

# Iowa Lacrosse Association

## Annual Report

2020-2021



## Introduction

The Iowa Lacrosse Association (ILAX) is completing its third year in June. The past 2020-21 season has been extremely challenging for the Association and its member clubs. A year ago we were still reeling over the closure of our schools and businesses, and the cancellation of the spring lacrosse season. But very few of us at the time could have imagined how radically the pandemic has changed and continues to change our lives. Not surprisingly, the pandemic has required our clubs to work extremely hard to offer on-field lacrosse opportunities that meet CDC and local authorities' health protocols as well as parent expectations.

At the time of this writing, the progress of vaccinations and the lifting of public health restrictions leads one to believe we are overcoming the pandemic and can return to a normal way of life. The pandemic essentially wiped out the entire 2020 spring sport season including lacrosse which had wide ranging repercussions for member clubs going forward. Clubs were impacted by suspended activities and extra time and expenditures to address the pandemic which led to significant financial fall-out.

Despite this unprecedented challenge, we are happy to report that your Association with your support was able to help clubs in a number of ways this past year. What follows is a brief summary of the "state of the game" in Iowa, some details about the Association's efforts over the past year, and some preliminary thoughts on what ILAX plans to focus on in the near future.

## State of the game

The number of clubs belonging to ILAX remained the same. However, the new Kingfisher youth club plans to petition ILAX for membership in the near future which would mean seven of eight youth lacrosse organizations in Iowa would be ILAX members. The Kingfisher club based in Solon serves the surrounding Iowa City-Cedar Rapids area, and fielded teams this season.

Overall the pandemic negatively impacted participation levels this past spring. The Ames, Dubuque and Quad Cities clubs saw their numbers decline and the Roosevelt HS Girls program were unable to field a team due to school restrictions. The Adel girls team folded, but some of their players participated with West Des Moines.

Despite these challenges, Iowa clubs had a total of 554 players registered this past spring compared to 556 a year ago before that season was cancelled. Here's a quick breakdown of spring 2021 registrations for all Iowa programs by total player counts:

Ames (boys only)	16
Ankeny	114
Dubuque	24
Kingfisher (IC-CR area)	53
Meskwaki Settlement	47
Quad Cities	40
Waukee (boys only)	109
West Des Moines	151
<b>Total Statewide</b>	<b>554</b>

However, these numbers are not the full extent of lacrosse participation in Iowa. Several of our clubs and area parks & rec departments have offered beginners clinics this past fall and spring. While fewer than normal due to COVID19, we expect more clinics to be offered in the future.

Also, there are 12 men's and/or women's college programs operating in Iowa including Clark University, Cornell College, Dordt College (club), Iowa State University (club), University of Iowa (club), Loras College, Morningside College, St. Ambrose University, University of Dubuque, Upper Iowa University, Wartburg College, and William Penn University. ILAX wants to develop closer relationships with these programs in the future as increasing numbers of Iowa high school seniors are making their way onto college rosters.

## **Recap of ILAX efforts**

A year ago the Association outlined several goals for 2020-2021: help clubs respond to the pandemic; support coach development; recruit and train new officials; support the new Iowa City-Cedar Rapids program; offer youth league competition when possible; expand visibility within the state; and attract more support for the ILAX organization. COVID19 impacted the pursuit of those goals, but progress was made in many of them.

**Response to the pandemic** — With the help of USA Lacrosse (USAL) and the West Des Moines Lacrosse Club, the Association developed a COVID19 response protocol for member clubs to use for future lacrosse activities going forward. From the large volume of USAL return to play guidance and recommendations, ILAX worked with West Des Moines to create a COVID19 Action Plan (CAP) template that incorporated the most important recommendations for clubs to use as they wrestled with the situation. West Des Moines' input helped ILAX find that balance between what was reasonably safe but yet practical.



