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# An Examination in the Evolution of Iroquois Lacrosse

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State University of New York  
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An Examination in the Evolution of Iroquois Lacrosse

A Thesis in  
History

by

Christopher P. Root

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## **Chapter I**

### *Introduction*

On Saturday nights throughout the winter and spring, thousands of fans fill the First Niagara Center in downtown Buffalo. But unlike most arenas in major American cities, these fans are not here to watch a hockey or a basketball game. They are there for a lacrosse game, the National Lacrosse League's Buffalo Bandits. The franchise consistently fills its 18,000 seat home arena when it hosts teams from all over North America. What makes the Buffalo franchise so unique compared to many other franchises that have come and gone in the league is its decades of success since its establishment in 1991. This success has transitioned to a dedicated fan base, decked out in the team's colors of orange and black flocking to downtown on game nights. Despite the physical nature of the game, families are seen throughout the crowd cheering for their team. Lacrosse has become a staple of the community in Western New York in the past twenty five years.

This was not always the case. Despite Buffalo's close proximity to Canada, where lacrosse is officially declared as the official summer sport of the nation, and the three Iroquois reservations all within a forty five minute drive from downtown, lacrosse had been an exclusive, niche sport. For most, lacrosse conjured images of two very different worlds. The first being the game of the affluent classes, where the only opportunities to play were through private clubs or parochial athletics. This affiliation to wealth stems from the adoption of lacrosse from the Iroquois in Victorian Canada and its spread south into the eastern United States by the turn of the twentieth century. The second is the rough and tumble games that took place on the Native American reservations of upstate New York and Canada. For the Haudenosaunee, lacrosse

provides a glimpse for contemporary Americans into their culture and heritage. Though the Six Nations refer to themselves as Haudenosaunee, they will be called Iroquois throughout this thesis because that is the name of their national team. For the Iroquois, lacrosse holds a cultural significance that is not comparable to anything other sport in western culture. This paper will focus on how lacrosse serves as a connection to their ancient past in a modern world, that lacrosse can provide a microcosm into Native-white relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the adaptations that were taken to secure their place in the sport's future as it grows in popularity.

Long nicknamed the “Little Brother of War” lacrosse's rough reputation stemmed from its physical nature, and the long told story of the Fort Michilimack massacre during Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763. On a warm June 2<sup>nd</sup>, nearly five hundred Ojibwe and Saux demonstrated a lacrosse game outside the gates of Fort Michilimack, near present Mackinaw City, Michigan on the border between the upper and lower peninsulas. The Ojibwe invited the soldiers outside to watch a match to commemorate the king's birthday. The game captivated the attention and many of them gathered to watch the match on the sidelines. Suddenly, the two teams stopped playing and the history of the lacrosse would change forever. None of the soldiers were suspect of the women near the gates of the fort, who were wrapped in blankets despite being the middle of summer. Once the ball was thrown near the gates, gameplay ceased and the women disclosed the tomahawks and knives that they were hiding. Immediately, the sweat and calls of gameplay were replaced with blood and screams of slaughter.

The small significance in the overall context of conflicts between European colonizers and the indigenous peoples of North America, the massacre's tie to lacrosse has had a lasting effect on the reputation of the game itself. Long nicknamed “The Little Brother of War”, the

Fort Michilimack massacre is often used as an example of how lacrosse and indigenous warfare were closely affiliated. The city of Mackinaw still has reenactments and special events based on the massacre. As Don Fisher wrote, “The relationship between real and romanticized Indians lies at the core of the history of lacrosse.”<sup>1</sup> This applies to the contemporary world of lacrosse, where the Iroquois can host international tournaments and produce some of the best players, but they are still lumped with the same stories of brutality of the noble savage such as the Fort Michilimack massacre.

An examination of the Iroquois history of lacrosse is required to research a number of factors and significant events. Centuries before the arrival of Europeans to the North American continent, indigenous stick ball games were being played by tribes in all regions. The earliest accounts of Iroquois lacrosse games began in the late seventeenth century by Jesuit priests who were closely affiliated with the indigenous tribes. Almost two hundred years later, the full adoption and modernization of the sport by Victorian Canadians would set the tone for the next one hundred and fifty years. There was never any doubt about the ancient roots of the game of lacrosse, but social and racial overtones would play an important role in the numerous hurdles that the Iroquois would have to overcome in order to remain influential in the game they hold so dearly. Despite over a century of exclusion of organized lacrosse by the forefathers of its modern style, and the social problems related to life on reservations, the Iroquois will play a very important role in lacrosse’s continued growth not only in North America, but internationally.

