

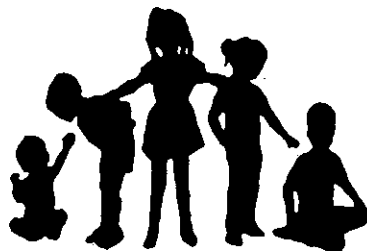
**2007 Price Child Health and Welfare Journalism Award**

**Special Interest Award**

Daniel Heimpel

"Foreign Turf"

*a series of articles appearing in Tu Ciudad Magazine and  
InsideLacrosse.com on how a lacrosse team in South Los Angeles is  
offering high school students a positive alternative to gangs and drugs*



Los Angeles  
**Daily Journal**

915 East First Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 • (213) 229-5300 • (213) 680-3682

July 12, 2007

Christina Falcone  
Children's Advocacy Institute  
University of San Diego School of Law  
5998 Alcala Park  
San Diego, CA 92110

Dear Ms. Falcone,

I feel strange being my own advocate, but as a freelancer I have to be.

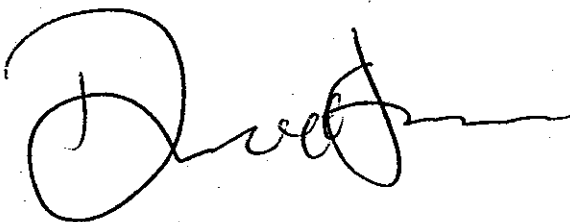
I spent six months coaching and reporting on a lacrosse team in South Los Angeles. I found a story that transcended the spot coverage so often associated with inner city LA. A story with real characters; kids trying to win on a sports team in a neighborhood rife with gangs, fast food and few good role models.

I am sending a copy of the story I wrote for *Tu Ciudad Magazine*, a story that appeared in *Inside Lacrosse Magazine* as well as a series of columns I wrote for *Inside Lacrosse Magazine's* website.

I hope you will consider my work.

Thank You.

Sincerely,



Daniel Heimpel

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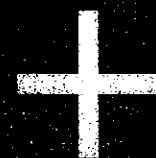
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## SPORTS

# Foreign Turf

A high school in South L.A. is home to an unlikely lacrosse team, but the players—and their coach—persevere

**WITH DUSK APPROACHING**, a lacrosse team huddles around its coach. The high schoolers—mostly Latino, a few black—are tired. They're ready for their walk or bus ride home through the rutted streets surrounding Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles. But head coach Sean McKeon has no such ideas.

"We are not going to win one game if you don't put in the work," barks McKeon, 31, who played lacrosse in college. The players look down. The coach's voice is constantly hoarse from yelling in frustration at his players. It's been four years since he decided to start a lacrosse team at Manual Arts after talking to a teacher there who thought it would be good for the school. It's the first, and only, lacrosse team in South L.A. "It's been four years fighting the distractions of the neighborhood—gangs and drugs," McKeon says later. "It's been four years trying to build discipline among students, many of whom don't have father figures. It's been four years, with only one win."

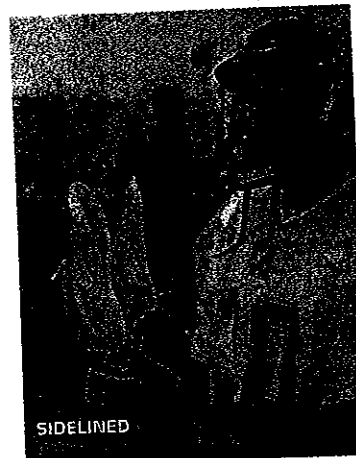
Still, he perseveres. The next day is the first scrimmage of the new season. A chartered bus carrying a team from Windward High School in Mar Vista pulls up. Glancing at their opponents, captain Rogelio Perez says, "We got brown pride. They don't want none of that."

But the Manual Arts Toilers' pride is no match for the opposing team's skill. They can't score a goal. Two players, team star Ron Rodney and his brother, Marvin, are no-shows.

But they show up for the next practice. They had missed the scrimmage to spend the day working for their father, earning money to help repay McKeon for a lacrosse camp he had signed them up for, but which they didn't attend.

McKeon's discipline and the team's near inability to win have pushed some players away. But for the others, McKeon and Manual's anomalous lacrosse team have become an important part of their lives.

"I guess I joined to have something to do," says Christopher Lango as practice winds down one day. When he was 12 his mother died. A year later he was made a ward of the state and he still lives in a group home. Now he has this unfamiliar but enjoyable sport, a group of peers, and a coach who supports and disciplines him. He has a team—one that fights for its players. A team looking for something to celebrate. It happens April 24—a win. Their final season record: one victory and 10 losses. —DANIEL HEIMPEL



NIKE AND THE IROQUOIS NATIONALS  
LACROSSE IN SOUTH CENTRAL

INSIDE

# LACROSSE

Duke Lacrosse Player Tony McDevitt  
"Last  
Scream"

SE  
THE  
LACROSSE

PLUS:  
Underrated  
Players  
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Mike Remy  
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# A Better Way

HAS BROUGHT LACROSSE, AND HOPE, TO ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOODS:

