburg game and hundreds were from the York Adams area. We also sponsored the WISH (Make-A-wish Foundation) of seven year old Cora through the World’s Longest Running Lacrosse Game and she leaves tomorrow for her week in Disney World with her family.

And finally, I received a telephone call last month from a young man who played lacrosse for Dallastown years ago. He is currently a senior at Towson and was asked to write a story as part of his senior requirement in mass communication. The story is at the bottom of this message for you to read. I would strongly encourage you to take the time to not only read it, but think about the impact we all have on our student athletes as in our roles as coaches, fellow players, officials, and parents.

Here is a young man who had a very positive lacrosse experience in High School who is teaching us a valuable life lesson about community building. As he shared in the conclusion of his story,

***“For lacrosse in York County, there is one number that stands above the rest, one that personifies what the sport can bring out in us, in competition and in community-building. One sport, one community, one number: #14.***

Bob Rhein  
President  
York County Lacrosse Association (YCLA)



**ROOTS** ==> *Honor the Game*

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Kevin Sunday  
April 22, 2008

### **Lacrosse in York County Grows Up With, Remembers Travis Sipe**

It was a moment every lacrosse player dreams about.

On his rival team's field, under the stadium lights, the entire crowd and both teams were on their feet – clapping, applauding, and chanting his name.

In his hands was a lacrosse stick, slowly being cradled from elbow to ear. It was a deceptively simple motion, one every lacrosse player performs countless times, whether in drills or on a run or in the game – a curl or two for every step of the way.

But there was something extraordinary about this cradling, because, on that warm May night in 2003, surrounded by family, friends, teammates and opponents alike cheering his name – “Travis! Travis! Travis!” – Travis Sipe, star attack lacrosse player, lay in his wheelchair alongside the field. With each slow curl of the stick, Travis was fighting through injuries that had left him incapacitated and unable to talk, injuries sustained not on the field, but in a tragic car accident nearly two years before.

The cheers of the crowd were reaching Travis, and he was reaching back.

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Though the sport of lacrosse has a history that dates back hundreds, if not thousands, of years in the annals of Native American lore, its modern incarnation in southern Pennsylvania stretches its roots back barely more than a decade.

In 1996, two local attorneys were looking to sponsor a traveling team from across York County. Coached by Bill Middleton, and later Bob Rhein, 25 boys from five different high schools would be brought together to compete against other counties' teams. Without a home field to call their own, the team rented out space in an athletic facility in nearby Lancaster County to practice. During one of the team's practices, the coaches spotted a smiling young boy playing soccer who just might have what it takes to play offense in the fastest game on two feet.

Then just 10 years old and the youngest player on the team, Travis Sipe found a lacrosse stick in his hand and passion (as well as incredible talent) for playing this new sport.

“They weren't taking [new players] that young, but they took him,” said Travis' mother, Laurie. “He just kind of picked it up like that. It came easy to him.”

Lacrosse, then in its infancy in York County, was growing up right alongside Travis Sipe.

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One of the rites of passage for high school students is getting the driver's license. At sixteen, adulthood draws near and change rides the wind. For Travis Sipe, change could not come in a more tragic way.

In March of 2001, shortly after passing his driver's test, Travis was in a car accident that left him with severe brain damage and put him in a coma for six months. And, perhaps worst of all, he was unable to speak.

In 2001, lacrosse was coming of age in York County. Over 300 players across the county were participating, according to the York County Lacrosse Association. Though there were enough players for towns to form their own teams, lacrosse was not sanctioned by the state athletic commission and so the sport was not sponsored by the town's



respective high schools. Players had to pay for their own equipment, field space and referees. Lacrosse had become a club sport, and Dallastown had its Wildcat Lacrosse Club. York Catholic had the Shooting Irish, Susquehannock the Warrior Lacrosse Club, and so on.

But the teams knew that their genesis came from the county-wide team, and nearly every team had a connection back to that first team. With Travis an integral part to the sport's beginnings in the area, the lacrosse community came together to help his family with the medical bills.

Later that year, in May, Travis was made an honorary All-Star. But there is no doubt that "if he would have been playing, he would have been one," said Laurie Sipe. Before the accident, Travis led his team and the county in scoring.

Two years later, the teams put their collective helmets together with the "Take It to the Goal #14" campaign, in honor of Travis' jersey number, to raise money for a specialized wheelchair. The campaign came to a head on May 4, 2003, where, in a rare showing of support from the high schools, Red Lion, the rival to Dallastown, allowed the two teams to use its high school stadium for a televised night game with proceeds benefiting Travis and his family.

"That game was really special," said Laurie. "Everyone was really supportive. . . . I don't know what we'd ever done through all of this without such support."

A sport and a community had come together.

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Travis' will and determination carried off the field and through his injury. He could not talk, but his strength spoke to a community. As the county's ambassador for the sport, Travis, as well as his family, was on hand for the sport's biggest moments, including the county playoffs.

Tragically, during what would have been his senior year, after coming out of the coma and after fighting through the injury for three and a half years, Travis Sipe passed away on October 24, 2004.

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Today, lacrosse is flourishing in York. Over 1,800 boys and girls of all ages and skill levels, across a dozen clubs, take part in the sport.

And every spring, for the past three years, many of those 1,800 players play in the World's Longest Running Lacrosse Game.

Beginning at 7:14 in the morning, in memory of Travis' jersey, hundreds of players play in hour long intervals till midnight. Though, to the chagrin of Coach Rhein, the Guinness Book of World Records refuses to officially recognize the game as the "world's longest running" (there is no set roster limiting the number of players), the eighteen hours of lacrosse serves to raise money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Travis had always wanted to help children – he took just as much joy in teaching the sport as in playing it – and the marathon game does just that.

Laurie Sipe has been on hand for the games, and, for her, it is a bittersweet experience.

"It's hard," she said. "It's pretty emotional, because I always think it should be him out there."

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As in any sport, players and fans of lacrosse use statistics to measure and rate achievement – wins, losses, goals scored, goals allowed. The numbers help us to form a narrative. The numbers help us reach the end goal of competition – figuring out who is the best.

For lacrosse in York County, there is one number that stands above the rest, one that personifies what the sport can bring out in us, in competition and in community-building. One sport, one community, one number: #14.



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Added by Bob Rhein on 4/27/08:

Kevin Sunday is a graduating senior from Towson University, receiving a bachelor's in mass communication. He plans on applying his concentration in public relations towards the field of government affairs. Sunday played lacrosse at Dallastown High School from 2002 to 2004 and was the defensive captain his senior year. He can be reached at 717 487-4571 or his permanent address at 225 W Chestnut St., Dallastown PA, 17313. His email address is [kdsunday@yahoo.com](mailto:kdsunday@yahoo.com)