

# Local kids stick with learning lacrosse

## Md. program introduces sport to youngsters

BY PAT GAVIN

Special to *The Examiner*

With the heat index hovering around 100 degrees, children in the Rosemary Hills Lacrosse program seek refuge in Silver Spring's Gwendolyn Coffield Center's air-conditioned gym.

Confining 24 stick-wielding 8-to-13-year-olds to half a basketball court is a bit like throwing a family of Tasmanian devils into a phone booth. As a lacrosse ball sailed back and forth between cardboard goals, a screaming collection of flailing limbs followed closely behind.

Occasionally, Jeff Wagner blew his whistle on the sideline. The carnage would temporarily subside as he signaled a goal, called an infraction or reminded someone, usually a counselor, to put his or her protective goggles back on.

Basically, it was business as usual. The last day of Wagner's Silver Spring summer lacrosse experiment went off without a hitch this past Friday for the sixth straight year.

The program brings the growing sport to about 40 youngsters, primarily underprivileged ones, who would never normally be exposed to lacrosse.

The participants and all who attend the community center have come to embrace the sport thanks to Wagner's efforts.

"When it's hot and we come inside, there are 100 basketball kids in here," said Wagner, who pays for small things like locks and nets out of his own pocket. "They just



Lloyd Ferguson, 10, (right) and Kory Cooley, 9, (center) both of Silver Spring watch as coach Jeff Wagner adjusts the netting on a lacrosse stick.

say, 'Okay, it's lacrosse time.' They don't, like, say 'What are you talking about? This is a gym.' It is now reasonable that lacrosse takes up half the gym."

The kids pick up the sport fast, mastering the basics in a week or two.

"They catch on quicker than I could have when I was their age," said Jamie Allen, a counselor who is a rising senior and a varsity lacrosse player at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. "Some of the best athletes I've seen come out here, and if they can learn at a younger age, that's even better."

Wagner, a Baltimore native and former three-time All-Ivy League lacrosse player at Brown University, is not simply pitching lacrosse to kids as a two-hour alternative to basketball or X-box on summer weekdays. His goal is for them to love the sport and run with it.

"There are definitely [future] high school players here," said Wagner. "That kid is. This kid right here has good stick work. And this kid's a

superstar."

The "superstar" is 9-year-old Kory Cooley, who attends Chevy Chase Elementary. Cooley flashes a huge grin when a counselor gushes over him.

"I like hanging out with my friends and I like playing lacrosse," Cooley said. "It's really fun to run around and stuff."

"I think it's better than football," said Timothy Rickard, 12, of Silver Spring who was sporting his dad's Darrell Green jersey. "I like checking people, and when they throw the ball I like jumping up and catching it and stealing it from them."

The group usually plays outside on a spacious grass field with real metal goals. Since equipment manufacturer Brine is one of the program's main sponsors, nets and sticks don't make a huge dent in Wagner's bud-

Innocent Okocha, right, of Silver Spring, moves up court during Rosemary Hills Lacrosse practice Friday.

— Chris Rossi/For The Examiner



Coke Whitworth/AP

Philadelphia Eagles running back Brian Westbrook (DeMatha) hauls in a pass at Eagles training camp Monday. Westbrook ended his 7-day holdout.

## FOOTBALL

# Westbrook back with Eagles, Law joins Jets

## DeMatha grad ends holdout

By *The Associated Press*

Ty Law found a new home while Brian Westbrook (DeMatha) returned to his NFL team Monday.

Law landed with the New York Jets, agreeing to a multiyear deal that could be worth as much as \$28.5 million for the first three years. The cornerback who was released by the Patriots — he has three Super Bowl rings — took a physical and worked out for the team Monday.

The 31-year-old Law is intent on showing the Jets and the league he is completely healed from a serious foot injury that kept him out of the Super Bowl in February.

### MORE FOOTBALL

Redskins training camp coverage, page 44.

"I think I have something to prove all the time anyway, that's just my mind-set. It's how I approach the game," Law said. "I can hold my head up high and say I've had a pretty good career thus far, and I'm going to continue that. I have a lot left to give."

"I'm going to prove to all the doubters, if there are any out there, that I'm still the best cornerback in football."

Westbrook is one of the best all-around running backs in the game, but he had little bargaining leverage with the Eagles. The fourth-year pro last season led all NFL running

backs with 73 catches for 703 yards and six touchdowns, while adding 812 yards and three scores on the ground. He had been holding out for a long-term contract after signing a one-year restricted free agent offer for \$1.43 million.

Westbrook had little choice but to report for camp by Monday. He risked forfeiting a year of service if he stayed out any longer. Then he would have been unable to become an unrestricted free agent next season — possibly missing out on a big payday.

■ **Ravens:** First-round draft pick Mark Clayton practiced for the first time after ending his five-day holdout. Clayton had been criticized by coach Brian Billick last week, but the wide receiver from Oklahoma said he "didn't hear much of it."

"I was out in the back yard catching balls," Clayton said.