



# Giving LACROSSE

A PUBLICATION FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE USA LACROSSE FOUNDATION



## NINA WALKER

### Offers a Unique Perspective

BY PAUL OHANIAN

**Nina Walker (MA, LAT, ATC) readily acknowledges** that her job at the University of North Carolina puts her in very select company...a group of one. By her count, she is the only Black female who currently serves as head athletic trainer for a Division I men's lacrosse team.

"It's a really unique position, but it's been fun for me," said Walker, who has handled this important medical role for the Tar Heels since 2006. "I may be one of the few African American females that my athletes regularly interact with, so having a chance to discuss various topics, talk about current events, and share different perspectives has been really great."

It was, in part, her comfort level in working with mostly male athletes, along with 20 years of field lacrosse experience, that led her to apply for the medical staff of the 2019 U.S. Men's Box Team. Interestingly, she had never seen an indoor game when she submitted her application.

"I always like a challenge and I wanted to do something different," explained Walker, who grew up on Long Island and became a fan of lacrosse at an early age. "To the credit of the players and the coaches, I never felt like an outsider with that team. I quickly became part of the family. It was a really cool experience."

That initial taste of international lacrosse also led Walker to a bigger administrative role with World Lacrosse, where she now

serves as co-chair of its Sports Medicine Committee. Walker and her committee members are working feverishly to make sure that the two world championship events this summer will be as safe as possible for all the participants.

"Lacrosse is still new in a lot of countries and so is lacrosse medicine," Walker said. "There's a lot of policies that we have to implement, from concussion protocols to heat related illness. International medicine can be pretty challenging."

In addition to her roles at UNC and with World Lacrosse, Walker also serves as president of the North Carolina Athletic Trainers' Association (NCATA), is the founder of the Lacrosse Athletic Trainers Society (LATS), and has served as a member of the USA Lacrosse Sports Science and Safety Committee since 2015. She also has research interests that include emergency management, lacrosse helmet removal, and spine boarding.

Despite the demands, Walker continues to have a passion for her work and is quick to offer advice to others, especially Black females, who may wish to follow a similar career path.

"Just try, because you never know," Walker said. "Sometimes, fear gets in our way, but don't let perceptions influence you. Step out of your comfort zone and just go for it. The lacrosse community is outstanding."

> For more on USA Lacrosse's Center for Sport Science, the hub for the study and improvement of health, safety, and performance in lacrosse, go to [usalacrosse.com/center-sport-science](https://usalacrosse.com/center-sport-science)



## JENNY LEVY U.S. WOMEN'S HEAD COACH

These past few years it has been an absolute honor and privilege to serve as the Head Coach of the U.S. Women's National Team. From the very beginning of this journey, the camaraderie and competitiveness of this group has been inspiring. The sport of Women's Lacrosse has grown tremendously in that time, and I'm excited for the impact this team will have in continuing that growth.

It's fitting that this journey concludes in 2022, where we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Title IX and the impact it's had on females in

sport across the country. When you watch our team compete this summer, my hope is that the creativity and passion displayed on the field inspires little girls across the country to pick up the stick and dream big. Our journeys all began the same way...with a stick. Along the way, it is the belief, commitment, and investment from so many to have a childhood dream culminate in gold draped in the red, white, and blue. Thank you for all you've done and continue to do in support of our National Team program.



## NICK MYERS U.S. MEN'S U21 HEAD COACH

I first want to acknowledge how grateful and humbling it is to serve as the Head Coach of the U.S. Men's U21 National Team. I'm a firm believer that you win with people. From the hard-working staff at USA Lacrosse, dedicated coaches and trainers, supportive families and the young men who have formed this brotherhood, the fact is no one wins alone and we're proud to represent the United States this summer.

As we prepare to compete, I want to share a little bit about our team motto, which is The Walk of the Humble Warrior. To us, the humble warrior is entitled to nothing yet grateful for everything. It's a mindset which has guided us through this journey. Understanding the opportunity this team has that others do not. Understanding that success is earned every inch of the way. Understanding our culture and what it means to play the USA way. That is the team you'll see compete this summer. A team that will leave it all on the field, proudly earn gold and most certainly leave it better than they found it.

Earlier I mentioned that you win with people. It is not lost on us, the incredible amount of support and generosity required to provide this world class experience.

Thank you for being with us on this journey and for continuing to support our National Team program.