By Daniel Heimpel

Photos by Dirk Dewachter

as the

cross the neighborhood

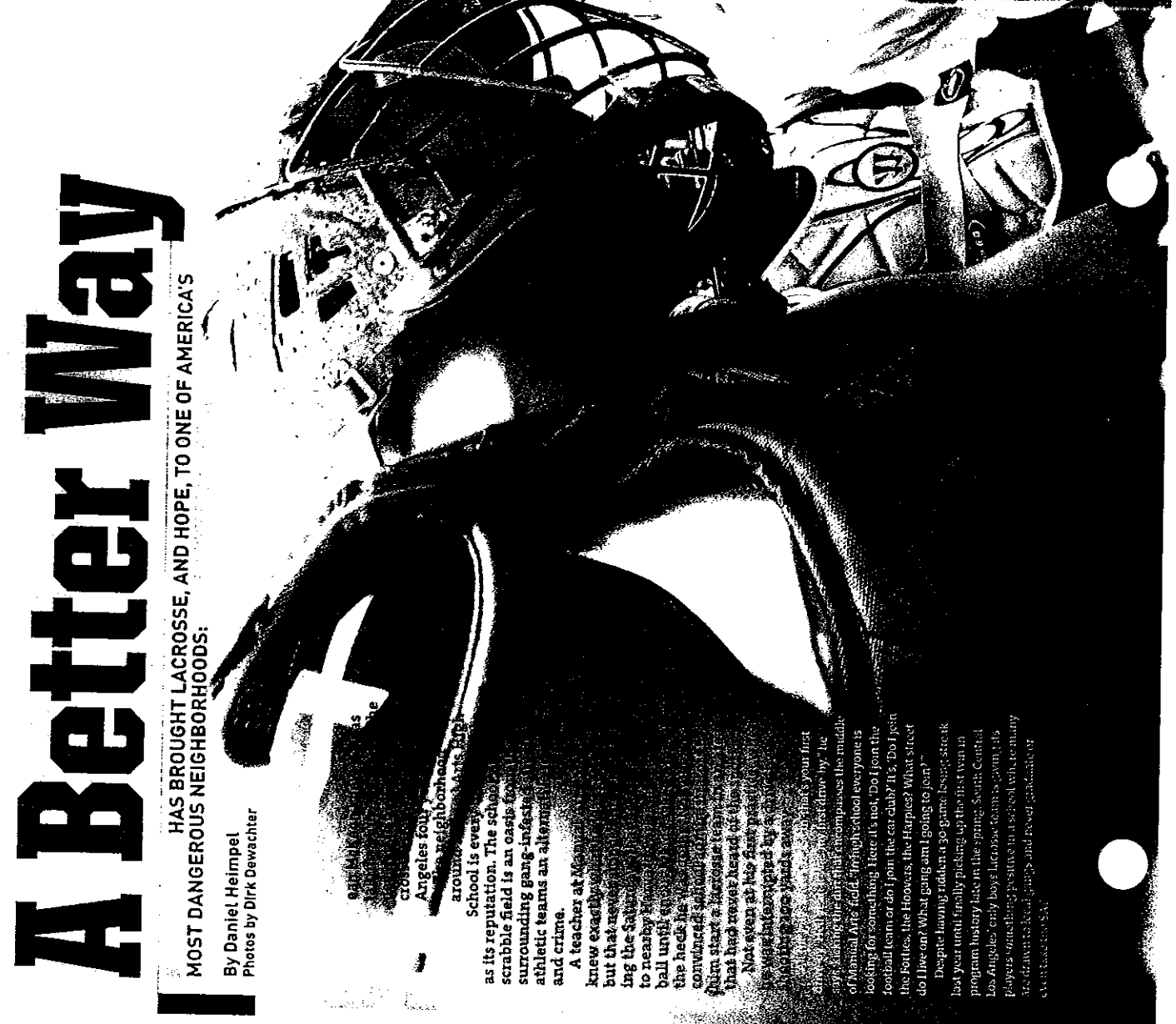
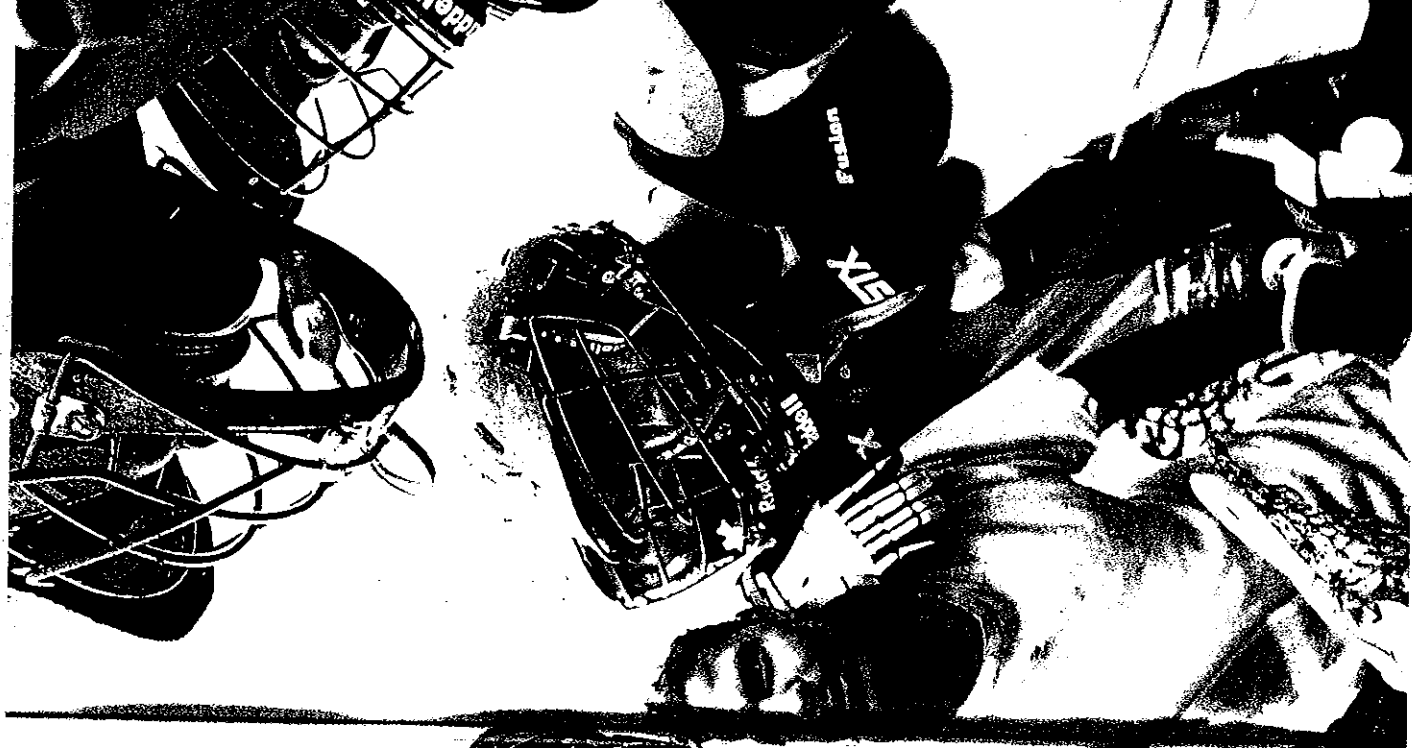
School is every-  
as its reputation. The school's  
scrabble field is an oasis from  
surrounding gang-infested  
athletic teams an alternative  
and crime.