For the indigenous peoples of North America, participation in such activities was in accordance with the wishes of the gods. Sports were a part of religious holidays, or were

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher, Don. *Lacrosse: A History of the Game*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002. prologue

organized to coincide with particular times of the year such as changing of the seasons. For example, the Zuni, a tribe of the Pueblo, organized a dart competition with their warriors during the winter solstice to change the weather.<sup>2</sup> The contestants would cover a large ball with a sacred blend of cornmeal, and would throw their feather-shafted arrows at it. The first person to pierce the ball held it above their heads and offered prayers to their deities in hopes that they would respond with rain.<sup>3</sup>

In Central America, numerous tribes played a game in which the objective was to get a ball through a hoop hanging on the wall without the use of hands. The game, referred to as *Ollamalizti*, was played for religious and social reasons, though many of the specific rules and the significance of the game are unknown. According to oral tradition, the captain of the losing team, or sometimes the entire team, would be sacrificed to the gods.<sup>4</sup> These two examples show that regardless of the location or type of game that was played, these activities were deeply engrained in these ancient indigenous cultures.

Most importantly, the sport of lacrosse, as it is known today, derives from the version of the game played across the northeastern United States and southern Canada, but has spread throughout the world in recent decades. Lacrosse would be played throughout the continent, although versions of the sport were as diverse as the different tribes. These games are also referred to as lacrosse in English, though they have different names in their respective indigenous languages. The Mohawk called it *Tewaraaton*, which would later be adopted as the name for the award given to the top collegiate player every year. The Onondaga call it

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<sup>2</sup> Vennum, Thomas. *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994. P.27

<sup>3</sup> Vennum, p.27

<sup>4</sup> Cartwright, Mark. "The Ball Game of Mesoamerica." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. September 16, 2013. Accessed June 10, 2015.

*Dehontisgwæhs*, and the Algonquin called it *Baggataway*, which all translate to “they bump hips”. But for Native Americans, lacrosse is much more than a game. Lacrosse ties into all aspects of indigenous culture and religious beliefs. The training of warriors, medicinal benefits, connections to religion and the incorporation of social aspects are still engrained in modern lacrosse, despite its evolution over the past one hundred fifty years. One of the most cherished possessions an Iroquois boy will have is his lacrosse stick. There are stories of newborns having sticks placed in their cribs, and elders being buried alongside their prized sticks. Today, lacrosse serves as the identity of contemporary Iroquois culture.

The first written accounts of lacrosse were first made by European missionaries, and later settlers, fur traders and government officials. Scholarship focused solely on lacrosse and other indigenous games would not occur until centuries later. Often in these early accounts, lacrosse would be a component of the anthropological study of the indigenous cultures of North America. The reports of the new world and their subsequent attempts to convert the indigenous peoples were sent to back to France provided glimpses of the sport. Writers of these accounts were men whose lives were spent amongst these indigenous communities, in their accounts chronicled what they had witnessed. Therefore these early witnesses to lacrosse and had little time for “careful writing”, or to provide descriptive insight or interpretation to the activity.<sup>5</sup> The earliest accounts of lacrosse games in the southern United States would take place in the mid eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Davis, Andrew McFarland. "Indian Games." *Bulletin of the Essex Institute* 17, no. 7 (1885): 89-106. Accessed August 12, 2015. P92

<sup>6</sup> Davis, 97



## Historiography/Literature Review

The earliest known account of a European writing about lacrosse was by Father Jean de Brebeuf, a French Jesuit missionary. The first mention of lacrosse is in the 1636 edition of *The Jesuit Relations*, a series of annual reports of Jesuit missionaries regarding their progress of conversion of various Native American tribes. The members of the Society of Jesus, known to the natives as the “Black Robes”, attempted to create a biracial theocracy in New France by adding Roman Catholicism onto traditional native beliefs in hopes of converting the Hurons.<sup>7</sup> Brebeuf’s early account concentrates on popular games of the Hurons and their medicinal associations. This early description is the first to mention the gambling that would take place. He also mentions that villagers would wager beaver robes and beaded necklaces on lacrosse matches. He writes “you will see then in a beautiful field, Village contending against Villages, as to who will play cross the better, and betting against one another Beaver robes and Porcelain collars, so as to excite greater interest....”<sup>8</sup>

Between 1662 and 1669, Nicolas Perrot, an acting agent of the French government, provide descriptions of the game. Most notably, these were the first accounts that would describe gameplay. In 1667, he was received near Saut Sainte Marie by a chief from the Miami tribe. A few days after Perrot’s arrival, the chief called for a game of lacrosse to entertain the tribe’s special visitor. Perrot described the game as:

More than two thousand persons assembled in a great plain each with his cross. A wooden ball about the size of a tennis ball was tossed in the air. From that moment there was a constant movement of all these crosses which made a noise like that of arms which one hears during battle. Half the savages tried to send the ball to the northwest the length of the field, the

