

Brief History of Lacrosse

Lacrosse originated in the Native American nations of North America mainly among the Algonquian. In many Native American societies/tribes, the ball sport was often part of religious ritual, played to resolve conflicts, heal the sick, develop strong, virile men and prepare for war. Legend tells of games with more than 100 players from different tribes taking turns to play. It could be played on a field many miles in length and width; sometimes the game could last for days. Early lacrosse balls were made of deerskin, clay, stone, and sometimes wood. Lacrosse played a significant role in the community and religious life of tribes across the continent for many years. Early lacrosse was characterized by deep spiritual involvement, befitting the spirit of combat in which it was undertaken. Those who took part did so in the role of warriors, with the goal of bringing glory and honor to themselves and their tribes. The game was said to be played "for the Creator" or was referred to as "The Creator's Game".

Lacrosse, one of the oldest team sports in the Americas, may have developed as early as the 12th century, but since then has undergone many modifications. In the traditional Native American version, each team consisted of about 100 to 1,000 men on a field that stretched from about 500 yards to a couple of miles long. These lacrosse games lasted from sunup to sundown for two to three days straight. These games were played as part of ceremonial ritual to give thanks to the Creator. The modern Ojibway verb 'to play Lacrosse' is baaga'adowe (baggataway).

The French Jesuit missionary, Jean de Brébeuf, saw Iroquois tribesmen play it in 1637 and was the first European to write about the game. He called it lacrosse. Some say the name originated from the French term for field hockey, le jeu de la crosse. Others suggest that it was named after the crosier, a staff carried by bishops.

In 1856, Dr. William George Beers, a Canadian dentist, founded the Montreal Lacrosse Club. In 1867 he codified the game, shortening the length of each game and reducing the number of players to twelve per team. The first game played under Beers' rules was at Upper Canada College in 1867, with Upper Canada College losing to the Toronto Cricket Club by a score of 3–1. By the 1900s, high schools, colleges, and universities began playing the game.