



BUILDING THE HYBRID LACROSSE PLAYER

TODAY, MORE GIRLS ARE PLAYING BOTH BOX AND FIELD LACROSSE, WHICH IN TURN IS CREATING A BETTER, STRONGER, SMARTER AND BETTER-ROUNDED ATHLETE THAT WILL ONLY BENEFIT THEM AND CANADIAN LACROSSE IN THE LONG TERM

// By Melissa Yollick

At this year's Ontario Lacrosse Festival, held this past summer in Whitby, Ont., eight girls took home gold medals in more than one event, with some sweeping the podium in the Bantam 'A' box division, the Field U15 'B' division and the national Bantam box division.

What differentiated these girls from the rest of the outstanding participants was their dedication to both box and field lacrosse — a decision that some lacrosse insiders feel will eventually lead them to a place on the world stage.

Years ago, girls didn't have a choice when it came to lacrosse in Canada. Girl's field lacrosse didn't really exist, so players were taught box instead. This all changed in 1982, when according to the Team Canada Women's Lacrosse website, the International Federation of Women's Lacrosse Associations held its first World Cup. Canada's national team comprised of box lacrosse players quickly learned the field game and placed third overall.

Today, the "choose box or field lacrosse" attitude is changing. Nowadays, playing both box and field is slowly being encouraged by lacrosse coaches and adopted by female players across the country. It can also be seen at the top as World Cup players are proving their skills in both games are making them fierce competitors.

"When we all got back from the World Cup, people who were leading the organization at that time realized they needed to get heavy into the

Photos: Pixels Photography Services



field game,” says Marie (Gilkinson) Pringle, who played in the 1982 World Cup, and is now assistant coach of Team Ontario and head coach of the Burlington Bantam Girls. “Over the years, box kind of dwindled and field grew up. About five years ago, a group of people got together in the Greater Toronto Area and re-launched the girls-only box program. When box re-launched, it started attracting brand new girls to the sport.

“There was a couple of people who believed that it makes you a better box player if you’re also a field player,” she adds, “and those people in those organizations promoted their box players crossing over to field.”

“There’s been some quite accomplished players who have come up with girls box and moved over to field,” adds Jim Calder, vice-president of girls lacrosse for the Toronto Stars Lacrosse Association. He mentions Troyhann Santos and Dana Dobbie as some examples of crossover successes at the World Cup level.

The benefits of playing both box and field lacrosse range from the simple fact that these girls are constantly improving their stick skills, to subtler advantages like developing their aiming and fitness level.

Brianna Kennelly, 14, plays both box and field lacrosse, and holds three gold medals from the 2009 championships in Whitby. She plays for the Burlington Chiefs for both box and field lacrosse and was on Canada’s national box lacrosse team. As both a box and field lacrosse player, she has seen an improvement in her



game since taking up field lacrosse a year ago. She thinks the success from this year’s nationals will encourage more girls to start playing both brands of lacrosse.

“Playing both helps me find different strategies,” she says. “Playing field lacrosse taught me how to use bounce shots more effectively and it keeps you in shape too. Using the field stick also got me better at aiming properly. Originally, only two people played both [box and field lacrosse] from my team and they kept encouraging more people to play. I think after hearing our success and how much fun we had, even more people will come.”



Calder also encourages the girls to play both sports as he sees the advantages it has on their skill set.

"I think the box game made them get used to moving the ball quickly and I think because the box game is a physical game, our girls are very confident with the ball," he notes. "The field game helps the girls play the box game because you're playing with a very shallow pocket. If you can manage to play with a shallow pocket in the

field game, when you get a box stick with a deep pocket it is easy to play with."

Troyhann Santos, a four-time World Cup player and coach of the Team Ontario Girls Box squad, began playing box lacrosse on a boys team at the age of 11. When she crossed over to the field game, her box skills were initially thought of as a disadvantage to her field game. Now, however, her box skills are perceived as a benefit.

"At first it was seen as a disadvantage to play box lacrosse because people said that you picked up bad habits, but the girls game has adapted so much becoming more like a box game that now those skills, which people thought were detrimental to my playing, are actually advantageous to my playing," she says.

Even though the box skills may help their field game, playing both sports can be difficult on the players. At the 2009 championships this summer, the crossover girls played 15 games in less than a week. The logistics of the event did pose some disadvantages to the girls that were playing both sports. The scheduling was exhausting, and injuries occurred.

"At the championship, the injuries that we could have gotten could have carried over to our next sport," recalls Kennelly. "One girl on my team hurt her leg and there was a box game right after field. I hurt myself at the end of the box provincials so I was playing the nationals with a sore leg."

Injuries and possible scheduling conflicts aside, between the two games, there are more opportunities for university scholarships in

field lacrosse. According to Santos, at the World Cup level, the Canadian girls are the only competitors that have learnt both games. She feels the skills acquired in the box game have brought about a different type of player when compared to girls who only play field.

She describes it as a "hybrid" of box and field player. If box lacrosse helps these girls become more skilled at the field game, then they should have a leg-up on the competition, especially if they are competing for scholarships against girls who only play field lacrosse.

Overall, the girls that play both sports have proven its advantages by their stellar showing at the national championships this past summer. As the trend continues, there will be more coordination required to eliminate scheduling conflicts and back-to-back games that involve the same players. That said, some of these girls just can't get enough lacrosse, whether field or box, and are looking to hone their skills regardless of the venue.

"I think the reality is if you love the sport and have a chance to play it more often, it's unique that you can play a similar sport in different varieties and get to use the same skills," says Pringle.

The key is making both sports work to their advantage. With cooperation from coaches in both field and box lacrosse, and synchronization between the different sports, these girls can be given the chance to thrive. ♦

Melissa Yollick is a freelance writer in Toronto, Ont.