A teacher at Man-  
knew exactly  
but that never  
ing the safety  
to nearby  
ball until  
the heck he  
convicted school  
them start a lacrosse team  
that had never heard of the  
Not even at his first practice  
It was interrupted by a  
the two yards away

What's your first  
aimed at the "my first time by" he  
saying, making the air that encompasses the middle  
of Manual Arts' field. In high school everyone is  
looking for something. Here it's not, "Do I join the  
football team or do I join the car club? It's, "Do I join  
the Faties, the Hoovers, the Harpess? What street  
do I live on? What gang am I going to join?"

Despite having ridden a 30-game losing streak  
last year until finally picking up the first win in  
program history late in the spring, South Central  
Los Angeles' only boys lacrosse team is going. Its  
players are mostly positive in a school where many  
are drawn to local gangs and never graduate or

© 1994 TIME INC.



Just under 73% of Manual Arts' senior class from 2006 graduated, according to Cynthia Lim, school information director for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Their SAT scores are 192 points lower than the rest of the school district's average (901), and just 34.7% of Manual Arts students took the test, 13.1% lower than the rest of the district.

There are plenty of dangerous distractions — and lacrosse's notoriety in this community, like most inner-city areas, remains limited — but McKee's efforts have already helped a host of young students.

"Gangs have a draw," says assistant principal Miranda Raof. "But lacrosse is a way to draw them to other things. They see some positive things and that can trigger them to be more motivated. These kids, under Sean's instruction, none will drop out."

"This is a small effort that has turned into something great."

**AS THE 30-YEAR-OLD MCKEE** shouts at his players to hustle during an early spring practice, a stout Latino man with a 40-ounce bottle of golden liquid mocks them with a "Yeah guys, hustle!" jeer from across the street.

Unfortunately, the problems faced by Manual Arts' students (the school is 81% Hispanic and 18% African-American) are worse than simple heckling from neighborhood hoodlums. Whether they're actual violent "gang-bangers" or just part of "tagging cliques" that deal mostly in graffiti, students have a lot of tricky diversions to negotiate.

Take a player named "Chucky" (McKee wants his real name kept secret so he doesn't get assaulted). Chucky was in a gang, but he got beat up fairly badly and McKee made him quit.

"I told him it was either the crew or the lacrosse team; he chose us," McKee says. "Everyone on the team knows gang members, and they're welcome to join; they just have to choose us or the gang."

A group of players sits in the grass listening as McKee tells this story. "Some guys have shanks," says a freshman named Daniel, a new Manual Arts' recruit.

Many students carry guns, but never on campus because, as Carlos "Supersize" Lopez says, "The school has random [gun] checks."

Senior Ron Rodney, the team's unabashed star, says he saw a group of hoodlums blast a volley of gunshots at a teammate after football practice one day. And while no one was hit, the shooting was 10 feet from where Rodney stands, yet he discusses it without fear.

For Supersize, who goes about 5-9, 300 lbs., it was two blocks up the street in front of his house where he saw the aftermath of a shotgun blast.

**"Here it's not, 'Do I join the football team or do I join the car club?'**  
**It's, 'DO I JOIN THE FORTIES, THE HOOVERS, THE HARPIES?'**  
**What street do I live on? WHAT GANG AM I GOING TO JOIN?'"**

**—Sean McKee**



(Above) Joseph Minero runs sprints during a Manual Arts practice. (Right) Coach McKee breaks down a fastbreak play for his players while assistant Robert Diaz looks on. (Lower right) Chris Lango flexes an intimidating pose with his stick.



"The dude's leg was on the floor man," he says.

This is where the Hoovers, Street Villains, Rollin 40's, the Dark Side 40's and other gangs and cliques operate. "I'd never die for some letters," Supersize says, incessantly twirling his lacrosse stick. "That s--- is stupid. I'll die for something honorable."

"Like what?" Rodney asks.

"Like dying for my country," Supersize says. He's joking, maybe, or he's acting like he's joking. But somewhere inside he's serious. "I'd die for my family," he adds.

It might be hard to believe, but this is South Central.

#### IT ISN'T SO MUCH UNFAMILIARITY WITH

LACROSSE that limits McKee, but more its perception around Manual Arts.

"They think it's a bitch's game," says Jairo Tovar of his non-enlightened Manual Arts classmates. The 19-year-old graduated in 2005, and while he wants to continue to play, he doesn't have the money to pay for clinics. Instead he comes out to practice, just to run with the team — and not to sit on the stoop

Manual Arts players sprint across the school's muddy field after a hard rain. Though the team sometimes struggles in players, and with scary distractions, they currently on the team are enthusiastic about lacrosse.



"Gangs have a draw, but lacrosse is a way to draw them to other things. **THEY SEE SOME POSITIVE THINGS** and that can trigger them to be more motivated."  
-Miranda Raoof

across the street with a blunt in his fingers. Tovar didn't know what lacrosse was when he first stepped on the field last spring for the Tollers. But he quickly figured it out and became the team's leading scorer in 2006. "I like the hitting," he says. "That's the best part."