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<sup>7</sup> Fisher, 17

<sup>8</sup> "Disease and Medicine." In *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, edited by Allan Greer. New York, NY: Bedford / St. Martins, 2000.

others wished to make it go to the southeast. The contest which lasted for a half hour was doubtful.<sup>9</sup>

Perrot had little admiration for the game he saw. He also stated that “They are naturally so addicted to these that they will give up their food and drink, not only to play but to watch the game.”<sup>10</sup> Fortunately for historical research purposes, Perrot provides a better description of gameplay in the mid seventeenth century than Brebeuf. He describes the *crosse* as a light club, having one end similar to that of a tennis racket, and that a ball is used similar to the size of a turkey egg. Perrot’s account of gameplay also describes two equal teams, usually from opposing tribes that would try to attempt to drive the ball towards the goal of the opponent.<sup>11</sup> The game would begin with a tribal leader standing at the center of the field, tossing the ball into the air. Perrot adds that if the ball falls to the ground, the player endeavors to draw it toward him with his *crosse*.<sup>12</sup> This is the first account of what is now known as a ground ball, which is a statistic kept in modern gameplay.

Perrot also describes the physical nature and violence of the sport. He wrote that “...If one were not told beforehand that they were playing, one would certainly believe that they were fighting together in the open field.”<sup>13</sup> This comparison to fighting was due to the violent blows consistently thrown in an attempt to gain possession of the ball. In the instance in which a ball is between held by a player between his feet, he states that “it is for him to avoid the blows that his adversaries rain incessantly upon his feet; and, if he happens to be wounded in this encounter,

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<sup>9</sup> Davis, p 89

<sup>10</sup> "The Games and Amusements of the Savages." In *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, edited by Emma Helen Blair. Vol. 1. Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911 p.93

<sup>11</sup> Blair, 93

<sup>12</sup> Blair, 94

<sup>13</sup> Blair, 95

that is his own affair.”<sup>14</sup> Descriptions of broken limbs, instances of death, and long term crippling injuries Perrot blamed on the obstinacy of the individual for their injury. When a player does become injured, they quietly retire from gameplay, and if the injury does not permit the player to walk, they will be carried off by their relatives and the game will continue as if nothing happened.<sup>15</sup>

Perrot was able to observe important native beliefs attributed to the sport, though he does not wholly understand them. He stated that “Whatever mishap this sport may occasion, they attribute it to the luck of the game, and they feel no hatred towards one another.”<sup>16</sup> What Perrot refers as “luck of the game” is contrary to the rigorous training a player would endure for weeks so they would be play with all of their effort in order to please the creator. Therefore there was no luck, the victor would have chosen by the creator. But, Perrot acknowledged that what took place during the game, would result in no hard feelings, which is echoed in contemporary gameplay amongst the Iroquois. When former Syracuse all-star and Onondaga Chief Oren Lyons recalls watching his father play, he says “I would go to the game... And there would be a winner, and a loser, but it didn’t seem to be so much a point of the game as the celebration, the sense of community, the being together with pride.”<sup>17</sup> This coincides with natives beliefs that both sides are to play with all of their effort during a lacrosse game. Subsequently the views of Perrot would be echoed by Abbe Ferland, whose *Cours d' Histoire du Canada (1861)* duplicates Perrot’s descriptions almost word for word.<sup>18</sup> Other early explorers of the North American continent such as Louis-Armand de Lom d’Arce de Lahontan in *Memoires de L’Amerique*

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<sup>14</sup> Blair, 94

<sup>15</sup> Blair, 95

<sup>16</sup> Blair, 95

<sup>17</sup>Vennum, 110

<sup>18</sup> Wullf, 16

*Septentrionale* in 1705, Bacqueville de la Potherie in *Histoire de L’Amerique Septentrionale* in 1722 and Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix in *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* in 1744 provided accounts of lacrosse games.<sup>19</sup> Once again, these descriptions of lacrosse in the early nineteenth century were based upon accounts of white spectators. During this time period, we even begin see early accounts of white and neighboring natives playing against each other, such as in 1799 in Geneseo, though the occurrence of such matches seem to be rare.<sup>20</sup>

During the nineteenth century, we see that research of lacrosse was based upon emerging anthropological methods. These studies concentrated on native society and cultures as a whole, and did not solely focus on lacrosse. Lewis Henry Morgan’s *The League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois (1851)* is arguably the most important early in depth account of the life and culture of the Iroquois people. This two volume book is considered the first ethnography of an American Indian tribe.<sup>21</sup> Morgan’s work presented the complexity of Iroquois society using ethnographic practices that would serve as a model for future anthropologists. His interest in the Iroquois began with the formation of the fraternity society called the New Confederacy of the Iroquois in 1841. The members of this fraternal order intended on reviving the spirituality of the Iroquois. The men tried to learn the languages, practiced many native rituals, took Iroquois names and viewed themselves as the heirs to the older Confederacy. Morgan himself acted as the leader of the organization and would serve as “Grand Sachem”. Morgan would urged the research of Iroquois culture and history, conducting much of the field work himself.<sup>22</sup> He also forged a friendship with Ely S. Parker, a Tonawanda Seneca who would later serve as