*West Des Moines officials welcome players to fall ball check-in with a return to play protocol.*

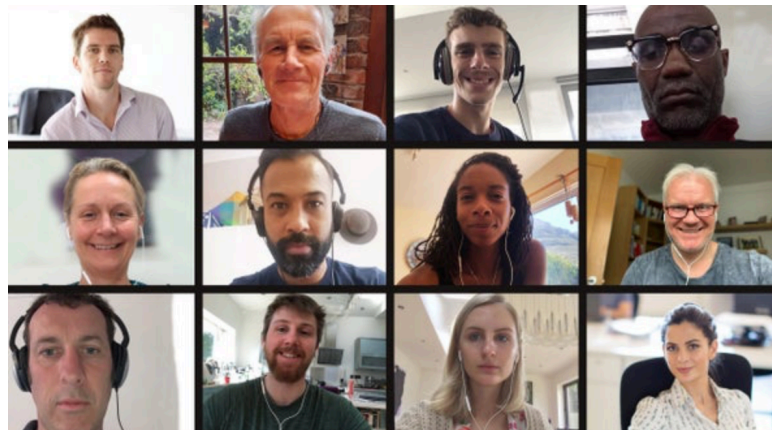
As area schools opened up their fall sports activities, ILAX provided the CAP template to member clubs so they could consider the suggested protocol for their fall lacrosse activities. We were pleased to learn that the clubs that held fall ball activities used the template and were successful in offering a safe environment for play.

Some common steps taken were pre-screening before practice, temperatures being taken upon arrival, masks being worn before and after practice, social distancing enforced, and attendance documentation for contact tracing. With a few minor exceptions, these clubs got through the fall with very few reported cases.

This past winter when all member clubs geared up to offer a spring season, there still was lingering questions about whether we would be able to play and under what circumstances. The monthly board meetings enabled club leaders to discuss preparations and share ideas. Fortunately, the advent of vaccines and improved community infection rates allowed schools to re-open in-person classes and offer spring sports which opened the door for a spring lacrosse season.

**Support coach development** — Due to the growth of the sport, new coaches are sorely needed, and the number of experienced youth lacrosse coaches in the state is very limited. Clubs often rely on parents to assume that role and find training support very helpful. Due to the pandemic, USAL transitioned to a virtual-only coaching development offering this past winter rather than the traditional in-person local training they've offered in the past. Several virtual Level 1 & 2 coaching clinics were subsequently conducted.

*Level 1 & 2 USA Lacrosse Coaching Development training was provided via Zoom this past winter.*



ILAX promoted these virtual offerings in January & February to member clubs and their constituents, and several coaches from Iowa took advantage of them. ILAX president Beech Turner attended the virtual LAXCON national convention on January 15-16 and was able to take part in a Level 1 clinic and found it to be well done, focusing more on how to have a positive impact on young players rather than lacrosse fundamentals. It remains to be seen if USAL offers in-person coaching clinics in the future or a combination of both.

**Recruit and train officials** — Youth clubs in Iowa are still needing more local officials especially for the women's game. ILAX continues to work on helping recruit and train new officials. Local official Kevin Hawn of Des Moines is acting as director of Iowa officials and has led the effort for the men's game where progress is being made. Kevin officiates basketball too and uses that network to approach other officials about trying lacrosse.

This past year Kevin worked with Omaha-based officials to offer online Level 1 coursework, and a few Iowa-based candidates took advantage of that series of offerings. We need to help him with on-field evaluations so these officials can get certified. All in all this spring the state gained 3 new officials and the effort continues to attract more.

It's been a bigger challenge to attract women's game officials. We gained one new official this spring when a lacrosse parent went through training. The pandemic made it more challenging to gain officials, and the Association needs to put more resources into helping with this effort.

