



Statement on Age Eligibility Standards Issued May 25, 2023

The Iowa Lacrosse Association Board of Directors met on May 24, 2023 to discuss age eligibility standards for youth lacrosse. The Board reviewed a petition for age verification, the actions taken by its Competition Committee to consider concerns about age eligibility and received a briefing from USA Lacrosse on its age eligibility guidance.

The Iowa Lacrosse Association was formed in 2018 by the Ames, Ankeny, and West Des Moines lacrosse clubs which saw the need to work together to grow the game and help lacrosse organizations throughout the state be more successful. Additional clubs from across the state have since joined ILAX in pursuit of the common goal of growing opportunities for girls and boys to play lacrosse. Member organizations benefit from ILAX's efforts to promote the game, provide training and education, and offer competitive leagues as well as enhanced member communication.

The Iowa Lacrosse Association is dedicated to promoting and developing the sport of lacrosse throughout the state of Iowa. Through collaboration with its members, the Association seeks to grow and honor the game by helping more youth discover and enjoy the sport as well as instilling values of sportsmanship and teamwork.

On May 24, a petition was submitted to the ILAX board that raised concerns related to age verification practices related to safety concerns and competitive play. ILAX is a youth developmental league that prioritizes the health, safety, and well-being of our players at the forefront of all decision making. We all want the same thing when our players are on the field – a safe playing experience and a fun and sportsmanlike environment.

ILAX Board Members have reviewed and discussed the submitted petition. Moving forward, the ILAX Board will work with Member Clubs to make sure that ILAX and Member Clubs adhere to and understand the age grouping standards set by USA Lacrosse. After review, it is now apparent that, for the '22-23 competitive year, Member Clubs utilized age grouping standards individually based upon their own interpretations of incorrect information provided by USA Lacrosse, which in turn created confusion and frustration for Member Clubs and ILAX.

At the ILAX Board's request, USA Lacrosse investigated the question and provided clarification on May 24. Based on information confirmed for the ILAX Board by senior administration at USA Lacrosse the correct eligibility standard is a player's age on September 1. That means a player who is 10 on Sept 1 can play 10U in the spring even if they have turned 11 since; the same is

true where a player who is 12 on Sept 1 and turns 13 at some point thereafter remains eligible for 12U; and a player who is 14 on Sept 1 can play 14U even if they have turned 15. Moving forward, ILAX and Member Clubs will adhere to the policies and procedures set forth by USA Lacrosse.

A second issue raised concerns use of players outside of established age limits. A central mission of the Iowa Lacrosse Association is to support ways for any child who wishes to play lacrosse to do so. As ILAX supports development of new teams within member clubs and growth of new clubs across the state, it will be necessary to accommodate mixed age teams due to inadequate numbers of participants or the absence of local age-appropriate teams. Clubs fielding mixed age teams are to disclose this fact at the start of the spring or fall seasons. Additional steps will be taken in future Competition Committee planning to explicitly collect this information and see that is communicated to other teams in the affected age grouping.

As it was determined that (1) no Member Club had acted inappropriately in constructing their rosters for the spring season due to the use of incongruent age eligibility standards and (2) continued allowance of mixed age teams to encourage program development remains necessary, the petition was tabled for future consideration by the Competition Committee and no further action is deemed necessary to conclude the Spring 2023 season.

ILAX remains committed to open and honest communication of concerns and ideas to continue to improve player safety, increase participation, youth development, and to grow and improve the sport of Lacrosse in Iowa.

BACKGROUND

Competition Committee Review: The Board's Competition Committee had previously reviewed age eligibility in early May following concerns raised to Committee members. That discussion revealed that USA Lacrosse age eligibility guidance was subject to varying interpretations, but all agreed that ILAX clubs should adhere to USA Lacrosse standards. The Committee's discussion showed that (1) member clubs were using different age eligibility standards (for example, some were organized by grade, others used a USA Lacrosse age chart since shown to be incorrect, or while another had sought direct guidance from USA Lacrosse and was told that age on Sept 1 determined eligibility) and (2) some clubs were fielding teams with players who did not meet any of the age eligibility standards due to low numbers of players or the lack of upper age group teams. The Committee concluded that the Spring '23 season should run its course and a consistent age eligibility framework be established for all member clubs to utilize for the '23-24 competitive year and beyond. The Committee also concluded that clubs developing new teams be afforded flexibility to encourage those programs to develop, but that the presence of players outside the age parameters be disclosed at the start of the season.

USA Lacrosse Briefing Confirms Age on September 1 Determines Eligibility: On May 24, the regional representative from USA Lacrosse clarified the age eligibility rule for the ILAX Board, stating:

"On behalf of USA Lacrosse, I would like to apologize to the players, parents, coaches, and board members of the Iowa Lacrosse Association for the confusion caused by an error in our Age & Eligibility materials for the 2022-2023 season. USA Lacrosse recommends that age divisions be based on a player's age as of September 1st. Unfortunately, there was an error published in our Age Group Reference Chart this season which caused programs to unknowingly register some players in inconsistent age divisions. I am truly sorry for any negative impacts caused by this error. The Age Group Reference Chart has been corrected, and I look forward to working with ILAX leaders to continue to provide a positive experience for Iowa lacrosse players and their families." - Shawn Maloney, USA Lacrosse Regional Manager.

Maloney further confirmed that this guidance had been reviewed by senior administration of USA Lacrosse in an effort to dispel any question of its veracity.

Playing Down: Playing down is defined as use of a player whose age exceeds the recommended guidance in a lower age group (for example, a player who is 11 on Sept 1 playing in 10U for the spring). The central mission of the Iowa Lacrosse Association is to provide opportunities for any child to play lacrosse. As we work to expand the game across Iowa and encourage the development of new teams within existing clubs and growing new clubs across the state, the Iowa Lacrosse Association will accommodate teams with mixed ages so long as there are no other reasonable options for non-conforming players (i.e., no age appropriate team is available for them to play with) and the use of mixed age players is disclosed to and approved by the Competition Committee.