

Lacrosse 'Moscow Rebels' Gather Momentum as Team

By [Jack Stubbs](#)

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Two friendly teams going quite literally head to head at an early Moscow Rebels' tournament in Taganskaya. **Ekaterina Strukova**

Moscow has seen historical firsts come and go, but at the beginning of 2013 there was room for one more when the Moscow Rebels Lacrosse Club held their first ever intra-squad tournament.

Founded in 2007, the Moscow Rebels have been finding it hard to maintain long-term interest among new players due to a lack of competitive fixtures. Russia currently has two lacrosse teams playing matches twice a year in Moscow and St Petersburg, but the sport still remains largely unheard of.

Eugene Arkhipov, 26, emigrated to America with his mother in the early 90s but returned to Moscow in 2010 having played lacrosse at school and college. He now finds himself as captain of the Moscow Rebels and is determined to continue the development of lacrosse

in his mother country.

Speaking about this first tournament, he said: "I wanted to do something in the winter to keep people focused. When we are just practicing, people tend to fall off, but they always show up for the big events.

"In college, the coaches would split the squad into two teams and have a draft of players to compete in an intra-squad tournament. I thought, why can't we do that here? So, quite simply, we did."

Originating from Native American war games, lacrosse is traditionally played in North America with small but dedicated followings in the U.K., Australia and central Europe. The sport requires two teams of ten players to pass, catch and shoot a rubber ball with netted sticks in order to score in the opposition's 1.8 meter square goal.

The Rebels' intra-squad tournament was held at the Moscow State University of Instrument Engineering and Computer Science sports center in January this year. 23 players made up three teams to battle it out for the championship. Each player contributed to the cost of the tournament and players with a whole range of abilities were given the chance to experience competitive play, some for the very first time.

Valeo Sosnov, a 20-year-old web programmer from Moscow, became interested in lacrosse after seeing it played in American films. He discovered the Moscow Rebels online and has been an active club member for the past nine months. He said the tournament was a great opportunity to develop his individual skills and strengths as a player.

"This was the first time I felt I could really take part and make a decent contribution to the game," he said. "Playing in a real match where both sides really want to win, even though we are all actually on the same team, is such a different experience and a world away from normal practice."

Arkhipov first discovered lacrosse 14 years ago at school in America and went on to play for his college team at Rochester Institute of Technology. He now balances his job as an English teacher in Moscow alongside his work developing Russian lacrosse. He said that although still in its infancy, significant steps have recently been made.

In 2011, Russia was granted membership to the Federation of International Lacrosse, and there are plans to form a national team with hopes of playing in the 2014 World Championships.

Whilst the Moscow Rebels is largely made up of American and other international players, more and more work is being done to involve Russians in the sport. Last summer, sport support group Lacrosse Without Borders held development sessions in Moscow, and the Rebels played a demonstration game at the American Chamber of Commerce's U.S. Independence day picnic.

David Diamonon, Texas-born founder of the Moscow Rebels, said he had previously been frustrated by the lack of opportunities to play lacrosse outside of America. When he moved to Moscow in 2007 to work for Chicago-based rail company Amsted Rail, he was determined

to start something new.

"I knew that as a nation full of sports fans, Russia was ripe for introducing new games," he said.

"Compared to sports long since entrenched in this country such as soccer, ice hockey and basketball, lacrosse now offers an opportunity for athletes to try something new, some different, something a bit cooler."

With the next bi-annual showdown with St Petersburg team, the St Petersburg White Knights, set for May and plans to compete in international tournaments this summer, the Moscow Rebels look set to continue making history.

Anyone interested in the club or their upcoming fixtures should visit lacrosserussia.ru or search 'Moscow Lacrosse Club' on Facebook.

Contact the author at artsreporter@imedia.ru

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