Last fall, with CIF status looming, McKeon tried recruiting more players out of Manual Arts' physical education classes. He got five signed up, but by the time this spring season started, his fall recruiting only yielded two players.

McKeon's used to the struggle, though. After bouncing through six undergraduate programs and playing lacrosse at the University of Arizona along the way, he came to Los Angeles to find work in the music industry. Disillusioned during four years of writing stages for shows, he decided to give back to the community and took his wife Amy's advice to start teaching in the inner city.

Starting out at Manual Arts, McKeon soon fell back on his background playing lacrosse in high school in suburban Chicago. He knew what the sport had done for his life and imagined what it could do for the kids he saw every day.

"I was burnt out and going through a quarter-life crisis," he says. "I remembered what had inspired me most had been coaching my old high school team, so I decided to start an inner-city league in L.A."

Four years later he's having that effect on a host of young athletes.

"A lot of these kids don't have father figures," says his wife, Amy McKeon. "They know that he really loves them. And they love him too. You always hear them saying, 'We love you Sean, we love you.'"

Rodney and McKeon have developed a unique bond, as coach tries to inspire player to use lacrosse as a means for something better.

"I want to go to college and play lacrosse," Rodney says, still sweating from practice's last set of sprints on an early spring day. While Rodney says he has maintained a C average, he's a senior and he hasn't applied to any colleges.

It looks like McKeon's dream of sending Rodney off to be Manual Arts' first college lacrosse player is in danger of going unrealized. Still, progress is progress.

"At least he's not such a dumb ass this year," McKeon says. "He's finally become responsible. But I tried to set him up with this [lacrosse] clinic. I call him up in the evening and asked if he liked it and he's like, 'Aw I didn't go.' I asked him why and he gave me some crap about sleeping in and the bus being late."

Despite the lethargy of these teenagers, lacrosse and McKeon have affected some change. Rodney says he goes to class more often now, which is all part of the discipline McKeon has been handing

down. If the kids are late to practice, they're quarter in that week's game; two times in half three times, they can forget about the field.

He wants to enforce a 2.5 GPA minimum he did he couldn't field a team. Instead to the 2.0 required of all LAUSD sports.

Running the team as a club costs \$2,000 according to McKeon, who has poured of \$2,000 of his own money during the seasons. The rest of the money comes from donations and a big fundraising banquet Raoof helped organize. Recent 501 C3 state non-profit LAX in LA organization will money and fundraising a possibility. As team now CIF-sanctioned, the school will write Lacrosse on its budget.

But even with funding and official status all-minority lacrosse team remains an an in U.S. Lacrosse's BRIDGE program, which is introducing the game to non-traditional seen success in places like San Francisco for life) and Boston (METRO Lacrosse), by main areas that remain untouched from growth are inner cities.

Last November, Kyle Harrison and a group of other pro lacrosse players did a clinic at Manual Arts to help solve this problem. Harrison, a 2005 All-American and who won the 2005 Trophy, is one of the best, most exciting the game. If anyone can have an impact more young African-American athletes to sport, it's him.

Tovar, the Manual Arts graduate, was a clinic, and not only did he know who Harrison knows how good he is. "Hell yeah, I saw him," he says. "He's raw."

Unfortunately, McKeon could only have players that afternoon. His white sneakers in mud thanks to some overzealous water Manual Arts field. Harrison surveys the offer a poignant take.

"I love this," he says. "I just wish more shown up." ■

Daniel Haimpel was so taken with the McKeon story that he signed on as a volunteer coach for the 2007 season. To read more on Toller, read his blog on [insidelacrosse.com](http://insidelacrosse.com) check out McKeon's [www.laxiaia.org](http://www.laxiaia.org) site.

# INSIDE LACROSSE

## Spirit of the Toilers: Building a program in Los Angeles

December 14, 2006

Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*

There is now a varsity lacrosse team in South Central Los Angeles. Three years ago, Sean McKeon came to Manual Arts High School and built a program.

Their school consistently ranks low in the Los Angeles Unified School District in terms of graduation rates and exit exam scores.



Photo courtesy Sean McKeon

Manual Arts is no different than any other inner city high school, rife with problems but also full of hope.

This fall I joined the Manual Arts Toilers as an assistant coach. They won their first game, after 30-some losses, at the end of last season. I'm here to help keep that streak alive.

IN THE LONG SHADOW of the Los Angeles Coliseum's faded gold lies Manual Arts High School. A square block of fences, creaking buildings and one gloriously brown, muddy and fully-functional field compose the campus. In the confines of this clumsy infrastructure, 3,000 students yell, low-five, curse and appraise each other. Teachers hold keys to wet-floored faculty bathrooms and gates that keep teenage traffic in check.

I'm here for the second day, trying to help Sean McKeon coach a lacrosse team. White-toothed and freshly married, Sean spends his day in a shack adjacent to the track and pitch of rutted grass. There he teaches video production to class after class of students. They etch silly monikers into the two dozen new Macintosh computers he petitioned the state for.

But the day of teaching is done, there is the field and the clouds are mixing with coming night.

When I first met the team last year, they were two games from the close of their third season. Optimism wasn't high.

"We've been riding a three-year losing streak," Sean said.

I went to a game, and saw them lose. But the next week I got an email from Sean. The Toilers had won their first game.

Today, the team looks far from a consecutive win. Only three players have shown up for practice.

But Sean and I run them through line drills and groundballs.

"I've got a devious way to mix fun with sprints," Sean says.

He tells Edwin, Rogilio and Eduardo that they have eight shots. Every shot counts as a sprint. If they hit the gloves, two sticks and helmet hung from the time-wheedled net they can knock off a sprint.

Eduardo and Edwin suffer through the exercise, only hitting the targets once and twice, respectively. Rogelio hits four times. He only owes us four sprints.

I line up with all three guys. Sean says go, and we go. I'm surprised at Eduardo's pace. Once we've covered 50 yards, we line up again. Rogelio, massive and fast in his helmet and pads, speeds next to me for the second sprint.

