For the Love of Lacrosse

An old sport gets a new surge of local interest

By Mark Travis Photos by Rylan Fennema









Baseball might be America's pastime, but the continent's oldest sport predates it by several centuries. Around 1100, the Native American nations that owned the lands between present-day New York and Canada began playing a game they believed was endowed by the creator of the universe. They called it "The Medicine Game" because of its restorative powers over the mind, body and soul. The first Europeans to encounter the sport had a different name for it: La Crosse, because the sticks being wielded reminded them of the cross a bishop would carry.

Josh McClendon—a Navy veteran from Redondo Beach, California, who played Division III lacrosse at the University of Dallas—is trying to expand the sport's reach to the Coastal Bend. In 2023, McClendon founded South Texas Lacrosse, a grassroots sporting organization designed to fructify interest in the game and develop talent across all age groups.

"As soon as I got to Corpus Christi, I wanted to make a lacrosse scene here," McClendon, the program's president and head coach, said. "We want kids to be able to grow up and say they had the opportunity to play the sport in their hometown."

To some locals, lacrosse might seem as foreign as it did to the French missionaries who christened it in the 1600s, but McClendon doesn't mind starting with a blank canvas. While stationed at Naval Base San Diego, McClendon assembled a team of fellow enlisted officers and community members, giving him experience building from the ground up. He also believes coaching kids who aren't familiar with the game helps them avoid the narrow parameters that define the typical lacrosse player nationwide.

South Texas Lacrosse also offers an adult league. Sign up online to receive information on how to get involved.

"It's almost better to be positively ignorant to what the 'norm' is," McClendon said. "It means there is not much of a gap to bridge over."

Lacrosse is among the most homogeneous team sports in North America. "On almost every lacrosse team or coaching staff I have been on, I've been the only person of color," McClendon said. Now, to his players, the most prominent authority on the sport is a person of color. "I get to teach them that lacrosse is for everybody."

Somewhat ironically, for a sport created a millennium ago that used hand-crafted sticks, lacrosse is one of the most expensive games in the world to play due to pricey gear and steep team and travel costs. Because lacrosse is not a UIL-sanctioned sport, meaning public schools do not field teams and students do not have seasonal access to equipment, the Coastal Bend has struggled to create a self-sustaining player base.

In the absence of a pipeline, McClendon is determined to establish one. South Texas Lacrosse, which gained nonprofit status in October 2024, has teams in Corpus Christi and Rockport, featuring players ages 5 and up. As he introduces the sport to the community, McClendon has instructively used smaller iterations of lacrosse—shrinking the field, the net and the number of players per team—to create an environment conducive to skill-crafting and spatial attunement.

Lacrosse might be in its nascent stages in South Texas, but fueled by McClendon's ambition and expertise, it won't be long before it is out of the cradle.

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