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<sup>19</sup> Davis, 98

<sup>20</sup> Wulff, 17

<sup>21</sup> Starna, William A. 1996. "Lewis H. Morgan on Iroquois Material Culture / the Library of Lewis Henry Morgan." *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (1): 137. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/216850392?accountid=7259>.

<sup>22</sup> Tooker, Elisabeth. *Lewis H. Morgan on Iroquois Material Culture*. University of Arizona Press, 1994. 19.

Comissioner of Indian Affairs under President Ulysses S. Grant. Parker acted as a liaison for access to tribe members and a source of information regarding interpretation of cultural practices. Though the focus of his scholarship was Iroquois society as a whole, lacrosse plays such a large role that it could not be ignored. In his chapter on Indian games, he provides the most attention to lacrosse. Morgan would also serve as an aid to the battle over Iroquois land claims during the Odgen Land Affair, and would be later adopted by the Seneca.<sup>23</sup>

Morgan's important documentation would be followed by a number of articles published scholarly journals in the 1890's and into the first decade of the twentieth century. James Mooney would publish an article in 1890 titled "The Cherokee Ball Play" which would provide a background on the creation story, which is almost identical to that of the Iroquois. W.M Beauchamp would publish an article titled "Iroquois Games" in 1896. Stewart Culin, an early ethnographer who focused of games, dress and art would publish two articles, both titled "American Indian Games" in 1898 and 1903.

Publications in the twentieth century would show how Native American studies would begin to evolve. For example, older books such as Alexand Weyand and Milton Roberts *The Lacrosse Story (1965)* spends very little time concentrating on the Native American heritage of the game, only twelve pages of the over three hundred page book. The book itself is dedicated to the American Indian with the description "A few generations hence little will be left of the American continent to remind the generations then alive of the red man who once ruled it, save a few names in the geography – and lacrosse."<sup>24</sup> The chapter concentrated on the Native American heritage of lacrosse echoes statements that can be viewed as products of the time period, but

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<sup>23</sup> "Lewis Henry Morgan: American Anthropologist." Encyclopedia Britannica. July 7, 2014. Accessed August 6, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Weymand, v.

would not be considered politically correct today. For instance, the authors discuss early accounts of native lacrosse during the arrival of the French. This is not new information, but as the chapter continues to describe the traditional wooden stick, it asks “How came the Indians to fashion a racket? No one will ever know. They were not very inventive.”<sup>25</sup> The conclusion that is presented is that the round loop racket was the imitation of a cobweb-like shield from a religious object.<sup>26</sup>

The only study of the game conducted by Native Americans to be published in a book is the North American Indian Travelling College’s *Tewaarathon (Lacrosse)* in 1978. This book provides great insight to Iroquois interpretations of lacrosse and its history, by contributors from the Mohawk tribe. The first chapter is entitled “The White Man’s Viewpoint” and aims to address misconceptions that are made about the indigenous people of North America, and the study of lacrosse. The chapter mentions that the Europeans had viewed lacrosse because of the differences in cultures and lifestyles, which caused them to draw a critical analysis that was based upon their own values.<sup>27</sup> The next chapter, entitled “The Origin of Lacrosse” provides the reader with myths such as the lacrosse creation story between the birds and four-legged animals. Later chapters presents the experiences of Native Americans, most notably the Mohawk, while lacrosse evolved and was adapted by whites beginning in the late nineteenth century. Fortunately for the reader, the descriptions of stick making and terminology associated with gameplay are accompanied with useful illustrations and photographs.

In 1994, Thomas Vennum, Jr., of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, published *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*. This book provides the

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<sup>25</sup> Weymand, 5

<sup>26</sup> Weymand, 5

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, Michael, ed. *Tewaarathon (Lacrosse): Akwesasne's Story of Our National Game*. Mohawk Nation: North American Indian Travelling College, 1978. p.8

most comprehensive study of Native American stick ball games in eastern North America. Vennum's book covers all aspects of indigenous lacrosse ranging from playing fields and equipment to the spirituality and ceremonialism of the game. Three regions are covered in the research; the southeast, the Great Lakes and the lands of the Iroquois. Throughout the book, the reader is able to draw the similarities in rituals and gameplay to these games, though each version appears to be cousins of another. Vennum's scholarship could also be used to see comparisons of ancient lacrosse to modern sports. For example, the seeking of well-respected sachems whose special powers may secure victory can be compared to the recruitment of high profile coaches in collegiate and professional sports, as one review pointed out.<sup>28</sup>

