

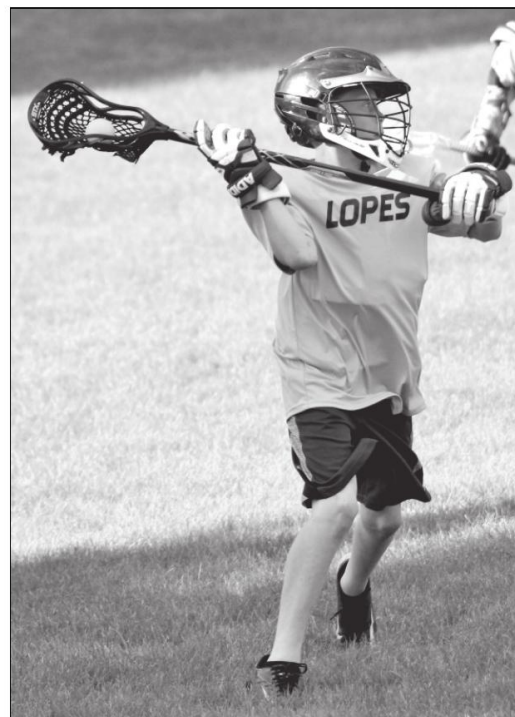
How to play lacrosse

- As far as scoring goes, lacrosse is a lot like soccer. There are two goals at each end of the field, and teams score by putting the tennis-ball shaped ball into the net. Teams try to get to the goal by passing the ball to one another using sticks with a small net at the end.
- The positioning for lacrosse is also similar to soccer, but there are only 10 players – one goalie, three defenders, three midfielders and three attackers. When one team has the ball, there always has to be four defenders in the defensive half of the field and three attackers in the attacking half. The midfielders are free to roam the field, but the other seven players must stay focused on their positioning. If a player leaves his zone without making sure there are enough teammates in the area, offsides will be called.

- In lacrosse, play begins a lot like it does in a hockey game. The faceoff occurs with both players on their feet but with their hands and sticks on the ground. The ball is placed in between the two players' sticks, and when the official signals, the players try to win possession for their team. There is a faceoff after every score, so the team that just scored has a chance at immediately regaining possession.
- The field in lacrosse is bigger than a normal football field, measuring 110 yards long by 60 yards wide. Like football, lacrosse is a physical game. There is stick checking and body checking. Stick checking is allowed when players use their stick to try to dislodge the ball from an opponent's stick. Body checks can be legal if they are executed above the waist and below the head area.
- Lacrosse has a couple rules that are specific to the sport. For example, the concept of out of bounds is different.



Members of the Lopes Lacrosse team put their sticks to the sky for their traditional huddle breakdown at the end of practice. Much of the gear came from the First Stick Grant from US Lacrosse.



Above, 12-year-old Salem Schweitzer, takes a shot during one of the final practices of the season. At left, 8-year-old Hollis Schweitzer, right, avoids the check of Abby St. Marie and speeds down the field during a practice at Eastside Elementary School in Rock Springs.



First Stick Grant from U.S. Lacrosse will help pay for new equipment.

▶ CONTINUED: THE COACH

“The passion went from playing to spreading the love of the game. That’s



A promise fulfilled
Baker honored his pledge to Trip, and now

If a ball goes out of bounds, the team with a player closest to the line when the ball crosses the boundary gets to keep possession. Many times, it's a race to the out-of-bounds line to see who can get possession.

- There are three basic ideas that teams need to have in mind, according to coach Rick Baker.

The first is to clear the ball from the defensive end and try to get it to the attacking zone.

The second thing is to find a way to isolate players and move the ball. That part is all about creating space and making good passes.

The third thing is making sure you take quality shots. "If you don't take shots, you don't score."

where we're at now."

Growing a team

He landed a teaching job in southern California after graduating from Gonzaga, and that's where he got his first taste of what he calls "growing the sport."

On his first day at a high school outside Palm Springs, California, he noticed four guys out on the football field playing catch with a lacrosse ball and sticks. That triggered something for Baker, and he decided then and there he wanted to start something.

He didn't realize how big it would get. After recruiting a couple of football players, the program started to grow. Baker was willing to do just about anything to get it going. He ordered a bunch of equipment from eBay and organized some games. And so it began.

The team did a lot of traveling at first, driving several hours to find games all over Orange County. It was all worth it in the end — after seven years, it went from four guys playing catch on a field to an established high school varsity lacrosse program.

A desire to play

Baker and his family moved to Rock Springs in 2012, and he had his sights set on repeating the California success.

However, the Bakers hit a big speed bump in their lives when their son Trip was diagnosed with leukemia. Baker and



TRIP BAKER

his wife, Jennifer, dropped everything to focus on Trip's health.

Baker put the idea of a Rock Springs lacrosse program on hold.

His son didn't.

Trip, now 11, didn't want his dad to pull back on his plans. Because of Trip's desire to play, Baker decided that as soon as his son was healthy, the plan to start a lacrosse program would be launched.

It was a stressful time for the family, and especially for Trip. But the boy was unbelievably strong and found a way to beat the disease. Last year, doctors cleared Trip to play football. Once his dad heard the news, it was time to make good on his commitment. Baker now is coaching his son in lacrosse.

"It was a promise to my son," Baker said about starting Lopes Lacrosse. "I promised him that once he was healthy, I would do it."

the lacrosse club in Rock Springs is well on its way.

Last year, the program ended with 12 players. This year, it's up to 29. The growing process has begun.

Assistant coach Casey Schweitzer knows that Baker was the right guy to get the ball rolling.

"He has this attitude that 'this is going to work, this is going to be big,'" Schweitzer said. "He's very steadfast and very positive."

Baker never doubted the program had potential. His first big step was receiving the First Stick Grant. He spent hours filling out paperwork for US Lacrosse. When it was awarded, Lopes became one of 15-20 programs in the nation to receive it. The grant provides things like brand-new gear and covering US Lacrosse registration, which allows entry at events.

Now that the program has some life, Baker wants to make it as inexpensive as possible for kids and parents. He knows that down the road, as the club continues to grow, fees also will grow. Baker's priority is to get kids onto the field.

"Right now, I don't want to charge anything. Let's just play the game, and we'll work on the rest later," Baker said. "I'm trying to make this sport, right out the gates, something everyone can afford."

Baker is a man on a mission, and he is realizing his vision. He's never doubted that lacrosse is going to "blow up" in Rock Springs.

"I'm telling you," Baker said, with a huge smile on his face, "this little gamble I took is going to turn into something big."

Rocket-Miner stories and photos by **Miles Englehart**