

Hi Robbie,

Hello from Upstate, New York—Homer to be exact. I am Matt Riter and am very glad to connect with you. I began playing lacrosse in a friend's backyard when I was in 5th grade. The minute I started playing, I was hooked! It has been a part of my life ever since. I played at Homer High School and then Syracuse University. I received the Turnbull Award after the 1993 season and was quite thrilled and honored. My teammate, Greg Burns, received it my freshman year and former Syracuse great John Zulberti had won it shortly before Greg. So, I knew what a special award it was at the time. Looking back now, I think it means even more to me. I think I was lucky to be part of a team that made me look good. We had a bunch of excellent players but not the real “superstars” for which Syracuse had become known. We also won the national championship that year. That was pretty special, obviously, and also means more to me each year.

I have been coaching some very young players for the last few years and I'll share with you some things I usually say to them. First—keep your stick in your hands as much as possible. You have probably heard this a million times—but work on the wall. I used to use a basketball backboard since I didn't really have a good wall nearby out in the country. You can (and must) do all of this without other people. Use two hands. We start our little guys by simply flipping the ball up in the air to themselves. Be a smart player. Know what the play will look like a few steps ahead. Study the game. If you can't throw and catch, then you can't play. You would be amazed at what second graders can do when they are coached well and practice. So, get the work done so that you can get to your highest level.

I hope you realize, Robbie, what the game can do for you. You'll meet new people, and you are very likely to make friendships playing the game that will last your whole life.

Among my most special memories in the game was a trip that our Syracuse team took to Lockerbie, Scotland in 1989 after a terrorist attack took down a plane carrying thirty-five of our students (and a total of 259 people on board and eleven people on the ground) back to Syracuse University after studying abroad. Coach Simmons thought it would be helpful for our team to offer our support to the families—on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean—that suffered those terrible losses. It was my first time flying—so I was terrified. But we were welcomed with open arms by both England and Scotland. I remember that the fields were nice with short grass like putting greens, the weather in England was very gray and cloudy, and Scotland was beautiful with rolling, grassy hills with no trees. We did some clinics and exhibitions—it was the first time I had played international rules. We visited the memorial area, which was very symbolic of why we were there. I can still picture it in my mind today. It was an incredible trip.

Lacrosse has been very good to me. I hope you'll get to enjoy our great game as much as I have and that you'll be inclined, like so many of us who have had a great experience in the game, to give some of it back to younger players.

A book I would recommend you read is *The Boys of Winter: The Untold Story of a Coach, a Dream, and the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team* by Wayne Coffey because it shows that good coaching and hard work/perseverance pay off, and it stresses how rivals can come together and play as one to represent your country.

Good luck, Robbie,

Matt Riter
Syracuse University 1993
Turnbull Award 1993