

Club Notebook: Don't Be Fooled

Tony Scazzero may play the role of laid-back Texan, but the MCLA's new prez is as sharp as they come

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Tony Scazzero is the head coach of the Texas A&M men's lacrosse team, and he plays the part. He's got the easy-going nature, a booming, yet endearing, voice, along with a bushy moustache and grizzled features that give him the appearance of an extra in *Tombstone*.

Last weekend, this good ole boy was named the next president of the Men's Collegiate Lacrosse Association, replacing Michigan's John Paul, who officially ends his duties in May.

Compared with the scrubbed appearance and measured public personas of Paul and his predecessor as MCLA chief, BYU's Jason Lamb, Scazzero looks like he just rode in off a dusty trail.

What may surprise you is Scazzero didn't wander onto a Lone Star lacrosse field after punching doggies one afternoon. He's actually an Ivy-educated native of Sleepy Hollow, N.Y. (then North Tarrytown) - located in Westchester County and a stone's throw from Manhattan - who played lacrosse for the legendary Richie Moran at Cornell.

"Don't be fooled by the big moustache and the large voice - Tony's no country bumpkin," cautioned Rob Graff, the head coach at Minnesota-Duluth and a Harvard man himself. "He's a sharp, analytical and calculating leader who knows how to get things done and motivate his team, whether that team is Texas A&M or the MCLA executive board. I think he'll do a great job as MCLA president."

Scazzero has been able to assimilate to the Texan culture because he has lived longer there than in New York. After graduating from college, he bounced around the East Coast playing club lacrosse for a couple of years before following his younger brother, who had plans on opening a restaurant, to Texas in 1978. After making the trip, Scazzero grabbed his equipment and headed down to the park on a lazy Saturday afternoon.

"I walked out and you find a lacrosse game wherever you go, so I asked if I could play," said Scazzero, who has been serving as the MCLA vice president. "Texas A&M was playing the Dallas men's club and there weren't many college teams at that time, so I got to play and I've been coaching them ever since. That's kind of the long and short of it."

From that point onward, Scazzero has seen Texas A&M and the club scene navigate its way from the fractured, regionalized format that existed up until the 1990s, through the transition from the USILA and US Lacrosse MDIA to the current 200-team, two-division MCLA. It's this first-person experience that made him an easy choice to replace Paul.

"Tony has served us locally and nationally for the better part of 20-plus years," said Ken Lovic, Georgia Tech's head coach. "As a coach, league administrator and MCLA vice president, Tony has always worked hard to assist in creating the positive image that the MCLA portrays today."



In addition to his duties as MCLA president, **Tony Scazzero** will continue his role as the head coach of Texas A&M (Photo: Cecil Copeland)

Scazzero's election is not a lifetime achievement award. While his tenure is more than most in the club ranks, Scazzero sought the position because of his allegiance to the sport and desire to pass it on to the next generations. He has already been a huge factor in growing the sport in Texas at both the high school and collegiate levels. "Texas Lacrosse should hold a 'Tony Scazzero' Day for all he's done for that state's lacrosse community," said Graff.

It only makes sense he would try to do the same at the national level, especially considering how his lacrosse career paralleled that of many Texas - and MCLA - players, past and present.

Scazzero was a phenomenal athlete, playing just half a season of lacrosse in high school after switching from baseball midway through his senior year. He had his mind set on playing football at Cornell when Moran took him aside and told him he was pursuing the wrong sport. "He just challenged me as an athlete, and I had a tremendous experience with it," said Scazzero.

As he looked around the Texas fields when he arrived in the '70s, all Scazzero saw were great athletes with football blinders on, ready to have their eyes opened with lacrosse just as his were. Now his adopted home state is a required destination on the camp circuit and a fertile area for small college programs. Scazzero hopes to apply that model on a national scale.

"It has been a long road, but I feel there is a tremendous opportunity for these young men to represent their schools in the sport of lacrosse," said Scazzero, who will retire from his job with the city of College Station this summer. "Obviously, we're not seeing a huge influx of varsity [college] programs everywhere and there are so many kids getting turned out of high school that this thing is just going to keep growing. I feel an obligation to the sport as a way to pay back what I got from it."

"Tony truly has the best interests of his primary constituents - the players - at heart," said Troy Hood, Lindenwood's head coach.

There are various administrative obstacles and issues that will confront Scazzero when he takes the reins of the MCLA, none more so than funding. As Paul said, "It's always about money."

The recent economic downturn is only going to exacerbate the unequal fiscal footing that has created a competitive divide in both of the association's divisions. The prospect of creating an executive director position and a league staff - a natural progression for the ever-expanding MCLA - will further ratchet up the financial demands of programs, many of which rely exclusively on student dues.

In the 30-plus years he's been coaching at the club level, Scazzero has overcome all sorts of hurdles - including remaking a New Yorker into a Texan - so the future is still bright, regardless of money issues.

"I think this is a great opportunity to put our game out in front of everybody and become a real player in the national scene," he said. "There are certainly a lot of athletes who are not looking for that scholarship experience, and this is their opportunity to get out there and play. From the national overview, I think this is a real opportunity to provide a good service to young men of this country."