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## Upcoming National Team Events

DATE	TEAM	EVENT	LOCATION
6/29-7/9	Women's Sr.	World Lacrosse Women's World Championship	Towson, MD
7/8-12	Men's 6s	World Games	Birmingham, AL
7/12-16	Women's 6s	World Games	Birmingham, AL
8/10-20	Men's U21	World Lacrosse Men's U21 World Championship	Limerick, Ireland
10/14-16	Men & Women Sr. NTDP Select Teams	Fall Classic, Brogden Cup	Baltimore, MD

# It Started WITH A STICK



Whether it's making new friends or making the U.S. National Team, everyone's lacrosse journey is different, but it all starts with a stick. We asked U.S. Women's and Men's U21 National Teams players to tell us about their first stick, what it has represented on their journey, or advice they would give their younger self. Here are a few of their responses ...



**MEG DOUTY**  
Fair Haven, New Jersey

That first stick represents everything this sport has given me. It has given me the ability to create so many memories, relationships and experiences that I will never take for granted.



**ALICE MERCER**  
Woodbine, Maryland

My first stick represents a young awkward girl with glasses from Carroll County who dreamed of playing lacrosse at the highest level. It is a reminder of where I came from and how I got started.



**ALLY MASTROIANNI**  
Martinsville, New Jersey

Thinking back to my first stick reminds me of all the fun that exists in the game of lacrosse. I remember running around with my friends laughing as we learned how to cradle and scoop up ground balls, and it instantly brings a smile to my face. Playing at such an elite level, sometimes we forget that lacrosse is a game, and it is meant to be fun, so taking a step back to think about what it represents reminds me of the love, passion and fun lacrosse has provided throughout my journey.



**QUENTIN MATSUI**  
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

I got my first stick going into the summer of 7th grade. My first game I ever played with my first stick (which was a short stick) was as a midfielder. That was the final and only live action that stick got. I'm pretty sure I dropped every ball thrown to me in my first game. I think it is pretty funny to look at the stick and be reminded about that game and how my lacrosse career started.



**LANCE TILLMAN**  
Lone Tree, Colorado

I surrounded myself with other guys who made me want to be better. I really like players who bring me up, make me want to be a better player. It's all about the friendships and relationships and respecting each other.



**ALEX SLUSHER**  
Portland, Oregon

That stick has represented all that lacrosse has given me: a sport that I have become incredibly passionate about, while also allowing me to meet many new friends and open academic doors that may not have been available to me.

For more information on USA Lacrosse's First Stick Program and other grants and scholarships go to [usalacrosse.com/grants-and-scholarships](https://usalacrosse.com/grants-and-scholarships)

# National Teams Development Program

## AMBASSADORS AND ROLE MODELS

Originated in 1988 to honor former Johns Hopkins goalie Mac Brogden, who represented the United States in the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, the Brogden Cup originally pitted post-collegiate club players from the U.S. against Canadian players. In recent years, USA Lacrosse has hosted the competition as part of the Fall Classic featuring top U.S. high school-aged players against teams from Canada and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. In 2021, more than 1,600 players participated in tryouts for the USA Select U16 and U18 boys' and girls' teams, with 88 ultimately selected. U16 players Grace Hasselbeck and Nigel Vital were asked to journal about their experiences:

### GRACE HASSELBECK Nashville, Tennessee

I did not think I could love lacrosse any more than I already did. Then I stepped onto the field in my USA jersey alongside the best of the best, and my passion for the game hit a whole new level. The unique opportunity to represent my country by wearing red, white and blue was a life-changing experience because we were playing for one another and our nation. Running out behind the flag onto Tierney Field before our last game of the weekend was the most surreal experience of my life.

Coming from Nashville, I did not know most of the girls very well going into the weekend. But after the first practice, everyone made awesome efforts to get to know one another, paving the way for friendships that I believe will last a lifetime. Our sideline celebrations were unforgettable. Playing for Team USA made me a better teammate and player. The team's connection off the turf affected our connection on the turf, and we were able to make amazing plays happen as if we had been playing together forever.



**NIGEL VITAL**  
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Playing in the Brogden Cup as member of the USA Select U16 boys' team was one of the most memorable and fulfilling experiences in my relatively young life. As I looked in the stands, I could not help but wonder what my parents, Haitian and St. Lucian immigrants, were thinking about me, their son, representing our country, the USA, in a sporting event.

It was also meaningful to become friends with Justin Brown, my hotel roommate and the other African American player on our team. It is not lost on me and others the significance of us not just representing the USA, but also serving as ambassadors and role models to other young players who look like us. My hope is that 6-year-old boys or girls seeing me and Justin competing and having success at this level believe they can do the same.

- > For more information on the USA Lacrosse National Team Development Program (NTDP), go to [usalacrosse.com/national-team-development-program](https://usalacrosse.com/national-team-development-program)



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