



## The History of Lacrosse

### La Crosse America's Oldest Game

A visitor from another planet would be perplexed and perhaps even frightened by the odd looking sticks with a strange net attached, being twirled by some athletes today.

Is it a butterfly net? A crab net? A big swatter?

No, just a lacrosse stick, the primary equipment (along with a hard rubber ball) of a lacrosse player, who plays the oldest game in the North American continent.

Lacrosse is steeped in tradition, and though today's participants use sticks of plastic and titanium rather than wood, the lacrosse stick symbolizes the historical significance of the game.

The game, like the stick itself, was developed by North American Indians as early as the 15th century. Indians played the game not only for recreation, but also to settle tribal disputes and to toughen warriors for fighting.

Games were played by as few as 100 and as many as 1,000 men and lasted two or three days, with play beginning at sunup and ending at sundown each day. Goals, consisting of rocks or trees, were generally 500 yards to a half-mile apart, but could be several miles apart. There were no sidelines, and players raced far and wide over the countryside.

White men - Jesuit missionaries from France - first encountered the game in the 17th century. They wrote home about a game played by the Huron Indians with sticks reminiscent of the crosier (la Crosse) carried by bishops as a symbol of their office.

In the early 1800's white settlers in Montreal took up the game. When the Dominion of Canada was created a decade later, lacrosse was designated - and still remains - the national sport. Canadians introduced the game to the United States, England, Ireland, and Scotland. Today, lacrosse is played at home and in international competition by England and Australia, as well as the United States and Canada.



For the uninitiated, lacrosse is a combination of football, hockey and basketball. It has been called the fastest game on two feet and is a grueling test of stamina.

There are 10 positions on a team (one goalie, three attackmen, three midfielders, and three defensemen). The object: put a 5 oz. hard-rubber ball into your opponent's net with a long-handled stick with a

triangular pocket at the end, while keeping your opponent from doing the same to you.

Like soccer, lacrosse is played on an open field with goals at both end; like hockey, the player carry sticks and can roam behind the net; like basketball, the offensive players set picks and run patterned offenses and fast breaks, while the defenses are man-to-man or zone; in fact, basketball inventor James Naismith was a lacrosse player in the late 1800's.

Glen (Pop) Warner, famed football coach, substituted lacrosse at eh Carlisle, PA, Indian School for baseball because, "Lacrosse is a developer of health and strength. It is a game that spectators rave over once the understand it," he said. He undoubtedly had an ulterior motive. Lacrosse, a contact sport, helped prepare his grid warriors for the fall season.

In 1956, the game got a boost when a superior athlete from Syracuse University, Jim Brown, scored six goals for the North in the North-South Lacrosse game. Brown, one of the greatest running backs in the history of the National Football League, admitted he would rather play lacrosse than the grid sport.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association eventually took over the directing of intercollegiate lacrosse, and the first NCAA Lacrosse championship was held in 1971. With the support of the NCAA, the sport has continued to grow as more and more youngsters reenact this modern version of the Indian tribal game.



So the next time a strange looking visitor asks you what those odd-looking sticks are, just refer him to the nearest Jesuit missionary.