HOW MUCH MORE?

For generations lacrosse players have carved a "love to party" reputation. Club lacrosse with Dad and his keg buddies, the Vail Shootout, where legend is measured in championships won and condominiums bashed. Final Four college teams loading adult beverage cases on team buses after semifinal wins.

This “play hard, live hard” banner has long waved over lousy and transcendent athletes in many sports. But devotees of lacrosse, a proudly “fringe” sport, take this chip-on-the-shoulder dare to a celebrated level.

It may be time, with the unparalleled explosion, mainstream attention and a sporty Buick namesake, to examine the costs of lacrosse’s social culture.

Recent wakeup calls come from outside the lacrosse fraternity. In December the NCAA’s Bill Saum stood before college coaches at the United States Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association (USILA) meetings with a sobering message. He and other senior administrators had just finished reviewing the NCAA’s 35-page study on Division I, II and III student-athletes. Their findings, summed up by Executive Director Myles Brand, stated that, “Lacrosse has a problem!”

While Saum’s central focus that morning involved the negative consequences to college athletes that gamble, he described “high-risk, impulsive” motivations that connect a variety of potentially harmful actions. Seventy-one percent of all student-athletes surveyed said they test themselves by “taking risks.” Fifty-seven percent of these edgy kids rated “...excitement more important than personal security.”

Saum, a former football coach, acknowledged the temptation to ignore a star’s inability to draw better players. Skill level naturally goes up with repetition against higher-class athletes, and a junior athlete should improve during freshman year. But rapid loss of potential with chronic use.

And injuries. Poor practices lead to disappointing game results. One must not be hurting the other!

John Underwood breaks it down to the molecular level. He describes what one’s body needs to store, burn and replenish for “optimal performance”. Every organ necessary for maximum physical and mental output is compromised by heavy alcohol and pot use. The liver stores and makes energy available for fast- and slow-twitch muscles. If an athlete’s liver is burning fuel by processing the 10 drinks he consumed last night, it cannot supply his brain, heart, legs and arms. Dehydration and poor recovery yield poor training. Poor training equals regression.

Lacrosse has a problem!

At least when I’m done you’ll know that what I’m saying is true,” he says. “Then it’s your decision. He tells coaches that if they “demand more, they will get more.”

Maybe it is time to interrupt the cycle in our sport. Almost leading the NCAA stats in alcohol and marijuana use is not a positive promotion for the players of this great game. Maybe the risk-taker’s dare of, ‘How close to the abuse abyss...’ needs to be replaced by ‘How good can I really be?’