Many chapters contain narratives describing various events that occurred during lacrosse's history since the arrival of the French. A story describing the role of lacrosse in a Mohawk-Seneca dispute story that will be presented later will be an example of this. Unfortunately for researchers, there is no citation of the historical accuracy of this. Vennum acknowledges that he considers these chapters to be fiction, and that he created much of the dialogue between the characters in the bibliographic note at the end of the book.<sup>29</sup> This note probably should have been made in the preface being that it is one of the most in depth books published on a subject that has seen little focus until the past twenty years. With this problem aside, Vennum's book provides an excellent glimpse into the role of lacrosse in indigenous communities in the past and presents contemporary Iroquois lacrosse at a time when major changes were taking place that would affect the sport today.

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<sup>28</sup> Stevens, Paul L. 1994. Vennum, Thomas, Jr. "American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War" (book review). *Michigan Historical Review* 20, (2): 229

<sup>29</sup> Vennum, 343

Following Vennum's popular book that sparked renewed interest in the history of the game, Donald Fisher's 2002 book *Lacrosse: A History of the Game* provided what Vennum missed. The research examines the adaptation of the sport from the Mohawks, the first implementation of set rules by George Beers and how lacrosse transitioned from an amateur, noble game to a professional, win-at-all costs activity once members of the immigrant class began to play also. Later on, Fisher examines how the sport spread into the United States and was picked up by many private institutions of higher education.

In Fisher's own words, "The relationship between real and romanticized Indians lies at the core of the history of lacrosse."<sup>30</sup> The examination of this relationship is why *Lacrosse* is such an important pillar in the study of the game's history. Fisher explores the complex relationship between Native Americans, most notably the Iroquois, and the European settlers who would eventually evolve lacrosse into the sport that we know today. *Lacrosse* attempts to present the history within broad cultural and social contexts, which he refers to as the "contested ground". Fisher argues that indigenous cultures and European settlers have clashed since English settlers in mid-nineteenth-century Canada first appropriated and transformed the "primitive" Mohawk game of *tewaarathon*, eventually turning it into a respectable sport of "gentlemen". Primary sources and the inclusion of the scholarship of the individuals briefly discussed are used to show this evolution. It is important to note that in Fisher's examination of the use of lacrosse in Victorian Canada as a way to forge nationalism for the new country, can be also applied to Iroquois nationalism that began in the 1980's and 90's in which participation amongst natives began to increase and the Iroquois Nationals team was established.

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<sup>30</sup> Fisher, prologue



The remaining chapters of this paper focus on how this contested ground would often place Native Americans in positions where they would be forced to adapt to the changes taking place in lacrosse. Over a century and a half, the originators of this great sport would be excluded from participating in matches against whites for a number of reasons. At this time, the American Indian was believed to go extinct in the coming decades. Though large portions of these indigenous cultures have endured numerous blows, and some has been lost forever, many have survived and began to once again thrive. Lacrosse is a prime example of the Native American holding onto a piece of their cultural heritage that would later become an important part of contemporary American and Canadian society.

## Chapter II

### *The Creation Story of Lacrosse and Its Importance in Haudenosaunee Culture*

To understand Native American lacrosse, one must first learn why it was played. The Iroquois believe that lacrosse is a gift from the Creator, to be played for his amusement.<sup>31</sup> Often the term “the Creator’s game” is associated with lacrosse, especially in contemporary discussion pertaining to the indigenous roots of the game. This derives from the notion that even though players and teams would want to be victorious at all costs, ultimately the individual was playing to the best of their own abilities in order to please their Creator.<sup>32</sup> From the time they are young, players are trained that “lacrosse should not be played for money, fame, or personal gain; you should be humble and of a good mind when you take your lacrosse stick in hand.”<sup>33</sup> For Mohawks, the name for the Creator, or God, is Rawena. The name Rawena comes from the words meaning “great voice”, “great ruler” or “great spirit”.<sup>34</sup> For other tribes, the name Hawenniyo is used. The Creator is portrayed as a just, generous caretaker and teacher of the Iroquois people. Later on, Raweno and other spellings of the name, were used to refer to “God” in early editions of the Bible that were translated into Iroquois languages. Today, practicing Iroquois Christians consider God and the Creator to be one in the same.<sup>35</sup>

One of the many roles of the tribal medicine man, or shaman, in Native American culture was to retain and pass down oral traditions. A common perception pertaining to the image of a medicine man conjures images of a witchdoctor, with extravagant clothing, body paint or tattoos. This is prime example of how mass characterization of native cultures has resulted in inaccurate

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<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, 8