"My stomach hurts," Edwin says after our third lap, his long black hair spilling from the back of his helmet. The air is cool and humid; the life

on the turf is fresh in our nostrils.

We finish the fourth sprint and Rogelio lines up.

"You only have to do four," I say.

"I'll just keep on going," he says.

We line up. Eduardo, small and uneasy with his stick, overtakes me.

Fifty yards later, Eduardo has served his six sprints. Rogelio is still there.

"Come on Eduardo," I say and all four of us run to Sean. The day is done. We pull in for a 'Manual' on three.

"One... two... three..." Edwin yells, "Manual," we scream into the darkening sky.

I walk off the field and into my car. As I pull past the high school and the fast food marts (the real L.A.), I pass the Coliseum. I'm thinking about Rogelio. How on a day in fall when only three players are showing up for practice, he ran three extra sprints just because it was the right thing to do.

I can't wait for the next practice.

*For information on sponsoring or contributing to the Manual Arts program, contact Daniel at [dheimpel@gmail.com](mailto:dheimpel@gmail.com).*

## The Shadow and The Thesaurus

December 27, 2006

Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*

"Why do they call you Shadow?" I ask one of the two Marvin's on the Manual Arts High School varsity boys' lacrosse team. The other one's nickname is The Hurricane.

"Because, I'm the darkest player on the team," Marvin says with a big smile. He's a junior, and he has played before, unlike most of the kids who have come out today. His stick skills are better, he's in shape and he is confident, always chuckling.

"They should have called you Midnight," says Rogelio, one of the Toilers' captains.

On any team, there are always nicknames. They're an expression of a special bond. The more cohesive a group of friends or a team, the more they will call each other by pseudonyms, and Manual Arts is no different. Between Sean, the kids and myself it will be incredible if anyone is spared some altered appellation by the end of the season.

Sean launches a ball in the air. It's the end of practice at Epic Field, a



Photo: Sean McKeon

wide expanse of grassless dirt in front of the L.A. Coliseum's swim facility. There was a soccer tournament at Manual Arts Field, the most popular sport in South Central L.A., so we are playing fireball, wherein Sean launches the ball into the sun and everyone else charges at it. The sun is low, the ball barely visible in the darkening sky. Rogelio leads the charge; the 10 other players follow, kicking up high plumes of smoky, orange dust.

"Ahhhh ... Roget's Thesaurus got it," Sean yells as Rogelio dips low and scoops up the ball.

Jonathan, a heavyset freshman, pushes through the dirt. He's chasing the ball with earnest even though practice didn't start out well for him. Sean was leading the team through a light workout, making them hop, two feet together, over an imaginary line drawn in the dirt.

"Hey coach," Jonathan says. I call him Joseppi because I mistook him for another player named Joseph the first day he showed up.

"What's up Joseppi?"

"I've got asthma. Can I stop?"

I look at him. "Of course you can stop," I say in a raised voice. My voice grows louder. "All of you can stop whenever you want."

"A lot of you have never been pushed before physically," Sean adds. The team has stopped completely. Among the Burger Kings and Taco Bells, many of the players on the team, many of the students at Manual Arts, many of L.A.'s inner city youths, are heavyset. They have simply never exerted themselves before.

Given the option, Joseppi stalks to the side of the dirt and looks on. He's shuddering slightly, so I walk up to him. I thought he was just sweating into his eyes but I notice that he's crying. "Hey Joseppi, just come back in when you feel better. And don't worry, I wouldn't yell if I didn't see any potential in you."

Joseppi joins the next exercise.

And back during the game of fireball he isn't one of the last to touch the ball. He jogs off to the side. "How do you feel?" I ask.

"Tired."

"Yeah, but you finished practice."

"Yeah, I feel proud of that."

The game of fireball ends, we all huddle in and yell out "Manual" on three. We start walking back to the high school, across the heavy rush hour traffic on the confluence of Vermont and King Streets' eight lanes of traffic. There is a taco stand and some fast food joints. Dozens of white headlights hit us as we cross the crosswalk, our sticks propped over our shoulders.

"Coach, I'm not gonna be at practice on Saturday," says Stephen, who the rest of the team calls Chucky because he has a big round face and dyed-red hair, like the doll gone mad in the popular horror series. "I gotta go visit my cousin in jail," he says. Stephen knows he doesn't have the grades to play for the team this upcoming season. He knows there's no chance, but he shows up for practice anyway.

That Saturday, Stephen "Chucky," Rogelio "Thesaurus," Marvin "The Shadow" and Jonathan "Joseppi," all show up. And with Sean and I filling in, we muster enough for six-on-six.

*For information on sponsoring or contributing to the Manual Arts program, contact Daniel at [dheimpel@gmail.com](mailto:dheimpel@gmail.com).*

# INSIDE LACROSSE

## Much more than a mama's boy

January 26, 2007

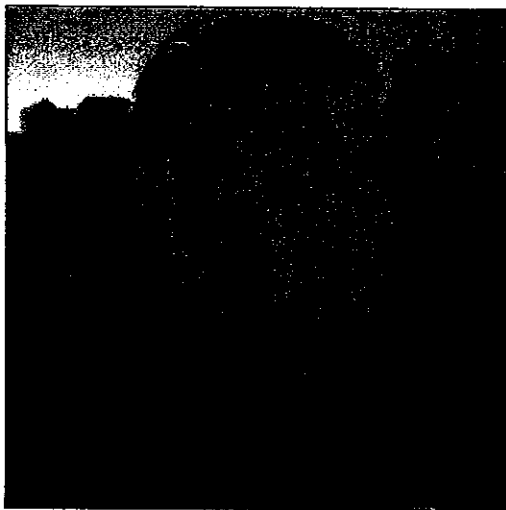
Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*

At 19, one Manual Arts Lacrosse alumnus lives for his mother.

He's like his own mother.

