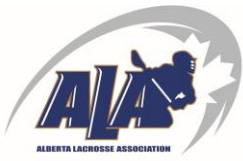




LACROSSE LITERACY

History of Lacrosse

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History of Lacrosse

This is a summary taken from Lacrosse Canada. Follow link for full description of the history of Lacrosse.

[Lacrosse Canada - History of Lacrosse](#)

Lacrosse: Canada's National Summer Sport

PREFACE

The roots of our country lay in many cultural soils, and Canadian society has grown and benefited from the contributions of people of many cultural backgrounds. The English and French are recognized as the dominant influences in the creation of this country and the foundation of our nation.

Before the English, French and many other immigrants to this continent strove and competed to build Canada, the aboriginal societies and cultures dominated North America. Unfortunately, today there is little common knowledge among Canadians of the nature and complexity of the societies of the First Nations. There is even less understanding or appreciation of the rituals and activities of those cultures.

Lacrosse, because of its unique history, exists as a link between these disparate components of Canadian society. It is one of the rare examples of the culture of the First Nations being accepted and embraced by Canadian society. To the religious and social rituals of the first North Americans, the settlers brought the European concepts of structure and rules, and together they produced one of the first symbols of the new Canadian nation, the sport of Lacrosse. "There is a long history of speculation about where the game of Lacrosse originated, but as Natives of North America, this question has little significance. We do not wonder who invented Lacrosse, or when and where; our ancestors have been playing the game for centuries - for the Creator." Tewaathon, Akwesasne's Story of Our Indian National Game: Native North American Travelling College, 1978

LACROSSE 'A GIFT FOR PEOPLE OF CANADA'

by Mike Mitchell, Director, Native North American Travelling College

One of the greatest contributions of our Native people in Canada is that of the game of Lacrosse, which in turn has been shared with the world.

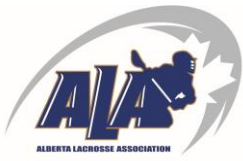
At the time of European settlement in Canada it was discovered that all nations and tribes across the country played Lacrosse in one fashion or another and they all had names for their sport.

The two largest linguistic families in Canada both had names for Lacrosse; the Algonquin referred to it as "Baggataway" and the Iroquois Nation referred to it as "Tewaathon".

To the early French settlers, the stick reminded them somewhat of a Bishop's crozier or staff. The French word for crozier is "crosse" and soon they started calling the game "La Crosse", which is the name everyone is familiar with now.

Originally, Lacrosse, when played only by the Native people, had a spiritual significance in the Indian's way of life. Lacrosse was a game to be played for their Creator, for the Native people to show their gratitude to the Great Spirit for living a full life, one that allowed them to live in harmony with nature and at peace with themselves.

Lacrosse was also played for honoured members within the Indian nation, and a game would be played to acknowledge to the Great Spirit that they were grateful that an elder or medicine person with great knowledge of many things existed in their midst.



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In early days, contrary to popular belief, a Lacrosse game would be played to settle a dispute between two tribes. In times of differences between Indian nations, the leaders and elders would arrange a Lacrosse game and the winner of that game would be considered the one with the correct viewpoint, sanctioned by the Great Spirit.

Lacrosse was very much a part of the culture of the Indian people, as well as a spiritual link with their Creator. Once settlers began to establish themselves in Canada, they took a great liking to Lacrosse and it was not long before almost every small community in Canada boasted of a Lacrosse team. During that time, rules were established for the number of players on each side and the playing area to be covered.

Today, Lacrosse has evolved from a spiritual game of our Native people to the exciting, thriving sport played in every province in Canada.

It is commonly referred to as the "fastest sport on two feet" and rightfully so. In addition, Lacrosse is one of very few sports in this country that can boast of originating from the land proudly called Canada.

HISTORY OF LACROSSE IN CANADA

No one can question the origin of this sport. Jean de Brebeuf recorded observations of a Lacrosse game in 1683 in what is now Southern Ontario, Canada. The legacy of the original North Americans to the European settlers, Lacrosse remains one of the few aspects of Native culture which has survived and prospered under the settlers' tutelage. Pre-dating recorded history, the sport has roots which are long and deep in North American society in general and the life and culture of the Natives of Ontario and Quebec.

"Many centuries before the white man set foot on the North American continent, our Native people were given the gift of lacrosse from the Creator. Although there was a great variation in the kind of stick used and the kind of game played, the philosophy, the spirit and the relation of lacrosse and the Creator was one; each tribal group held lacrosse in very high esteem."