<sup>32</sup> Waterman, Denise. “The Story of Lacrosse.” Iroquois Nationals. Accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Waterman

<sup>34</sup> “Legendary Native Figures: Raweno.” Native-languages.org. 1998. Accessed June 1, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

depictions that are still used today. To understand native oratory practices, first the definition of medicine in native culture must be explained. Medicine does not simply mean prescribing herbs, liquids or other remedies for illnesses. The term has a more religious and spiritual meaning. Medicine men were considered individuals with special powers, often hidden, who had healing capabilities beyond that of the average human. One example is that it the belief that they had the capabilities to change the weather. The medicine men were an important part of the lacrosse ceremony. It was believed that shaman was able to prepare his team with the goal of preventing injuries and defeating the opponent. Medicine men were also feared by opponents because it was believed that they could bring harm or injury to an opponent.<sup>36</sup>

The Cherokee would have shaman take part in their pregame rituals. First, Cherokee players would scratch each other until they bled from a hundred or more wounds.<sup>37</sup> The Cherokee also performed a ritual of “going to water”. This ritual took place at the Oconaluftee River located in the Great Smokey Mountains of North Carolina.<sup>38</sup> Each player would hold their crosses in front of them. A medicine man would then proceed to pray over red and black beads. The red beads represented success and the black beads were the confusion of the opponent. The black beads were then buried, and the dirt was stamped to secure their burial. Finally, the ceremony ended with each player dipping their sticks in the water, and then touching it to their lips.<sup>39</sup>

Most popular sports in North America today such as hockey, football, basketball and baseball, were all developed after the arrival of European settlers. The exact origins of lacrosse

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<sup>36</sup> Vennum, Thomas. *Lacrosse Legends of the First Americans*. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2007. 4

<sup>37</sup> Weymand & Roberts, 8

<sup>38</sup> Vennum, 40

<sup>39</sup> Weymand & Roberts, 8

and other indigenous games are impossible to document because of the lack of written records. For centuries, traditions and histories were passed down by oral accounts and folklore from one generation to the next through tribal shaman or elders. Therefore, a great amount of Iroquois folklore and mythology have been lost over time, due to the lack of written documentation, assimilation into a western lifestyle and the suppression of indigenous culture by governments. As one Iroquois lacrosse historian stated “we do not wonder who invented lacrosse, or when and where; our ancestors have been playing the game for centuries – for the Creator.”<sup>40</sup> Fortunately, of the few myths that have survived, the origins of lacrosse is one of them.

After the arrival of Europeans, many oral traditions would continue in the Iroquois community, however these would begin to fade over the next three hundred years. Fortunately for modern researchers, a number of individuals also documented many of these stories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>41</sup> The lacrosse creation story begins with the myth of a great match played between the four-legged animals and the winged animals of the forest. As with many Indian myths and folklore, there can be slight variances in the stories. For this thesis, the following story is the official version adapted by the Iroquois Nationals, the team that represents the Haudenosaunee in international competition.

Captains of the four legged animals included the bear, who is strong and can overpower all opponents; the deer, who is quick and agile and finally; the turtle, who can withstand strong blows.<sup>42</sup> The captains of the winged animals were the owl, who has the ability for great vision

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<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, 8

<sup>41</sup> Researchers such as Arthur Parker documented and published Seneca myths and folklore in 1923. Also, the work of James Mooney, who specialized in Native Americans in the Midwest, most notably the Cherokee, must be acknowledged. Finally, the six volume study of American Indians by Henry Schoolcraft in the 1850’s may provide access to early research conducted.

<sup>42</sup> Waterman.

and the hawk and eagle, who both excel in swift and quick movements.<sup>43</sup> While the bird captains were in a tree preparing for the match, they noticed two small creatures climbing up the tree towards them. It was a squirrel and a mouse. The small animals asked if they could join the winged animal's team in the lacrosse match. The winged captains inquired "why did you not ask to play with the four legged animals?" The small animals replied that they had asked and were laughed at because they were so small. Upon hearing their story, the winged animals took pity on the mouse and squirrel, but were not sure how to include them on their team. After a discussion, it was decided that the squirrel and mouse needed to have wings made for them, but nobody was sure how to do so. Inspiration struck one of the birds who thought of the drums used in ceremonies. It was thought that pieces of the drum head could be used to fabricate wings. They cut the leather head and attached it to the legs of the mouse, creating the bat. The bat was tested by throwing the ball, and showed skill by dodging and consistently circling without letting the ball touching the ground. The bat proved that the winged animals had just gained an important team member. Unfortunately for the squirrel, all of the leather had been used to turn the mouse into the bat and there was no time to send for more. It was suggested that possibly the squirrel's skin could be stretched and manipulated to create wings. The birds used their beaks to tug and stretch the loose skin of the squirrel between the feet of its body. It stretched enough to mimic wings and therefore created the flying squirrel.<sup>44</sup>

The match began with a faceoff between the eagle and bear, and the flying squirrel caught the ball. The ball was then passed to the hawk, who prevented it from being possessed by the opposition, including the deer who was the fastest of the four legged animals. The eagle then

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<sup>43</sup> Waterman.

