

NCAA's Top Coaches Recruit Inside the Box

Division I coaches Dom Starsia (Virginia), Nick Myers (Ohio State) and Peter Lawrence (Hartford) on what makes a box lacrosse player special.

Written by Michael Kennett for stealthlax.com

"American field players would really help themselves if they were exposed to a steady stream of box experience." – University of Virginia Head Coach, Dom Starsia

Even though field lacrosse purists continue to try, there's no denying the impact of box lacrosse on the landscape of the sport as a whole. Box lacrosse players are consistently being recruited to play at the highest levels of collegiate field lacrosse, and with good reason. Box players bring a different skill set to the field game with superior stick skills, scoring ability and toughness.

It goes all the way back to the Gait brothers, who grew up in the boxes of Victoria, B.C. and went on to field dominance at Syracuse, more recently with players like Garrett Billings (two-time All-American at Virginia) and Kevin Crowley (All-American at Stony Brook), and continues today with Mark Matthews (All-American at Denver) and Kiel Matisz (All-American at Robert Morris).

The bottom line: the brightest coaching minds in collegiate lacrosse value what a box lacrosse player brings to the table, and they are actively searching for more players with box experience. Three such coaches – Virginia's Dom Starsia, Ohio State's Nick Myers and Hartford's Peter Lawrence – gave their thoughts on the influx of box lacrosse talent in the NCAA.

"Box lacrosse is an extremely valuable background for a young player," said Starsia. "We need to incorporate more of the indoor skills in to the field game. It is almost a requirement to have a top player with indoor experience on your roster right now."

Box lacrosse is played in a much smaller space than its field counterpart. That space restriction creates a much faster tempo and requires quicker decision-making. Players in the box game grow more accustomed to handling the ball and scoring in traffic.

"The box game is played at a higher tempo than the field game and in a much tighter space," said Myers. "This sharpens a player's ability to react and you find that players with box experience, in many cases, have superior stick skills than those who have never played the box game before."

When returning to the field, players with box lacrosse experience typically have an advantage with more time and space. Coaches at the highest levels of NCAA Men's Lacrosse have taken notice, and encourage participation in box lacrosse to their players and recruits.

"The more a player is developed before they arrive at college the better," added Myers. "We certainly value any player that has box experience and encourage our men to explore opportunities to play the game they love inside and outside."

Box lacrosse players are being recruited more and more at powerhouse NCAA schools, and one reason for that is their ability to score around the crease and in traffic.

“The hardest thing to do in the field game is to score goals and good indoor players have a special knack for it,” said Starsia, who has had numerous Canadian box lacrosse players on his National Championship-caliber teams in past years, including one of the NLL’s premiere scorers in the Toronto Rock’s Garrett Billings. “[Box lacrosse players] have special skills around the goal and in tight spaces. Their skills are so special that we should be looking closely at the box method of shooting and scoring.”

The benefits of a box lacrosse background aren’t only showing themselves on the offensive end either.

“What has changed recently is that box players have begun to excel at the defensive end of the field as well,” added Starsia. “It used to be that you looked primarily for offensive box players. Now, a good, physical athlete with a box background can develop in to a special defensive player. They tend to be more aggressive checking, are very good at picking the ball up off the ground and think creatively in the transition game.”

If you’ve played any lacrosse, box or field, you are also aware of the importance of being a “smart lacrosse player” (every player at all levels has heard those words from a coach, just ask Stealth Head Coach Chris Hall).

“One of the biggest benefits of playing box for a young lacrosse player is in the development of lacrosse IQ,” said University of Hartford Head Men’s Lacrosse Coach Peter Lawrence. “Because everyone plays with a short stick [in box lacrosse], you have to focus on being a complete lacrosse player versus specializing as an attackman or d-man. That is how your IQ grows and skills improve.”

The proof is out there. These are the thoughts of just three coaches at the highest level of collegiate lacrosse, but there are many more examples of college programs with the same ideology throughout the NCAA Division I, II and III levels.

The Washington Stealth started the Stealth Lacrosse Academy in the fall of 2010 to provide local lacrosse players with the opportunity to learn those box lacrosse skills from some of the world’s most talented players. Since then, hundreds of local athletes have honed their skills in the box and seen the benefits on the field.

There are still plenty of opportunities to take your game to the next level with the Stealth Lacrosse Academy this summer and fall. There are still a limited number of spaces available for the three-day training camp on August 27-29 at the Comcast Arena. The Fall Academy will be held in two locations, Bellingham and Woodinville, starting on September 8 and continuing throughout the fall. All Stealth Lacrosse Academy training camps are run by Stealth All-Pro forward Lewis Ratcliff and his team of world-class coaches.

For more information on the Stealth Lacrosse Academy, visit www.stealthlax.com.