Tewaarathon, Akwesasne's Story of Our Indian National Game, North American Indian Travelling College, 1978

It was in the early 1800s that the Montreal townspeople became interested in this activity of the Mohawk tribes. In the 1840s the first games of Lacrosse were played between the townsfolk and the Natives. The action and skill of the game soon won the hearts of the locals, and though it was many years before any significant wins were logged against the Natives, the game of Lacrosse was quickly winning the loyalty and interest of the newest North Americans.

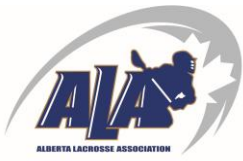
By the late 1850s and early 1860s Lacrosse had its foothold in the sporting society of the time and the first non-native Lacrosse clubs were being formed. This quickly led to the formation of inter-city rivalries and challenges, and the competitive base of the sport of Lacrosse was born.

The role of the Montreal athletes and organizers in creating a structured sport which captured the imagination of a young nation cannot be ignored. Those visionaries took the Native game with all its beauty, skill and dedication of spirit and molded it into a competitive sport which won the hearts and minds of the early Canadians.

Lacrosse was first declared the National Game of Canada in 1859. Although the original government records have never been located, hundreds of references cite this event, from renowned encyclopedia, books on Canada's history, government communications and educational textbooks to newspaper and other media accounts dating back in history.

One such reference occurs in Scribner's Monthly, Volume 14, May-October 1877. "The game of Lacrosse, which was adopted as the national game of Canada on the 1st of July, 1859, the first Dominion Day...

"The game of Lacrosse was granted this status in the 1800s, not merely because of its popularity or economics, but because it has made significant and lasting contributions to the history and development of this nation, its people, and the sport community. Indeed, Lacrosse is known as Canada's National Game throughout the world.



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CANADA'S NATIONAL SPORT

Lacrosse has been known as Canada's National Game since 1859.

In 1925, A.E.H. Coe, President of the Canadian Amateur Lacrosse Association refers not only to Lacrosse as Canada's National Summer Game, but also to Canada's other National Game, hockey!

In 1967, the late Honourable Lester B. Pearson, the Prime Minister of Canada, who was himself an accomplished Lacrosse player, when discussing the confirmation of a National Game in the House of Commons, suggested that Canada should have a National Summer Game (Lacrosse), and a National Winter Game (Hockey). Although either Hockey or Lacrosse has been discussed on several occasions, the debate was not resolved.

In 1976, Canada hosted its first Olympics. With much pomp, Canada proclaimed itself to the rest of the world and used the Games as a showpiece of that which is Canada. The \$10.00 Olympic commemorative coin depicted a Lacrosse game being played by Native North Americans. Lacrosse was the only sport not in the Olympic program to be so represented, and it was used because it is a symbol of Canada.

In 1978, though Lacrosse was a demonstration sport at the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, the medal being awarded also proclaimed it as Canada's National Game.

February 8, 1994, Nelson Riis introduced a private members bill (C-212) in the House of Commons to recognize Hockey as the National Sport. Substantial support for Lacrosse, however, resulted in the introduction of an amendment to the bill (proposed by the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Canadian Heritage) which was accepted unanimously.

On May 12, 1994, the following Bill C-212 received Royal Assent and became law: "To recognize Hockey as Canada's National Winter Sport and Lacrosse as Canada's National Summer Sport."

This decree is known as Canada's "National Sport Act." The recognition of Lacrosse as Canada's National (Summer) Sport in 1994 is a re-affirmation of the importance of the contributions of the Native North Americans to the development of our society and culture, recognition by the Canadian government of the importance of the sport to this country and confirms our pride in the game that we gave to the world. Canada is the product of an evolution which began with the Natives and was molded by the European settlers. It took the combined efforts of these people to open this country to development. Part of this development led to the invention of Canada's National Winter Game - Hockey.

Again in 1994, Lacrosse was the Official Demonstration Sport of the Commonwealth Games, once again illustrating its importance to Canada. Canada Post issued a Lacrosse stamp for the Games, along with a statement of the game's importance to our country.

SUMMARY

The sport of Lacrosse is an intrinsic part of Canadian culture, tradition, and heritage. The recognition of Lacrosse as the National Game for Canada in 1859 is a positive statement of the contributions of the sport to this nation's development. The passing of Bill C-212 by the Government of Canada attests to the enduring nature of the Sport of Lacrosse - Canada's oldest sport.

And, we owe it all to the people of the First Nations - and the Creator.