<sup>44</sup> Waterman.

faked a pass to the squirrel and passed it to the bat, who shot and scored the winning goal. The meaning of this story can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it shows that lacrosse is a game that is played for the enjoyment of the Creator and everyone who participates, no matter the size, strength or speed. Also it's easily inferred, when applied to the roles of the mouse and squirrel in the victory, that no matter how insignificant one may feel about the importance of an individual – that same individual could possess the qualities that may help you in the future.<sup>45</sup>

Being that lacrosse is so important to the culture of the Iroquois, matches were important events. A match of lacrosse would be called for a number of reasons. Lewis Henry Morgan, a pioneering American anthropologist in the mid nineteenth century, stated that the Iroquois League would host “national games”, during which lacrosse was the most important event. He said “[They] were not only played at their religious festivals, at which they often formed a conspicuous part of the entertainment, but special days were frequently set apart for their celebration.”<sup>46</sup> Matches would serve as major social gatherings, especially when games would be called between tribes that did not live in close proximity to each other. A match between distant tribes may happen only every few years, therefore a lacrosse match served as a catalyst for intertribal reunions. These lacrosse games provided individuals the opportunity to travel throughout the confederacy and interact with long lost friends and family members. Contemporarily, summer powwows are held throughout the Iroquois community as a way to strengthen their kinship, cultural identity and pride. For hundreds of years, lacrosse matches have provided the opportunity to express social alliances and kinship at the village, reservation and national levels.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Waterman

<sup>46</sup> Vennum, 35

<sup>47</sup> Vennum, 104

Today, the term the “medicine game” is associated with native lacrosse. This is attributed to oral stories affiliating the game with religious ceremonies and the overall health of the nation. In some instances, if there was an individual in the tribe who was sick, a medicine game would be called. The rationale behind this was that a high intensity match would please the Creator, and subsequently the sick would be healed of their illness. One of the earliest documentations of lacrosse made in 1636 by Father Jean de Brebeuf describes the medical powers associated with the game. He wrote:

There is a poor sick man, fevered of body and almost dying, and a miserable Sorcerer will order for him, as a cooling remedy, a game of crosse. Or the stick man himself, sometimes, will have dreamed that he must die unless the whole country shall play crosse for his health; and, no matter how littler may be his credit, you will see then in a beautiful field, Village contending against Villages, as to who will play crosse the better, and betting against one another Beaver robes and Porcelain collars, so as to excite greater interest...

...Sometimes, also, one of the Jugglers will say that the whole Country is sick, and he asks a game of crosse to heal it; no more needs to be said, it is published immediately everywhere; and all the Captains of each village give orders that all the young men do their duty in this respect, otherwise some great misfortune would befall the whole Country<sup>48</sup>

These medicine games would also be called annually with the hopes that the Creator would be pleased and grace good health and fortune to the entire tribe. Today, these annual medicine games are still played on Iroquois reservations in upstate New York. Most notably, medicine games are played in the autumn on the Tonawanda and Onondaga Reservations, but are closed to outsiders from participating or viewing.<sup>49</sup> In the spring of 2011, the medicine game at Onondaga had 80 players, with ages ranging from 10 years old up to 70. These players set up using traditional goals, which consists of two sticks posted in the ground six feet apart, on a field a

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<sup>48</sup> Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relation and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791* (New York: Pageant Book Co., 1959) 10:185,187

<sup>49</sup> Hill, Pete. "Pete Hill." Interview by author. May 13, 2015.

little less than a quarter mile long. All participants in the game use a wooden Iroquois made stick. The game begins with a ceremonial fire and smoking of tobacco. The Iroquois believe that these ceremonies tied with the smoke create a tunnel that directly connects players to the Creator in the sky.<sup>50</sup>

