

## Ravens Help Grow The Game

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The game of lacrosse has deep, strong roots, and one reason is the sport's tradition of passing the game on to the next generation. The lacrosse players at Ravenscroft have taken the challenge of helping to grow the game while they build a strong bond with the local community.

Raven players have been serving as coaches and officials for a number of years, working summer camps, clinics, and the Fusion lacrosse spring league. The experience gives the athletes a chance to spend time with youngsters in the community, and it strengthens their connection to the game of lacrosse.

"We stress the notion of giving back in our program," said Ravens coach Sandy Kapatos. "First and foremost, this gives our players a chance to form a connection with the younger kids. I remember having a chance to meet my heroes when I was a kid, and that's an impactful experience.



"This is also a big part of the tradition of lacrosse. In our game, we always want there to be a family type connection between the older players and the next generation."

Junior attackman Matt Johnson began helping youth lacrosse programs with his brother, former Raven standout Kubi Johnson (2013). Matt has worked countless summer camps and clinics, and he is a regular official for Fusion games in the spring.

"I started going along when my brother was doing it, and I just kept doing it," Johnson said. "When you are

watching the little kids playing and having fun, it's awesome. When you see one of them score, and he's dancing around celebrating, it's great to think, 'I taught him how to do that.'"

Midfielder Robert Cooley (2016) is another one of over 20 Ravens players who participated in the program last year.

"It's just fun. You get to play catch with them and teach them lacrosse, but you also get to interact with them and joke around with them," Cooley said. "I started playing in the sixth grade, so it's pretty amazing that these guys are in the first grade and they already have a stick in their hands."

"Sometimes the stick is taller than the player," added Johnson with a laugh.

Having fun is the key for everyone -- coaches, officials and players -- but there is also an educational element that touches everyone.

“You have to learn how to control your emotions. You can’t get frustrated, because there are a lot of things they can’t do ... sometimes they can’t even make a line,” Cooley said. “You just have to concentrate on having a good time.”

“You definitely learn a lot of patience,” Johnson said. “There are just things they can’t do, and you have to accept that they can get distracted really easily.”

Even with the obstacles, both Johnson and Cooley are looking forward to working with the youngsters in the future. Their efforts are paying off, because the youth program at Ravenscroft has flourished in recent years.

“I think this is really helping to establish a positive atmosphere for Ravenscroft lacrosse,” Kapatos said. “We expect a lot out of our boys, and this is one of the things that has become a part of our culture. I’m very proud of the way our boys have handled themselves, and the contribution that they have made.”