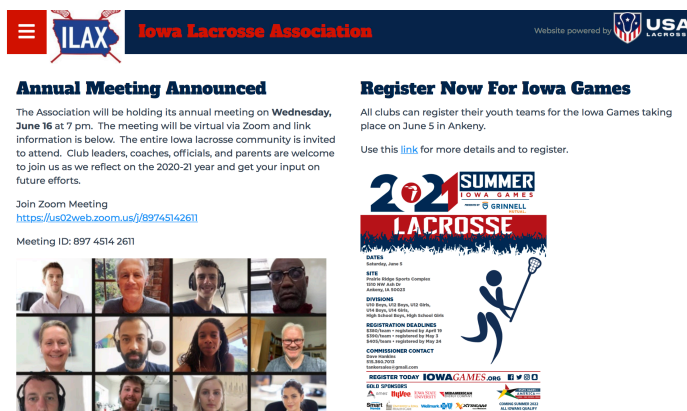
**Support new Iowa City/Cedar Rapids club** — The effort to get a new program started in this part of the state has been underway since 2018 when ILAX held a meeting in Iowa City with some possible stakeholders. The Association is pleased to report that thanks to the efforts of



ILAX board member Jeff Kueter and his leadership team, the Kingfisher Lacrosse program was able to register 53 players in their debut season this spring.

Over the past year ILAX helped facilitate the informal partnership the new club forged with the Quad Cities club to field teams this past season. ILAX also helped arrange for a Saturday Jamboree in Solon where several Iowa clubs took part. The Kingfisher club did a wonderful job of setting up and hosting the event. Going forward the new club hopes to boost their numbers including more girls players.

**Install new web platform** — In early 2020 the ILAX board of directors decided to explore a website alternative to their current ILAX vendor SportsEngine. That vendor's pricing increases and deteriorating service was cause for concern. ILAX was also interested in learning more about USAL's new league management system that was unveiled last August. The new system promised basic functionality that would meet ILAX's needs and at no cost.

The screenshot shows the Iowa Lacrosse Association website. The header includes the ILAX logo and the text "Iowa Lacrosse Association" and "Website powered by USA Lacrosse". The main content area has two columns. The left column is titled "Annual Meeting Announced" and states that the association will hold its annual meeting on Wednesday, June 16 at 7 pm. It provides a Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89745142611> and a meeting ID: 897 4514 2611. Below the text is a grid of 12 small video thumbnails showing participants in a virtual meeting. The right column is titled "Register Now For Iowa Games" and states that all clubs can register their youth teams for the Iowa Games taking place on June 5 in Ankeny. It includes a link for more details and to register. Below the text is a graphic for the "2021 SUMMER IOWA GAMES LACROSSE" featuring a lacrosse player silhouette and various logos including USA Lacrosse, Grinnell College, and others.

After a couple demos and discussion at the board level, the decision was made to leave SportsEngine and adopt the new USAL web platform. This past October we went live with the new site and since ILAX's current web functionality is pretty simple (posting information with no transactional needs) we've had a pretty easy transition. ILAX plans to build an event/league registration piece in the future. Some other ILAX members have also moved to the new system.

**Offer youth competitive league** — In the spring of 2019 ILAX helped form the first competitive youth league in the state for U14 and U12 boys. As the pandemic forced the cancellation of the 2020 season, ILAX hoped to offer league play again in 2021 including multi-game jamborees on weekends at a couple of colleges around the state.

It wasn't until this past March that it was clear Iowa schools would be holding spring sports and lacrosse clubs would have adequate registration numbers to hold league play. So ILAX had a late start in scheduling league games. We also were unable to secure field space at St. Ambrose in Davenport for a weekend jamboree as none was available. However, we were able to schedule jamborees in Solon and the Meskwaki Settlement and also take part in the Iowa Games in Ankeny.

This year four clubs were able to field U10 Boys teams and also take part in league play. We hope this age level expands and that the number of youth girls programs does as well so they can take part in the league. ILAX extends a big "thank you" to the participating clubs and their volunteers for making the Boys league happen under challenging circumstances.

**Attract more support to ILAX** — Your association needs more volunteer help to continue to grow the sport in Iowa. It has been very difficult to attract that support due to the distraction of the pandemic. Clubs were struggling to get coaches and players back on the field plus attract more parent volunteers, but ILAX hopes that going forward we can gain the added support we need from our member clubs.

## Future ILAX efforts

While the ILAX board is still discussing areas of support to focus on in the coming year, here are some of the most likely front-runners.

