



JOSHUA WANG

LEVEL UP!

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IS LONG OVERDUE FOR A MEN'S VARSITY LACROSSE PROGRAM. THE NON-PROFIT ALUMNI GROUP 'MAKE IT 8' IS DETERMINED TO SEE THE LIONS GO DI.

BY GRAHAM WINFREY

Columbia University's men's club lacrosse team celebrated its first undefeated season in 1976. When the Lions went undefeated again in '77, the student newspaper the *Columbia Daily Spectator* ran a story headlined, "Talented Laxmen Seek Varsity Status."

Nearly half a century later, not much has changed about Columbia lacrosse. The Lions are still seeking varsity status, and Columbia remains the only Ivy League school without a men's varsity lacrosse team. In 2018, however, a group of former Columbia lacrosse players launched Make It 8, a non-profit with an endowed fund to benefit Columbia men's lacrosse and develop an NCAA Division I program. A tax-deductible charity organization, Make It 8 also provides financial support to New York City lacrosse groups such as CityLax, Harlem Lacrosse and Inwood Lacrosse.

If you're a high school lacrosse player determined to play in college, don't overlook Columbia. The Lions have one of the strongest club lacrosse programs on the East Coast, and won a national championship in 2007. The team attracts former high school lacrosse standouts and graduate students who played at the Division I level as undergrads.

"It's a legit program," says Julien Barbey, a 2009 Columbia alum who played on the 2007 national championship team. "The skill level of the players exceeded all of my expectations."

A former captain at Washington D.C.'s St. Albans School and *Washington Post* All-Metropolitan Player, Barbey was recruited by Division I colleges including Brown University, but applied early decision to Columbia.

"If you want to play college lacrosse, you can do that at Columbia and have an amazing experience," Barbey says. "You get the same friendships and brotherhood that come with a varsity team."

One of the perks of Columbia's men's club lacrosse team is playing on Robert K. Kraft Field at Lawrence A. Wien Stadium, home to the Lions' football team. Described by *Sports Illustrated* as one of the nation's most beautiful venues for college football, Wien was ranked in 2018 as the top football stadium in the Ivy League and No. 9 among college stadiums nationally. It also hosted the Ivy League Men's Lacrosse Tournament in 2018, 2019 and 2023. While covering the tournament in 2019, ESPN sideline reporters Paul Carcaterra and Quint Kessenich applauded Make It 8's efforts to add a men's varsity team at Columbia.

"I think it would be magnificent," Carcaterra said. "It would be the cherry on top for this conference. This is the mecca in terms of great high school lacrosse, so it's a natural fit."

For anyone paying attention to the growth of college lacrosse in the 21st century, the question of Columbia adding a varsity men's team shouldn't be

a matter of if, but when. The number of men's college lacrosse teams grew 61 percent between 2003 and 2018, according to an NCAA study. Women's lacrosse teams grew even faster, nearly doubling over the same period. (Columbia launched a women's varsity lacrosse program in 1997.) Division I schools that have launched men's varsity programs in recent years include Iona, Utah, and Hampton, the first HBCU since Morgan State College to add an NCAA lacrosse team.

In October 2023, on the heels of the International Olympic Committee's decision to add lacrosse to the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, lacrosse organizations including USA Lacrosse, World Lacrosse, and the Premier Lacrosse League formed ELEVATE28, a campaign to double U.S. lacrosse participation to 4 million annual players by the end of the decade. Alongside these organizations working together to grow the game, Make It 8 will continue to help Columbia establish a varsity team. As one Columbia player told the *Spectator* back in 1977, "Columbia deserves to have one."

To learn more about Make It 8 and lacrosse at Columbia, visit makeit8.org and columbiamenslaxclub.com and follow both on Instagram at [@makeit8lax](https://www.instagram.com/makeit8lax) and [@columbia_mlax](https://www.instagram.com/columbia_mlax).

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Graham Winfrey played lacrosse at Trinity College and club lacrosse at Columbia.