



The German-American Lacrosse Exchange, a project that has been in the works for some time, has finally begun operating in the 2011-2012 season. A very unique and far reaching program, the German-American Lacrosse Exchange seeks to involve the American (and other) Lacrosse communities in helping the German Lacrosse Community grow and develop.

With some 75 million German-Americans, as well as countless tens of thousands of Americans who have served in military installations in Germany, there is some hope that Americans who feel a connection to Germany will help to grow the sport they love in that country.

The first aspect of the program was an attempt to solve a problem extremely unique to Germany. Some 30-40% of German youth spend a year abroad during high school. Any high school in the US is likely at any point in time to have multiple German-Exchange students, even though Germany is a relatively small country. Normally that exchange has helped to grow the sport of lacrosse in Germany, as students come back from a year in the US having learned a sport that was new to them, and find a lacrosse team to participate within when they return.

However, now that lacrosse has grown to the youth level in Germany, we have begun to have German lacrosse players going for a year abroad in the US. While lacrosse is growing wildly in the US, there are still more high schools without lacrosse than with lacrosse in the US, and we started to find that our players who were excited to spend a year in the US playing lacrosse were often left disappointed. They might find themselves in a high school, or worse, a whole region, with no lacrosse.

Our first attempt at a German-American lacrosse exchange, then, was to solicit the American Lacrosse Community for volunteers to serve as host families to German exchange students (both boys and girls). Our youth players could then live with a lacrosse family, and attend an American school that already has an established lacrosse program. We currently have several Germans in the US for this school year and have placed many more for the coming school year. The program allows for a Semester, a year, or even just a summer in the US. We are now working on finding homes for German lacrosse players for the 2013-14 school year. For 2013-14, we will also open the program to other European students seeking to spend a year abroad in the US.

The best part of this program is that we are working through a non-profit US Governmental

agency to place these students. That means that the costs of the program are extremely low (Airfare, Medical insurance, and actual visa cost).

In a mirror of that program, we have asked each lacrosse family in Germany who sends a student to the US to agree to host a US lacrosse player who wishes to do a year abroad in Germany. This is a much more difficult endeavor for a number of reasons. Typically, US students do not do a year abroad - especially those involved in lacrosse, where playing and being seen in the US can mean a spot on a college lacrosse team. Additionally, it is more expensive for an American to come to Europe because the same non-profit US Governmental agency has to work with a European counterpart to place students. Regardless, we have 3 US students in Germany this year, although they are only in Germany for 3 month exchanges. We hope this program grows in the future.

The third aspect of the German-American lacrosse exchange is a program we have been seeking to develop in Germany for the past 5 years. It is called the "Parachute Program", and is a summer long project geared more towards service oriented time in Germany than the typical pay-to-play travel teams that come in large numbers to Europe for the large summer tournaments. The Parachute Program finds host families who will provide room and board for Current US College players, recent graduates, or other interested adults. The US players are placed in groups of 5 (either a group of men, or a group of women). These groups then spend a summer in a German city which has been struggling to start a lacrosse team, and work with the local German players to build the number of lacrosse men, women and youth. By the end of the summer, the hope is that the work will leave a large enough lacrosse community to provide the local team the opportunity to field complete teams and lay the groundwork for further growth in that city. We even accept other Germans into this program, as a summer service project. Our first "parachute program" city will be this summer, and will take place in Bremen, where a strong women's team will help our service group to grow a youth team, as well as re-establish a defunct men's team in that city.

Following quickly on the heels of that program is our attempt to find Americans (or Canadians, Australians, etc) who would like to spend a year (or more) coaching local German teams. The typical model is for the local team to find an apartment for the coach, to find them a local job (typically teaching English as a second language), and sometimes to provide them with a monthly stipend. The coach then spends time (sometimes as a player-coach) developing the local team and helping to grow the sport.

Finally, the German-American lacrosse exchange is asking the American Lacrosse community to help collect used lacrosse equipment which can be shipped to Germany for use in our various programs which seek to grow the sport.

All of these aspects together have so far generated quite a strong interest in German lacrosse, and we hope it will accelerate the growth of the sport! If things continue to go well, we even plan on extending the program to Austria and Switzerland, which are natural sister programs for Germany.

If anyone has questions, or is interested in participating in our program, please contact Kyle Hawkins at warriors.coach@gmail.com or join the German-American Lacrosse Exchange webpage on facebook.