

The following message is from the **President of the Women's Division Board of Governors**.
—Laura Hebert

about the integrity of the women's game is being discussed across the country and in many different forums. Currently there is a thread on www.LaxPower.com devoted to the issue of whether or not helmets are on the horizon. In addition, I have received many e-mails from coaches, umpires, fans, and parents who are interested in being part of the dialogue we have started regarding the issue of safety in the women's game.

As many of you are aware, the women's game is at a critical juncture – the preservation of the beauty and fluidity of the women's game is competing with forces that are making the game more aggressive and taking it further from its roots and culture, such as the quicker, stronger athletes that populate the game, a winner-take-all mentality the permeates all sport, the slow erosion of the semantics of the women's game, and the introduction strategies and tactics more suitable to the men's game. Observers of the game see this more aggressive style of play and wonder why girls and women are not in helmets. Some have stated that the culture and tradition of the game does not need to be protected and the move toward a more aggressive game complete with helmets is inevitable. It is equally clear from the many discussions that I have been a part of that many more are in favor of preserving the beauty and finesse of the women's games without the need for pads or helmets. The Women's Division Board of Governors is intent on doing just that – maintaining an emphasis on safety while preserving the very nature of the game that makes it beautiful and special.

I would like to share some background so that this discussion can be viewed through the lens of what US Lacrosse is doing to maintain the integrity of the game and keep it safe for our athletes. US Lacrosse receives many e-mails, phone calls, and letters questioning why there is no rule mandating helmets in the women's game. There is no rule mandating helmets because we manage the risk in other ways such as enforcing the existing rules as they are written, e.g. carding the offending player. In addition:

- Certainly, we know that checks which make contact to the head do occur and may lead to concussions. However, research from the USL Sport Science and Safety Committee indicates that the chance of a player – boy or girl- getting a concussion is greater in soccer, for example than lacrosse. Also, research indicates that concussions occur in men's lacrosse (a helmeted sport) at a higher rate than women's lacrosse.
- Recent research noted in a 2008 article in the New York Times indicates that in most mainstreams sports (lacrosse was not included in the study) a majority of injuries are a result of illegal actions of players, which is why US Lacrosse is making significant investments in the training of coaches and officials to ensure that players learn the letter and spirit of rules and are required to uphold them on the field ([US Lacrosse Education & Training](#)). US Lacrosse, through the Safety and Education Committee, has initiated the Rules Rule Campaign which emphasizes and rewards the necessity of playing within the spirit and the letter of the rules ([Be Fierce & Fair](#)). This campaign has led to the distribution of hundreds of Rules Rule posters and coins for officials to use to begin a game.
- The H.S. Coaches Council of US Lacrosse has also made a commitment to maintaining safe play by tying All-American Awards to the number of cards received in a season.
- The College Coaches Council has circulated a letter, signed by Division I, II, and III coaches of the game including Chris Sailer of Princeton, Kirsten Kimmel of Duke, and Jenny Levy of UNC, which encourages collegiate umpires to make the calls necessary to keep athletes safe and the culture of the women's game intact.
- It is important to note that lacrosse may be one sport, but it is absolutely two games. Although both are rooted in the same Native American game, they are played under significantly different rules. There have been many suggestions as to rule changes which could increase safety while maintaining the integrity of the game. The Rules Committee has considered many rule changes that would send the "safety first" message, and this year a player receiving a yellow card will be suspended from play for three minutes while the team plays short. Although many feel this is not enough, it is a step in the right direction. I would encourage those who have other ideas such as ones mentioned on this forum to write to the US Lacrosse rules committee with their suggestions and submit them as possible rule changes.
- The 2009 USL Convention included sessions that used game film to depict safe versus dangerous play along with discussion among coaches and umpires on how to collaboratively move toward a game that highlights the strong athletic woman but ensures a safe environment in which to play.
- Safety concerns will continue to be evaluated as our sport evolves. Research done by our Sport Science and Safety Committee will be shared with the Rules Committee so appropriate adjustments to the game can be proposed and implemented. I appreciate the comments and ideas that are circulated through both formal and informal venues that deal with preserving the integrity of the women's game while ensuring safe play for our athletes. I look forward to engaging in a discussion that will lead our lacrosse community in a positive direction.