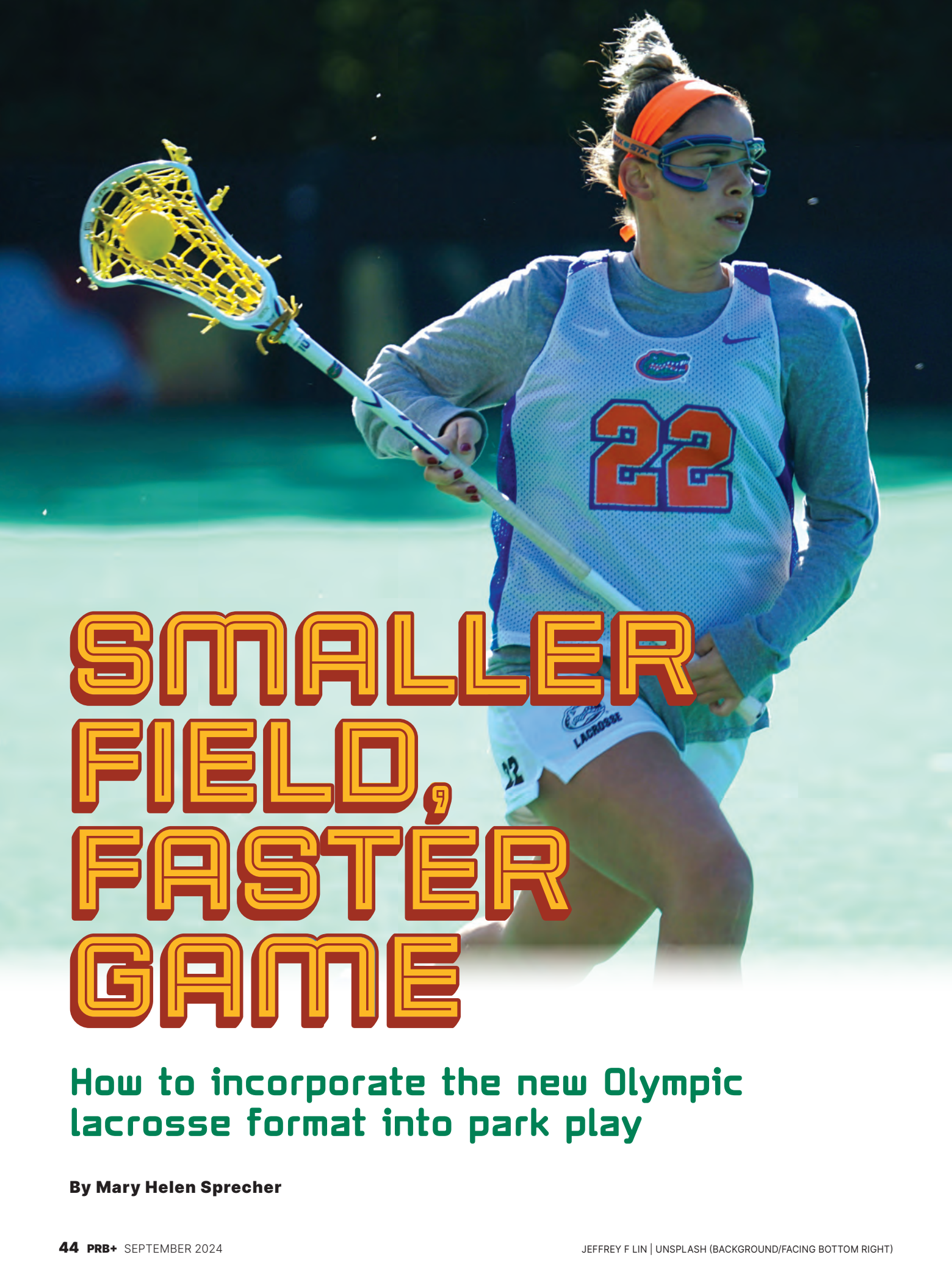




SMALLER FIELD, FASTER GAME

How to incorporate the new Olympic lacrosse format into park play

By Mary Helen Sprecher



Lacrosse is ready for its close-up.

But that close-up won't come until 2028, when lacrosse will be featured as a showcase sport at the Olympics in Los Angeles. However, that's actually a good thing because that gives parks (and player camps) an opportunity to get up to speed on the new format: sixes lacrosse, or more simply, sixes.

HOW SIXES ADDS UP

Whereas traditional lacrosse has ten team members per side, sixes, as the name implies, is a small-sided version of the game. It also plays out on a field (grass or turf) measuring a standard 70m x 36m for both the men's and women's games. (The dimensions of the traditional game, also known as field lacrosse, vary according to the gender and age of players, as well as the governing body for each level of play.)

The six-per-side format, touted by World Lacrosse as a faster and more exciting game to watch, is expected to be more television-friendly and understandable, particularly for those who have not watched lacrosse before. Each quarter of the 45-minute game is only eight minutes



long, with a 30-second shot clock. There are no specialist positions, either—just players and goalkeepers.

World Lacrosse notes, "A natural evolution of the sport, sixes is at the intersection of field and box lacrosse, offering an inclusionary opportunity to all existing lacrosse players and an easier entry point for new athletes."

Sixes has specific rules developed by World Lacrosse. USA Lacrosse, the national governing body, does not have any specific sixes rules, guidelines, or diagrams; instead, it has multiple small-sided options available for play.



