

SPORTS



Alyanna Webster, 10, of Rochester, wins a race for possession of the ball Thursday, Aug. 11, outside the Fond du Lac Ojibwe School. Webster and the others were participating in the weeklong Lax-4-Life camp conducted by the Band. The camp brought together players from Fond du Lac and Red Lake bands of Chippewa, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Oneida and Ho-Chunk nations, and Little Earth of United Tribes.

Photos by Brady Slater / Pine Knot News



Lax-4-Life camp coach Veronica Nash, of Minneapolis, and a coach with Twin Cities Native Lacrosse, said it was awesome to see Native American players learning from Native American coaches. "A lot of us didn't grow up with that," Nash said.



Lax-4-Life camp coach Aron Lipkin works on shooting form with Wanbdi Thompson, 8, of St. Paul.

Fond du Lac restores its annual lacrosse camp

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Bryan "Bear" Bosto surveyed a sunlit field outside the Fond du Lac Ojibwe School last week, and spoke with pride.

"We have a lot of Native talent in this game," said Bosto, organizer of the Lax-4-Life summer lacrosse camp.

Lacrosse nets lined a field divided into playing areas for both younger and older boys and one for girls.

Bosto noted 32 children from six regional tribes taking part in the week-long camp – a celebration of lacrosse and the Native American cultures from which the game sprang centuries ago.

The players were under

the instruction of a host of accomplished, mostly Native American, coaches imparting skills such as shot-making, stick-handling and passing.

"Oh, he's sniping pipes," said one coach after a player let rip a goal-making shot.

Campers lodged inside barracks at the Cloquet Forestry Center throughout last week. They ate together, practiced and swam together, and learned about diabetes prevention and game strategy. They played afternoon lacrosse games, and held a banquet to culminate their week.

"Traditional is better," said 11-year-old Jess Headbird, of Cass Lake, while jogging between drills, happy to be playing the cultural game.



A modern lacrosse stick appears in the sunlight juxtaposed against a traditional model.

Lax-4-Life started 12 years ago and ran through 2015. The event had to be canceled after a lightning strike killed power to the forestry center in 2016. The pandemic wiped out more recent possibilities.

"You lose momentum,"

Bosto said. "It feels wonderful having these kids back together."

The game is played using netted sticks to hurl and catch a ball. The aim is to score goals protected by a goaltender.

It helps to be fast. But

proficiency in possessing the ball and keeping it in the air while passing among teammates leads to the sport's prettiest moments.

For Veronica Nash, a seven-year member of Twin Cities Native Lacrosse, participation as a coach was about giving back to the game and standing up as a mentor for younger players.

"A lot of us didn't grow up with that," Nash said. "It's awesome to see other Native coaches and Native mentors working with Native players."

Nash started playing because she knew it was a Native sport.

"We've been playing lacrosse in Minnesota for a long time," she said.

But as it popularized

and became more mainstream, she noted the game becoming more expensive and her encounters with other players and coaches less connected to the game's roots.

"We're able to re-bring that back," Nash said. "These girls will bring back to their high schools and middle schools an awareness of where this game started from."

Corbyn Tao was a former player with the Minnesota Swarm, an indoor lacrosse team that played its games in St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center. The team relocated to Georgia in 2015.

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GrandViewGolfLinks.com

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HOCKEY

Cloquet native goes to work in Boston

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The hockey journey of former Lumberjack Jamie Langenbrunner continued this past week when it was announced he is the new assistant general manager of the Boston Bruins.

Langenbrunner starred for the Cloquet hockey team in the early 1990s and went on to an 18-year professional career. He played for the Dallas Stars, the New Jersey Devils and the St. Louis Blues. During his professional career, Langenbrunner won the Stanley Cup twice, and also played for the U.S. Olympic team twice, and was team captain in 2010 when the USA took home a silver medal.

In September 2015, Langenbrunner was hired by the Bruins to work with player development and eventually moved into the role of director of player development and player personnel advisor before being promoted to assistant general manager this past month.

"It was just a natural progression to move into the assistant GM position," Langenbrunner said. "After our GM for our AHL affiliate in Providence left last year, I had the chance to be involved with running that team and that opened things up in Boston. Don Sweeney, our GM for the Bruins, gave me the chance and it is a great opportunity for me."

