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BRION O'CONNOR | ON THE MOVE

# Re-Lax: Lacrosse league gives players a second youth



JEFFREY MATE

**Melrose Silver Fox Scott Larkin, center, tries to split a pair of Groton Ancient Warrior defenders, Kevin Pezanowski, left, and Serge Oriol, right, during an Olde New England Lacrosse League match.**

**By Brion O'Connor** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 05, 2017

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The driving philosophy behind the Olde New England Lacrosse League — ONELL to its enthusiasts — is concisely captured in the organization’s motto: “You don’t quit playing because you get old. You get old because you quit playing.”

“I’m hooked,” said Fitchburg’s Douglas Gray, 50, who first played lacrosse while attending UMass Boston, then resumed when his children took up the sport. “I’m constantly working on my game and looking to improve. The aspect of working on improving is really motivating.

“Now if only my knees would stop complaining,” said Gray, of the Groton Ancient Warriors.

Gray’s assessment is a common theme among league participants. Many started playing in school, while others are relative newcomers who weren’t content to let their children have all the fun.

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“I took up the game right before my 50th birthday, as my two sons were beginning their own lax adventures,” said Medford’s Rock D’Errico, now 60, of the Melrose Silver Foxes and the league’s treasurer. “I worked hard and played all winter and spring in any place I could find. I continue to play year round.”

Numerous ONELL members echo that commitment.

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“I enjoy competing and playing lacrosse so much that I can’t see myself ever stopping, and hope to play into my 40s or 50s, like Tom Brady,” said Hingham’s Patrick Maddigan, 37, of the South Shore Wompatuck, or “The Womps.”

“I like getting a run in that’s not the treadmill or elliptical,” said Maddigan. “I love ‘Dads’ night out,’ as we call Thursday nights in the summer, and hanging with teammates who are some of my best friends now. But it all starts with getting to play lacrosse and the sometimes intense competition that can’t really be found in many other places.”

Similar to beer league softball and the Over the Hill Soccer League, ONELL allows older lax players the chance to recapture the athletic glories of their youth while staying fit. Their bodies are a little heavier (or sometimes a lot), less pliable, and maybe less agile. But their affection for the game hasn’t diminished.

“I love the game,” said John Hauck, a 37-year-old goalie with the Aged Wood Lacrosse Club of Westwood. “I grew up in a house where my father played, and he actually played in the ONELL until he retired to Florida two years ago.

The ONELL spans a wide swath of the greater Boston area, with teams dotting the Route 3/I-93 corridors from Nashua, N.H. to Buzzards Bay, and along the I-95/Route 128 corridor from Providence, R.I. to Portsmouth, N.H. Many of the teams reflect the self-deprecating humor that older athletes embrace, like the Cape Ann Gaspin’ Greenheads, the Salty Old Buzzards of Buzzards Bay, Faded Glory, the ‘Gansett Grays, MetroLacrosse Stale Doughnuts, and the Rusty Bones.

The humor is balanced by a heightened sense of camaraderie and, oftentimes, compassion.

“The lacrosse community as a whole is tight, and many of ONELL players are coaches at youth, high school, or even college level – so they all rally when someone in the community needs it,” said Maddigan.

“The ONELL, as a league and group of players, [is] very philanthropic and benevolent.”

The Womps and other ONELL teams participate in a number of charity events, including fund-raisers to benefit Cure for DMD (Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy) and Cradle For A Cause.

“I often see teams or players supporting one another in a charitable efforts, buying candy bars for a youth fund-raiser, donating for a teammate’s Pan-Mass Challenge effort or the like,” said Maddigan. “I’ve played to benefit another team’s players sick child, [and] watched ONELL embrace and become very active with Shootout for Soldiers, which is a 24-hour series of lacrosse games to support veterans.”

ONELL games begin in mid-June, and run through the summer. There are 36 teams in two age divisions, with more than 500 players. Those hardy souls who play in both the Over-40 league (Tuesdays) and Over-30 league (Thursdays) pay a price, but they pay willingly.

David Williams, 52, who plays both Tuesday and Thursday nights for the Chelsea-based Stale Doughnuts, does not look forward to Friday mornings. “You feel all of the aches and pains.”

Those bumps and bruises are a badge of honor for ONELL diehards.

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There are other challenges, like pre-game rush-hour traffic and the occasional knucklehead who takes the game too seriously. But the lure of the game trumps everything, say players.

“As long as I can still play, why stop?” asked Curt Audin, a 65-year-old emergency room nurse from Sudbury. “It’s fun, keeps you in shape, and gives you a chance to hang out with the guys.

“ONELL has been a great outlet for those of us who played and want to continue to play, but at a level that better matches our athletic ability as we age,” said Audin. “Outside of a few tournaments, this is all we have.”

*For details on the Olde New England Lacrosse League, visit [onell.org](http://onell.org). The [Shootout for Soldiers](#) tournament will be held at UMass Lowell June 23-24. If you have an idea for the Globe’s “On the Move” column, contact correspondent Brion O’Connor at [brionoc@verizon.net](mailto:brionoc@verizon.net). Please allow several weeks advance notice.*

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