Gabriel, 19, wakes up at eight, makes breakfast for himself and his mom. He washes the dishes. He does chores. He also gives her medicine every six hours. He walks her to the living room when she wants to get out of bed. He bathes her.



"All I did after school was go to practice. I liked practice," said Gabriel. "...It distracted me from life for awhile, just being happy; it gets you away from the sadness in life."

His mom, Maria, has cirrhosis of the liver, the seventh-leading cause of death by disease in America, according to the American Cancer Society.

Gabriel has black hair and an easy smile. He used to play midfield for Manual Arts until he graduated in 2005. For him, the lacrosse field was a distraction from the worsening situation at home.

I call his home on a Sunday and ask what his mom was like in his playing days. Even though he graduated two years ago, Gabriel still makes it out for practice when he can. "Back then she was bad but she wasn't that bad," he says. Like most days, Gabriel, the youngest of four siblings, is at home watching over his mom.

"All I did after school was go to practice. I liked practice. It took me away from school and everything. It distracted me from life for awhile, just being happy; it gets you away from the sadness in life."

When I first met Gabriel he was smiling. He looked happy, confident. We were standing around the Manual Arts parking lot, waiting to go for a run as part of our fallball training. We left the purple bars and high concrete walls of Manual Arts for the Mercedes Benzes and manicured lawns of USC. We ran to the track but couldn't get on. The track coach yelled us off. So we ran the perimeter of the school: to the right all the wealth of 33,000 mostly well-healed brats and to the left the sprawl of Los Angeles.

After we returned to Manual Arts, I walked with Gabriel to the weight room, a shed-like appendage to a larger building that looks more prison yard than high school. He talked about his mother's symptoms: "She has cirrhosis and also chronic diabetes, which gives her anemia." To combat the illness, he gives her a mixed shot of nine different pills, but she still can become listless. "Sometimes, even when I give her the medicine, she gets in an altered mental state." Maria stops responding fully, answers questions with affirmatives or negatives.

Every other day Gabriel helps his mom take a shower. He goes to the bathroom and sets up her shower stool, then walks his mother from her bed. Once she's on the stool and in the shower, Gabriel goes to his room. "It's real close and I keep the door open so I can hear her," he explains. When she yells, he comes in and gets her.

Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver and can be caused by excessive drinking, cystic fibrosis and obesity, among a long list of other causes. Gabriel says he doesn't know why it happened to his mom. But whatever cause, cirrhosis can be fatal. The liver produces bile for food digestion, protein for blood and cleans blood of toxins.

"Her skin is a lot more sensitive too," he says. "She always is saying that her clothes are rough on her skin: things we would think is normal. Her skin is just more sensitive than you and I."

While symptoms can be stymied through medication, cirrhosis cannot be cured, so people like Maria have to wait on long lists for liver transplants. The national average for survival is 86-87 percent, according to Duke University.

She was put on the UCLA Medical Center's list six months ago. In Gabriel's routine, the trip from urban Manual to the Westside is like a break. "I like going to UCLA. I like seeing different environments of Los Angeles."

But more than a different environment, Gabriel's trips to UCLA have opened his eyes to the possibility of a future in medicine. Already, at 19, you can call him a medical worker. In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), a subdivision of the California Department of Social Services, pays Gabriel about \$9 an hour to take care of his mother. But the experience — as a 19-year old when the frat boys are popping their collars at USC — has given Gabriel a goal. He wants to get certified as an EMT and then become a paramedic.

"Somebody passes out when you're at a restaurant, normal people don't know what to do, but I will," he says soberly, no boasting. "It will be really intense; you never know when you're gonna get that call."

After practice ended the first day, I met Gabriel and walked out of the weight room with him. I was so impressed by his calm and maturity.

"Do you get to go out much?" I asked.

"Not really," he says. "If somebody is there with my mom, but she wants me to stick around most of the time. If I leave she gets stressed and I know she could get sicker, so I stay in as much as I can." He shook his head and laughed. On New Year's Eve he had to beg to stay out past midnight.

"Can you make it to practice tomorrow?" I asked.

"If somebody can take care of my mom."

As we neared the equipment shed, where my car was parked, I asked Gabriel if I could write a story about him.

"Why?"

"Because it's rare to see somebody do so much for their mother," I said.

He didn't even realize it was a big deal.

*For information on sponsoring or contributing to the Manual Arts program, contact Daniel at [dheimpel@gmail.com](mailto:dheimpel@gmail.com).*



## The first supper

February 13, 2007

Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*

They didn't think I'd come through.

"You really gonna take us out to dinner?" Tony, a big, strong kid who was new to lacrosse, said.

Sean was sick, so I handled practice. I ran them through USC. The old loop.

Ernesto, a freshman, ran with me. When we ran stadiums the day before, he was the fastest. He hadn't been wearing his cleats; instead he ran in his socks.

"Without my shoes I felt so light," he said as he ran next to me. The exhaust from a thousand cars filled our nostrils, but we were way ahead, the line of nine players strung behind.

When we got to the rugged turf of the field in front of the Olympic swimming pool, Ernesto and I continued. We ran laps, past the middle-aged Latino men playing soccer, past the bums drinking booze and yelling. We ran until the others showed up.

It took a long time and many laps before Daniel and Randy made it. Daniel, a freshman, is heavy and Randy (a junior and a veteran player) stayed with him, pushing him on. The scene was unforgettable, Randy with his gelled black pompadour of hair pushing Daniel along. Literally pushing him. Daniel fighting forward with a red face. But somehow behind the rubicund cheeks and obvious exhaustion, there was a want to continue. It made me happy.

"I pushed him from Jefferson," Randy said as Daniel sloughed off to

the bathroom in the Olympic pool facility (the Epicc Center). If what Randy said was true, which it was, he had pushed Daniel for at least a mile.