Ironically, after his playing career ended Langenbrunner was unsure he wanted to continue being involved with hockey. That all changed while on a vacation with his wife and some current and fellow



Cloquet native Jamie Langenbrunner is the new assistant general manager of the Boston Bruins. *File photo*

former players.

"We were on vacation with Jay Pandolfo and his wife, and Zach Parise and his wife," Langenbrunner said. "Jay was working with the Bruins and asked if I wanted to get involved in Boston, so I said I'd give it a shot and see how it went."

A big key to Langenbrunner getting involved in the management side as opposed to coaching was the flexibility management offers.

"When you are a coach, there is no time away once the season starts," Langenbrunner said. "I have been able to watch my kids play and have a bit more flexibility than I would have had as a coach."

As the assistant GM, Langenbrunner will be

involved in player personnel decisions. He will also spend the bulk of his time watching pro hockey games, European players, and college players.

"I will be able to pass along information on possible players we are looking to trade for, draft or pick up in free agency," Langenbrunner said. "You have to know what you have for players in the minors and what other teams have in their systems. There is a lot of work to put in, so when potential trades happen you have as much information as possible. You are always looking at the big picture."

One thing Langenbrunner has learned is how difficult making that blockbuster-type trade can be.

"It isn't easy to make trades because most of the time the guy you want to trade for the other team doesn't want to trade, and the guys the other teams want to pick up from you are guys you don't want to trade, so it is not as easy as it sounds," he said with a laugh.

Langenbrunner will also be another voice on draft day.

Back in 2020, he faced an unusual situation when the Bruins decided they were interested in possibly drafting his youngest son, Mason. Eventually the Bruins drafted Mason at 151st overall in the fifth round of the 2020 NHL draft.

(Mason will play hockey at Harvard University starting this year.)

"That was interesting," said Langenbrunner. "They came to me and said, 'What would you think if we drafted Mason?' I told them I had no comment one way or another and I wasn't going to be offended either way. I know there were other teams that would have taken Mason, but I felt it was best to let others make that decision."

Another key to Langenbrunner's success at the upper management level has been his ability to relate to players. As someone who played 18 years, he has been through much of what players are dealing with at the professional level.

"I think it gives you a level of street credibility," he said. "Guys know that

they can ask questions, or just vent because I've been in their same situation."

Last season the Bruins made the playoffs again — only to lose in Game 7 in their opening round matchup against Carolina.

"There are times when things can get a bit stressful," said Langenbrunner. "Those Game 7 losses are always tough, but our goal is to be in the playoffs every year and give our team a chance and we've been pretty successful so far in doing that. Chasing championships, and making the playoffs, are what we strive for."

If Langenbrunner continues to progress through the organization, who knows — maybe the next championship team will include his son Mason. That would be a fitting piece to the hockey puzzle for Langenbrunner.

Plante to Blackhawks

Langenbrunner is not the only former Cloquet player who has achieved success after their playing careers ended. Derek Plante recently was named the assistant coach of the Chicago Blackhawks after spending the past few years at UMD as an assistant to Scott Sandelin.

Corey Millen also achieved coaching success after his playing days. Millen was the head coach of the Minnesota Wild when they won the Robertson Cup in 2015 and is the current head coach of the St. Cloud Norseman of the NAHL. He also was a graduate assistant at the University of Minnesota, and assisted at the U.S. Air Force Academy for one season.

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Lacrosse

"The culture, the heritage — it's a well-rounded game," Tao said of a game started by Native Americans as "stickball," and first observed by white settlers in the 1600s, according to the sport's governing body World Lacrosse.

Tao said he likes how

individual skills mix with team concepts, things incorporated later with the advent of other North American sports, including baseball and basketball.

Tao grew up playing box lacrosse — a faster-paced game played in indoor hockey arenas. Outside the school last week, he said he enjoyed the "high skies" of field lacrosse.

"I want to provide the

same opportunities to our youth that I had, but on a more personal level with our Native kids," Tao said.

That included Wanbdi Thompson, 8, of St. Paul, who whipped a shot then joined teammates in collecting balls — some having fallen wide of the net, but most hitting home.

"It's fun," Thompson said. "It's kind of a cool sport."

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Tue., Aug. 23 @ 7:10 p.m. @ Astros
Wed., Aug. 24 @ 7:10 p.m. @ Astros
Thur., Aug. 25 @ 7:10 p.m. @ Astros
Fri., Aug. 26 @ 7:10 p.m. vs. Giants

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