A SPORT ON THE RISE

Lacrosse's popularity has been growing for a while; in the 2020-2021 school year, girls' lacrosse cracked the top-ten list for high school sports participation, as recorded by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), and it has remained a fixture ever since. Boys' lacrosse was previously a top-ten sport and continues its popularity to this day.

The sixes version of the sport received widespread international exposure at the 2022 World Games in Birmingham, Ala., where the U.S. men's and women's teams earned silver medals (Canada won the gold).

The sport also has historic appeal; its roots stretch back to 1100, when records show it was played by the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, people. Today, the Haudenosaunee Nationals Lacrosse Organization is an Indigenous sports organization (the only one

of its kind globally) that competes on the world stage.

All this exposure, and all this growth, means that parks can expect to host more sixes rec play, and those that host camps will likely see requests for player showcases, as well as instructional events. In many cases, those requests may already have been made. Members of the American Sports Builders Association say they are busier than ever adding lacrosse to existing facilities.



“We’re getting more requests for adding or including lacrosse lines on not only football/soccer fields, but also in the outfield areas of baseball and softball fields,” says Todd Smith PhD, PE, LEED AP of R&R Engineers.

Requests for small-sided fields, he adds, are commonplace, “mainly at the high school level but also for college level. In some cases, we see them requested by organizations that do not have enough room for a full-size field, whether it’s for boys’ or girls’ or even unified play.”

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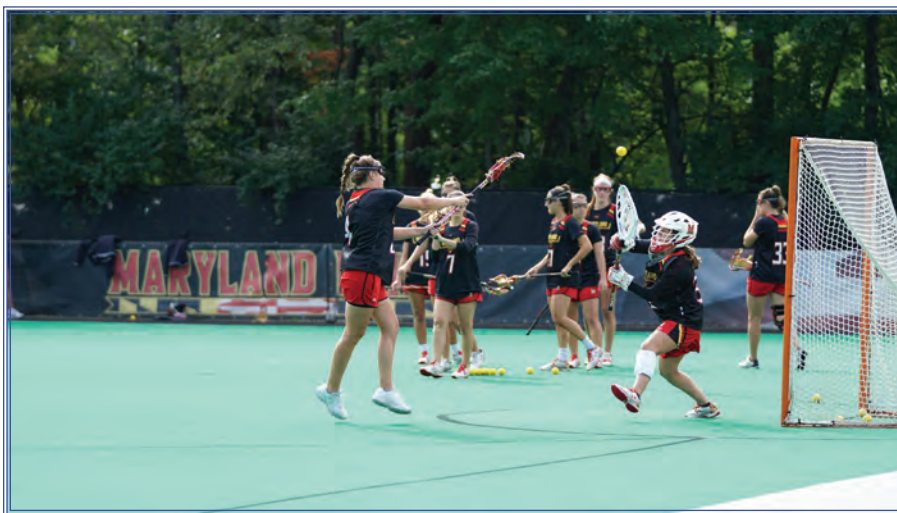
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A NEW OPPORTUNITY

Something else has come to light about the smaller-size fields and play format: they lend themselves to adult recreational play. Soccer event owners, for example, have noted an uptick among adult teams registering for tournaments. The reasons are numerous: adults miss their high school and college sports experience (and want to remain active), and they find it easier to gather enough

people to make up a smaller team. Additionally, the smaller field requires less running, something adults appreciate. A shorter game is also favored by players who are balancing a work schedule, family demands, and other factors.

Small-sided games, such as those for sixes lacrosse, may provide an excellent opportunity for parks to create rec and social leagues for adults, as well as for youth play. Park managers interested in hosting such play can partner with sports and social clubs in their cities; many such entities already exist for softball

and kickball. Well-lit fields will be desirable for this kind of use, since after-work and evening play is easier for adults' schedules than weekend games (when most youth play takes place).

Additionally, because small-sided lacrosse takes up less time and field space, it allows for more games to be hosted within a compressed period. (The only caution is that the field, if it is grass, should be regularly inspected to ensure it

stays in good condition in the face of increased use.)

“Lacrosse fields get the most use in the crease about three feet to four feet in front of the goal,” says Smith. “That area is generally more abused and needs more maintenance than soccer goal mouths.”

No matter what surface the field has, it is essential to keep the lines of communication open between players and park managers. Players should be encouraged to report concerns regarding the field, rather than automatically assuming the park’s maintenance staff will address any problems. Signage should be placed near fields, showing an email address or a phone number to call or text.

As an aside, those who want to become familiar with the complete rules for lacrosse sixes, including field diagrams and dimensions, can visit the World Lacrosse website.

International sixes play is already happening, including (but not limited to) events like the EuroLax Sixes Cup, Super Sixes, Sixes Nations Cup, and the PALA (Pan



American Lacrosse Association) Sixes Cup. The inaugural World Lacrosse Sixes Championships for men and women will be held in 2026. Several privately owned, small-sided lacrosse events continue to be big draws on the youth-travel tournament circuit as well. **PRB+**

Mary Helen Sprecher is the technical writer for the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA), and also the editor of two of ASBA’s publications, *Sports Fields: Construction and Maintenance Manual* and *Courts & Recreational Surfaces: Construction and Maintenance Manual*.

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