Then they ran sprints, and I yelled at them to do bear crawls and crab walks and other evil things. I made them do foster-hoppies (frog hops in Icelandic), one of the preferred methods of punishments my trainers used on me while I prepared for an ill- advised match with the Icelandic heavyweight champion this summer. Daniel had a red face.

When it was done Daniel asked me if we had to run back. No.

We walked the three blocks to the Manual Arts campus. Tony, all bravado, saw a girl drinking something red from a styrofoam cup. He prodded her and she gave him a sip.

"You're gonna hook me up with a sip aren't you?" Daniel asked. All the guys looked at each other and busted up. Daniel didn't get the sip, but he earned some respect.

After practice Sean and I hustled the guys into our two cars. My station wagon was stuffed; two kids in the trunk. But we all fit, and headed north towards Koreatown; away from the heavily Latino-populated part of L.A., and even farther from the heavily-African American part.

"Isn't it weird how segregated this town is?" I asked Tony, who sat in the passenger seat.

It was archaic how they chose their seats. Tony – the strongest, loudest, and most formidable – was assured shotgun. The two smallest, Joseph and Marvin, who Tony called "the midgets", were in the way back. The back row was filled by bigger Daniel, the other Tony, a longhaired reformed gang member, and Ernesto, who through his hummingbird speed had earned some level of kudos.

"Not really," Tony said. "People are close-minded. They just want to stay with their own kind. But you know... I'm interested in getting to know other races," he said smiling.

"You mean like going to eat at a Korean restaurant right now."

"I was thinking of something else," he said smiling widely.

The restaurant wasn't expecting us. It was a buffet and we cooked it on grills set into the middle of the tables. This was the first time any of the kids had Korean BBQ.

Daniel sat himself down at the head of the table. While all the other

kids fought to cook the beef, pork, pig belly, cow tongue and chicken, he happily sat. When a piece of meat was adequately cooked he would quickly grab it and munch.

"Daniel is like the godfather up there at the head of the table," I said. Daniel smiled. He liked that.

Rogelio, the Fall Ball captain and an amazingly dedicated senior, Erwin, with a long black ponytail, and Randy, with his immobile pompadour, downed their meat with rice. One bowl, two bowls, three bowls for each of them.

"Hey, we're Latino," Rogelio said.

When the meal was done we piled into our respective cars. I drove next to Sean. The kids in his car rolled down their windows - the kids in mine rolled down theirs. They yelled dirty things at each other like they owned the world. Sean smiled in the driver's seat, his face lit by the yellow of street lamps and the white of headlights in opposing traffic.

Back at Manual, the kids grabbed their things from Sean's room - he's also a teacher. I offered rides.

"I'll pay your gas money if you give me a ride," Daniel - the Godfather - said.

He and five others piled in. I dropped off Tony with the bravado first. They talked amongst each other figuring out the best route.

"I live down on Century," Daniel said.

"Damn, that's in the hood," Tony with the long hair said. Then I dropped him off.

I drifted farther South, dropping off Ron (the star) and his little brother Marvin at 62nd street. That's 60 blocks below Wilshire - Koreatown. The streets were dark. There were few people on the dimly lit sidewalks.

Now it was only Daniel and I, driving the last 40 blocks to Century Boulevard, otherwise known as 100th street. There was no-one, just barred windows and high fences.

"Nothing ever happened to me yet down here," Daniel said.

"But you feel like something bad is about to happen sometimes?"

"All the time," he said in a low tone. Hours before the Godfather flirting with a girl, poaching the meat. Now he was subdued. "I kinda hide when I come home after dark."

We drove down a big wide street. "Take a right here," Daniel said. My headlights found two young men talking oblivious as a three-year old girl hung on a stop sign pole near the big wide street. "We had to put some pillars up and keep the door locked," Daniel said.

"I'll wait for you till you get in."

"You don't have to. Well, you can if you want." Daniel extended his hand to mine. Then he grabbed his keys and stepped onto the sidewalk. I watched him open the gate and shut it. I watched him walk to the door, and then I drove off.

My headlights found the big wide street and I followed it to the bigger wider highway. And just like that I was out, steaming away from that place. Los Angeles can be a mean; thank God it has such good people.

*For information on sponsoring or contributing to the Manual Arts program, contact Daniel at [dheimpel@gmail.com](mailto:dheimpel@gmail.com).*

# INSIDE LACROSSE

## What motivates you?

February 28, 2007

Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*



In all histories there is a turning point. In war, there is a decisive moment when one army starts consistently losing, the other consistently winning. In a boxing match it's a punch. On the lacrosse field it can be a series of goals, a great save or something transcendent, a moment when a team becomes a team.

The air is cool but the fire is hot. We are sitting in a circle around it, having taken out the seats to the rental van to sit on. Sean is across from me, flanked by the boys, who he thinks of "like 20 little brothers." It's only 9:30, but it feels late. We've been enjoying the Angeles National Forest - hiking up hills, playing grueling games of capture the stick - but now we are calm and seated.

"Come on Sean, why don't we talk about what motivates us," Ron (Superstar) says. Later, as I try to sleep in a tent adjacent, I'll hear Ron telling his tentmates how he likes to just listen to people.

Ron's motivation is being the best. Right now he is, but there are boys on his tail.

Jesus, an achiever on the path to USC through a program that requires a 3.5 GPA, talks about his little brothers, talks about being motivated to be the first kid in his family to go to college.

"I want to get in good shape," Daniel (the Godfather) says. He is earnest, his round face yellow in the firelight. Earlier in the day we talked about his weight. I talked about mine, how I had been chubby before lacrosse, how lacrosse could change his life physically and therefore mentally. The next day he would be stuck on a seemingly interminable walk with Sean and I; the rest of the team way ahead, as we climbed a switchback-heavy path up from a low running river.



He would say, "I wish I had a helicopter, my stomach hurts, my legs hurt, I feel dizzy, I'm going to throw up." I'd try and joke with him. He'd say: "I don't even want to talk." But when it was all over, and the big van near again, I would ask how you feel, and he would say, "I feel proud."