**Establishing committees** — We will be recruiting more parents, coaches and club leaders to volunteer some time to the work of ILAX. We plan to form several committees in the near future, and some possible areas of focus could be League Oversight/Competition, Marketing/Communications, and Recruitment & Training.

**Club consultations** — Based on recent discussions with various club leaders, some clubs are struggling getting youth programs started and maintained. Recruiting young players is the lifeblood of any youth lacrosse organization. ILAX board members hope to attend a board meeting of each member club sometime in the coming months. ILAX board members would love to have a dialogue with each club's leadership team to see where we might support one another.

**Growing the game elsewhere** — While focusing support on existing youth programs is a priority, ILAX will continue to support efforts to introduce the game in other parts of the state. There are a number of Parks & Rec departments in Iowa that offer beginner lacrosse clinics or programs, and ILAX continues to encourage and support them. We will be appearing at the Iowa Parks & Rec Association (IPRA) fall workshop in Burlington in October to help interested cities offer lacrosse to area youth.

We also plan to attend the Iowa High School Athletic Directors Association convention next March in Coralville for the first time to increase visibility of the sport with schools and develop more relationships with school athletic leaders.

**TryLax Grant** — Last winter your Association applied for and received this grant from USAL. The grant provides for up to 100 boys and girls lacrosse sticks (over \$100 value) and a free annual membership to USAL for new players in grades 3-8.

We plan to hold a two-night clinic this coming September 14 & 16 in West Des Moines for those that register. Area clubs will run the event with the expectation that these new players will subsequently join those clubs this fall and beyond. Any unused remaining sticks & memberships would be used elsewhere in the state for new player recruitment.



**Continued recruitment/training support** — As always clubs will need help training new coaches, and youth lacrosse in Iowa desperately needs more officials. Please spread the word that we need officials and will help candidates get started at little or no cost. It remains to be seen whether coach training will be in-person, virtual or both. Officials training will continue to involve both. Most likely an ILAX committee will be formed to address this with more manpower and focus, especially in recruiting new officials.

**Support League play** — We plan to offer a boys youth league again next spring. Our goal is to get the game schedule established and shared much earlier than last season. Again, we hope to form a committee that will solicit feedback from member clubs over the winter, create a preliminary schedule, arrange for officials, and request funds for officials fees in advance of league play which normally starts after spring break.

## **Financial Status**

The pandemic and the resulting shut-down of lacrosse activities in March 2020 naturally curtailed our activities and related expenses as well so ILAX didn't spend all of the fees collected for the 2019-2020 budget year. We also anticipated few expenses in Spring or Fall of 2020. Subsequently last fall ILAX did not request annual membership fees from member clubs for the 2020-2021 budget year due to a carry-over surplus. Going forward the Association plans to resume normal promotional activities, and most likely will collect fees for the coming 2021-2022 budget year. Any surpluses will be factored into setting those fees.

Currently ILAX has \$3848.42 in its checking account with most of the Association's financial activity for the past year taking place in recent weeks as the spring league got underway. ILAX estimated and then collected officials fee estimates from participating clubs. Those fees have been advanced so officials could be paid at the conclusion of the games they worked.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the set-backs from the COVID19 pandemic this past year, your Association's leadership worked together to address this unprecedented challenge. Going forward, as ILAX works on the areas of member support outlined earlier, we will need more manpower from member clubs. We definitely need your help so let us know of your interest and we'll find a role for you. Finally, we greatly appreciate the support of our member clubs, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Iowa lacrosse community in the future.

**This report is submitted by the board of directors of the Iowa Lacrosse Association:**

Beech Turner, President, West Des Moines  
Dave Hankins, Vice President, Ankeny  
Meghan Gruver, Secretary, West Des Moines  
Bruce Maxwell, Treasurer, Ames  
Jeff Kueter, Iowa City  
Sean Mahoney, Waukee  
Vince McGee, Quad Cities  
Britt Mitchell, Meskwaki Settlement  
Tim Mohrfeld, Waukee  
Marc Shulman, Ames



***“Helping grow the game”***