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Virgin Islands Lacrosse Association Introduces Sport To IEKHS Students as Building Block For Territory-Wide Grassroots Program

Sports / **Published On October 24, 2022 05:01 AM /**

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Lacrosse sports equipment at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Over the past two weeks, members of the Virgin Islands Lacrosse Association taught physical education classes at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School to introduce the sport of lacrosse with the aim of building a grassroots program in the territory.

During the first week, students learned the fundamentals of Lacrosse, including cradling, passing, catching, shooting, and scooping the ball off the ground before progressing to scrimmages in the second week.

“It was great to see members of the USVI Lacrosse Association teaching the sport of lacrosse to local high school students as it was one of the initial goals of the organization," Richard Carter, executive director of USVILA told the Consortium. “We hope more schools will be interested in having coaches come and teach P.E. for a couple of weeks so more Virgin Islanders can learn lacrosse as we begin to establish our grassroots program locally.”

Sly Villaestiva, a P.E. teacher at IEKHS, said his students liked learning how to play lacrosse. “It’s a new game for everyone including me. We learned a lot; we wanted to learn more and we enjoyed playing the game," he said.

Mr. Villaestiva also expressed gratitude that the sport was introduced to IEKHS. “I think it’s a game changer...this is the fastest-growing game and we really need to have these sports in our school.”

Another P.E. teacher, Arnold Pangilinan, saw that students started learning the sport after difficulty the first week. “During the first week we saw that it was hard for the students to pick up the skills, but in a few days they got down the basic movements.”

Both PE teachers are hoping that USVILA will return to IEKHS in the spring semester.

Pedro Alvarado, president of the USVILA board and one of the volunteer coaches at IEKHS, stated, “It was a pleasure for me and the coaches to come out here and share the love of the game that we all grew up playing. The Virgin Islands are a big part of who we are and if it feels really nice to give back to the community and start a grassroots program from the beginning.”

Tony Randazzo, vice president of the USVILA board on St. Thomas and one of the volunteer coaches at IEKHS, said it was a great experience teaching the sport. “I saw a lot of potential out there. Some potential two-sport athletes, and hopefully we can nurture their interest in the game and help develop the next generation of VI athletes.”

Mr. Randazzo said there is “a lot of crossover ability” with Lacrosse with sports that Virgin Islanders are more familiar with such as basketball and baseball, which helped the students. "It's going to be a matter of keeping them engaged, interested and making it fun so they want to keep playing," he said.

At the moment, the USVI Lacrosse Association is gauging interest for the sport in the territory with hopes of having enough interest to run a free after-school program and camps in the spring semester of 2023. The association is interested in coaching similar programs across the territory.

If a school is interested in the program they can contact USVILA at admin@usvila.org. The hope is to foster a grassroots program where USVI students are able to represent the team in the near future.

The USVI Lacrosse Association plans to have teams in World Lacrosse tournaments in various age groups for both male and female.

In November 2020, the Virgin Islands was recognized as the 68th member of World Lacrosse.

In July, the USVI team competed in their first World Lacrosse-sanctioned event, The 2022 Pan American Lacrosse Association World Qualifiers. The players were honored to represent the Virgin Islands against Jamaica, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, and Puerto Rico in Medellin, Colombia.

Lacrosse is considered one of the fastest-growing sports in the world.

World Lacrosse is the governing body of Lacrosse worldwide and has been recognized by the International Olympic Committee.

Lacrosse is being considered a new Olympic sport for the 2028 Olympics.

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