

The Washington Post

Wilson debuts the first boys' lacrosse team from a D.C. Public School

Monday, March 22, 2010; D02

Views from high school sports from photographer Toni L. Sandys

As a new season of sports begins across the metro area, almost 50 kids gather on the field at Wilson High. The boys are there to play a sport that their new turf field isn't even lined for. A sport most -- if not all -- have never before played. A sport their suburban peers often start playing in kindergarten.

Last year, Wilson Athletic Director Mike Burnell was looking out the school windows, watching a youth lacrosse team practice on his field. "I was looking out there wondering if we could pull it off here," he said. After months of meetings and planning, it was indeed going to happen. Burnell's school would become the first D.C. public school to offer boys' varsity lacrosse.

Burnell sees it as a way to keep his students involved. And it's another opportunity for young men to earn scholarships. Before this year, the only sports the school offered in the spring for boys were track, baseball and rowing. "We had a whole other population of kids who obviously wanted to do something else. And they're here."

There are teachers and administrators

who are surprised to see some of the kids out on the field. "These are kids who haven't done anything before," Burnell said. "All of a sudden they're out here every day. Stick, ball and helmet. Practicing, practicing, practicing."

No one expected the turnout for the city's first boys' public school lacrosse team. "The first two weeks we had four new kids at practice every day," said co-coach Lucius Polk. "Some kids still keep showing up."

The team will play an eight-game schedule this year against mostly private schools and a Montgomery County public school. It opened its season against St. Albans, the alma mater of Polk and co-coach Harry Alford. The coaches have had a short time to teach fundamentals and stick skills to kids who have never

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played the game.

"Most of the kids on our team have never picked up a stick until four weeks ago," Polk said. "So to make the kind of progress that we have is pretty impressive."

Against St. Albans, "we went up 2-0 in the first and they had to call a timeout. We thought that was victory in itself," Alford said. Although Wilson ended up with a 15-5 loss, it wasn't as bad as everyone had feared against a school whose team has played together for years.

That's why the Wilson players are still on the field tossing the ball well after practice has ended. Even a practice that ends with sprints. That's why the Wilson players groan when they find out there won't be a Saturday practice.

"We like to have our heads high," said team member Alejandro Vasquez. "We don't like to embarrass ourselves. We have to stand up and represent for the DCPS and Wilson. This is our one time to shine."

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