

Hello Sunset players and parents of 5th through 8th grade boys,

This is a lengthy and detailed note with very important information about the 2018 spring season for boys grades 5-8. We encourage you to read carefully and ask questions as they may arise. There is a great deal of planning and careful considerations that goes into team formation, coach selection, scheduling, and (practice and home game) field procurement.

Summary

- Oregon Youth Lacrosse Association (OYLA) is moving to a Division 1/2/3 model based on experience and skill for 5/6 & 7/8 divisions
- Teams will play other teams at their level (e.g. D2 teams will play other D2 teams)
- Sunset Youth Lacrosse (SYL) will hold evaluations at the beginning of the season, which will help form our teams
- Emphasis on practices during the week with games mostly reserved for weekends
- SYL is in agreement that this approach enhances player safety, enables greater development, and improves overall experience

Preparing for Spring!

With spring registration opening December 1, we want to inform you about changes that are taking place in 2018 for boys' youth lacrosse. OYLA, the governing body of boys' youth lacrosse in the state, has adopted some structural changes on how clubs will form teams and schedule against other clubs. For many years now, OYLA required clubs to form balanced teams that consisted of a mixture of both experienced and new players on the same team. The premise for this structure was to prevent clubs from "stacking" teams with only skilled, experienced players.

As youth lacrosse has grown, so has the level of competition, particularly at the 5/6 and 7/8 grade levels. Lacrosse has become a year-round sport and the talent has increased tremendously in the last several years. Many clubs, like SYL, are fielding players with 6+ years of lacrosse by the time they reach 7/8th grade. However, there are still many clubs that struggle to field one team at each grade level and consist of many players with less than 2 years experience at the 7/8th grade level. In addition, we never want to discourage a player from starting at any age/grade! We have seen a trend of games with lopsided wins in favor of the more skilled teams even though they are technically "balanced." OYLA is adopting changes to improve safety, player development, and the overall player experience.

What are the changes?

Based on input and feedback from participating clubs, OYLA will implement a simple Division 1/2/3 model for the way teams are formed. This model is the same as the girls' youth model, referred to as Gold/Silver/Bronze. Basically, the D1/2/3 model teams are defined as:

- Division 1 - Considered the most competitive, a team of the most skilled players. This essentially becomes the Select team formed in the past.
- Division 2 - Considered to be teams competing with a healthy mix of experienced and less experienced players.
- Division 3 - Considered to be teams competing with mostly new/beginner-type players.

Why and how are these changes happening?

The main objective in adopting this structure is to focus on player development and safety. Players will develop faster when they are able to compete with like competition. That applies to practices as well as games. At the 7/8th grade level, middle school boys are going through multiple physical changes. When a team of skilled players with size and speed are competing against smaller, less-skilled players, this scenario can create unbalanced and unsafe conditions in a contact sport. This new model is designed to focus on the beginner as much as it does the skilled player. We are hopeful that this removes the stigma from kids wanting to join SYL but are afraid to because they have never played before and feel as if they are not good enough to play with players who have been playing lacrosse for years. This new model will allow us to place these first-time players on a team to play with and against like-skilled players. The only apparent downside to this change is kids potentially being placed on a team that a friend(s) is/are not on due to differing skill levels. This is a reality and we recognize that many kids play sports because their friends do and want to be together. However, we are attentive to player development at every skill level and we feel that this new model will provide the best overall experience for the individual player.

With this change, clubs are free to self-select what level of team(s) they wish to form depending on overall player numbers and the skills of their players. At the 7/8 level, SYL could form 1 D1 team and 2 D2 teams, or 1 each at D1, D2 and D3. In the D1/2/3 model, we can place players on a team that best suits their ability to develop in a fun and safe environment without being discouraged by competing against players with years of experience. When it comes time to schedule games, SYL will schedule games for our teams with other clubs forming teams of same levels (e.g. D2 teams can only schedule against D2 teams from other clubs). While it's not a perfect system, the expectation is that games will be more competitive based on similar skills, all participating players will thrive, and players will be encouraged to continue playing lacrosse season after season.

How will SYL create the 5/6 and 7/8 teams next spring?

At the beginning of the season, all 5/6 and 7/8 players will practice together. It will be during this time that players are evaluated for qualification on the D1-level team at each age group. We are at present undecided if we will host a separate tryout for the D1 teams. In addition, playing on the D1 team is not required, but we will need to be informed if you are not interested in that level. It does come at a premium price due to tournament fees, coaches' stipends, and other costs unique to this level/scheduling approach. We explain this to you now because it is difficult and time consuming to perform evaluations, place players on teams and schedule games, only to have players withdraw from the program after teams are made. When players quit or request to be on a different team, the art of team balancing and limiting rosters is lost and disruptive. It is helpful to provide specific comments to us when registering your son for SYL to assist the coaches in forming teams.

Practice and Game Scheduling

We are also adopting a change in how we schedule games (this decision is not dictated by OYLA). OYLA has allowed clubs to inform their schedulers when teams are available to host games on weeknights and/or weekends. OYLA then schedules individual games, home and away, based on input by all clubs. SYL will attempt to schedule games on weekends only in the spring. We recognize that there may be a weeknight game or two due to unforeseen scheduling conditions or weekends with no games (e.g. holidays), but our mission is to play Saturdays (and Sundays for tournament-based teams). Our main focus is on player development and we feel that practices take precedent over games. This will also allow for a consistent practice schedule, 2 per week on the same days, without game interruptions during the week.

The structure for the 3/4 division is unchanged; we will continue to balance each team to the best of our ability.

As this is the first year of this new structure, we ask for your patience and understanding. We would love to hear your feedback at any point during the season too.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel to reach out to Chris Brewer, President (syl.president@gmail.com) or Erin Hire, VP Boys (syl.vpboys@gmail.com).