Rogelio, the team's most devoted player, says it's his desire to get in shape too. "All you guys too," he says looking around at the rest of the team.

"I do it for you guys," Sean says. Then, like the newlywed he is: "I do it for my wife. So I can provide for her, so she can proud of me." That's not my motivation, but it's touching to hear.

"Three years ago I saw an amazing thing," Marvin, Ron's little brother, says. "I saw Ron pass the ball to himself from across the field and score."

That was during Manual Arts' first season. Ron had thrown the ball from the box on the defensive side. The intended target dropped the ball, but Ron kept on coming and picked the ball up, shot and scored. "I'm motivated to be as good as Ron."

"He's already better than me," Ron says back.

"Until I was 11, I lived with my auntie," Marvin (The Shadow – a 7th grader who sticks around because he loves lacrosse) says. At 12, he is built like a little man. With a stick he's good, in a few years he'll be amazing.

"There were gangs everywhere. My cousins said it was fun to join for a second and then it was lame. I told myself I'd never join a gang." He smiles. "I feel like a different person when I play, that's why I call myself the Shadow. My dad also told me that I was better than everyone and that's the way I feel. That's why I'm better than even Ron."

"My motivation is my brother," Mini-G says. He's sitting at the edge of the seat next to the Shadow. I know Mini-G's real name, I just choose not to use it. It's just that he's Gustavo's little brother; and Gustavo, being such a force of charisma, is the foundation from which I have built my image of Mini-G. "When my brother was going the wrong way I followed his steps. And now that he's going down the good way I'm following his steps."

Gustavo shakes his head and then hugs his brother. He's wearing glasses. "I never knew that," he says. "I thought I was a little gangster, but I never knew my brother saw that." He says he is motivated to be an example for his brother. That's not my motivation either. But I can feel it in me, like a warm frog in my chest.

It should be my turn but the group is breaking up. The Shadow disappears into the fringes of the firelight. I too get up, a little disappointed that I didn't get my chance. The moment has passed.

I'm lying in my sleeping bag. Ron, Gustavo, Mini-G and Marvin (Ron's little brother) are talking about that fabled subject, girls. Gustavo tells a gross story and then Ron starts to talk. "I just like to listen," he says. "So I ask questions and the girl asks questions. I like that. I like talking in a serious way."

I try to tell them why I'm motivated to be a part of Manual Arts Lacrosse Team. But it's too late, so I drift off to sleep thinking about what I would have said: "That Manual was for me a story. For a writer a story is a chance to advance his career. But that all evaporated the first day of practice. All my personal ambitions have been superceded by the teams'. I wanted to say that when I meet somebody new or talk to somebody I've known forever, my favorite subject is Manual Arts - the flood of students walking out as I pull in at 3:15 and Sean complaining about delays on 501 3C status. I love seeing Daniel run in his Vans, when I ask him to get real shoes he says he can't – his mom

has too many other expenses.

Yesterday, as the sun dipped below the endless rows of homes and squat apartments to the West of Manual Arts' bleachers, we ran fast break drills. Mini-G was in the right place, Gustavo's slides were right, Ron's passes were crisp, and I thought, 'Damn we have a team.'

So all I wanted to say but missed my chance was, "Hey, it's Manual that motivates me."

*For information on sponsoring or contributing to the Manual Arts program, contact Daniel at [dheimpel@gmail.com](mailto:dheimpel@gmail.com).*

# INSIDE LACROSSE

## Toil and trouble (IL)

April 18, 2007  
Daniel Heimpel

*For more information and an in-depth look at the Manual Arts High School in L.A., check out Inside Lacrosse magazine this spring. Subscribe to IL today.*



It was a bad, bad day. We are 0-9 now.

A captain held back tears. A player was arrested. A coach questioned his coaching ability. His assistant questioned everything.

The wind knocked out power five days ago. The day it happened I noticed that all the traffic lights were out south of 40th Street, near Manual. That was Wednesday. By Sunday I thought everything would be fixed.

It was early, churches and liquor stores the only points of activity. The lights were still out. Two cars: one small, metallic, blue and foreign was smashed up against something big and American. A block south

and police were directing traffic around a splotch of shattered glass rimmed with the occasional flare. The traffic lights were still out.

But that's just the neighborhood. That was Sunday.

And Monday we had a game.

A bunch of kids from Malibu came in and beat us. They, without a win, had been looking for a win all season, and they found it. They shot and scored on us one more than thirteen times. They came and beat us convincingly on our freshly sprinkled dirt field.

They had parents in the stands. Sean's and mine didn't. Our fans were the growing number of Manual Arts students interested in our Toilers and a handful of students from the Class I TA at USC. Good for all of them.

Malibu scored early and repeatedly. By the end of the half we were down 11 – 2. But for the next two quarters we foiled their clear with a four-man, midline-hugging zone ride.

We shot. Ernesto, fast and light like a hummingbird, sucked up ground balls, hit bigger, denser Malibu players and scored.

We moved. Scooter [Libby] had an excellent clear after his short-lived debut as goalkeeper.

We hit. Jawari, all 5'3" of him, slammed into the broad back of a blonde Malibu player and crumpled. But he crumpled with authority.

We held them to three goals. We tried under of the burden of knowing we would lose.

The team's name is the Toilers. Our opponent was named the Sharks -- something obscure and hyper-aggressive. No. We are no Hawks. We are no Grizzlies, no monsters, no goblins; no we are the Toilers.

We work. We work not hard, not easy. We work. Constantly. We work if we live 100 blocks south of Wilshire in a place where walking at night is an honest fright. We work if our mother's boyfriend beat her to death. We work if we stole a TV and were arrested hours before the game. We work thinking we can win and after we realize that we will lose. We work.

We have three games left in our fourth season. Over those four years more than 50 games have come and gone. In all those games we have won only one. We can quadruple our record in 10 days. Let's get to work.