Medicine games are very spiritual to the Iroquois because they believe that when they are playing on earth to please the Creator, that there is also another medicine game taking place in the Creator's land with ancestors who have passed away.<sup>51</sup> Legend has it that a when the famous Seneca prophet Handsome Lake passed way, a great game of lacrosse was called in his honor.<sup>52</sup> Today, on the Cattaraugus Reservation south of the city of Buffalo, the annual Kevin White Memorial Lacrosse Tournament is played in April. Though the memorial is more symbolic than religious, it still acts as a celebration of lacrosse and its importance in Iroquois culture. The tournament is held at an arena on the Cattaraugus Reservation over a weekend, and many members of the Iroquois community throughout New York and Southern Ontario attend to watch local players compete. Teams are generally sponsored by tribes or native owned businesses, but many non-natives still participate. The arena even offers special seating on the glass reserved for tribal elders. The tournament also acts as a warm up for teams and players who participate in the upcoming summer box season. In a Mohawk explanation of the many purposes for lacrosse, Tewaaron also constituted a means for offering thanks to the Creator for having allowed an elder or medicine person to remain with the Nation, so that individual can continue to share wisdom with the younger generations.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Inside Lacrosse, prod. *My Hometown: Onondaga Reservation*. Inside Lacrosse, 2011. 5 April 2013. Web Video

<sup>51</sup> Deninger

<sup>52</sup> Wulff, Roger L. "Lacrosse Among the Seneca". *The Indian Historian*. 10. Spring 1977, 16

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell, 8



Iroquois religious beliefs can be seen in the pregame preparations for traditional lacrosse matches. Young players would train rigorously for the match in the belief that they were playing for the Creator, and therefore giving all of their effort. Physical training would begin weeks before the match and the players would follow strict diets. Unlike today, where highly competitive athletes watch their diets based on nutritional values, lacrosse players followed their diets for spiritual reasons. For instance, certain meats were not allowed to be eaten. During training, a player would not ingest rabbit meat because they feared that they may inherit the characteristics of the animal through the consumption of their flesh. It was believed that if a player did consume the flesh, they would become timid and easily alarmed. This would in turn affect the player's performance and make victory more difficult to achieve.<sup>54</sup> Other training activities that were encouraged and practiced included chasing deer, swimming against a current, and weight training by tying small bags of sand to ones ankles.

Another longstanding practice of players training for matches was refraining from physical contact with a woman. Tradition stated that a player should abstain from touching a woman for seven days before and seven days after a game. Just as with the consumption of certain meats, a violation of this rule was considered to make the players weak and unable to defeat their opponent. It was also believed that this weakness may make the player vulnerable to the powers of the shaman of the opposing team. Even if a woman was to touch a player's stick on the eve of the game, the stick would be rendered unfit for use in the match.<sup>55</sup> Glimpses of these traditional beliefs regarding women continue to this day. On the Tonawanda Seneca Reservation, near Akron, New York, lacrosse is played on an outdoor box. Women are not

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<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, 30

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, 30

allowed to go on the opposite side of the stands, where the player's benches and changing areas are located. Also, women are not supposed to step inside of the box onto the turf where the lacrosse matches are played. Though some feel that this practice is outdated, it is still followed except for rare occurrences.

Finally, lacrosse matches would be called to end disputes that could not be settled through political mediation. Hence where the popular, yet incorrect, nickname "little brother of war" derives from. This reference to war is attributed to the scheduling of matches when a conflict between two groups needed to be settled. It was believed that the Creator would be left with the decision as to which group was right in the dispute. Whoever was victorious in the game effectively won the dispute and both sides would accept the Creator's decision without question.<sup>56</sup>

A story presented by Richard Vennum in his 1994 book, *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*, describes a match that was called in 1797 due to conflict between the Senecas and Mohawks stemming from a "grave offense committed" by a Mohawk player during a lacrosse match:

After years of constant conflict and warfare during the French-Indian War and American Revolution, the Iroquois found themselves losing large amounts of their ancestral homelands. What land was not lost, was most likely destroyed. For the Mohawks, this was a dire problem due to their close proximity to white settlement in the east. The Seneca lands were farther west, and had very little white settlement until the early nineteenth century. During the time of peace after the American Revolution, the Mohawks and Seneca decided to hold a great lacrosse match

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<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, 34

as a gesture of their long friendship and joint struggle in protecting their lands from further intrusions by white settlers. The challenge for the game came from the Mohawk after meeting in their tribal council. Consistent with tradition, two runners were sent from the challenger, carrying a lacrosse stick painted red with feathers. The game would be held on Mohawk territory in the late summer of 1794. The two sides agreed upon a game to twenty points and that no more than a hundred players would be available to each team because of the fact that the Seneca outnumbered the Mohawks due to fatalities of war and relocation. Two important figures, John Brant of the Mohawk and Red Jacket of the Seneca, were archrivals and would play a heavy hand in this lacrosse match and the subsequent conflict that would follow.<sup>57</sup>

Word spread quickly among the Seneca villages and excitement rose with the opportunity to display national pride. As the match approached, families began to gather crafts and heirlooms that would be used to bet on the match, which was a strong tradition of indigenous games. Small village games served as tryouts to form the one hundred player national team. Three days before the match, a caravan of five hundred men, women and children departed from Buffalo Creek. They traveled as one unified group with the hopes of gaining a psychological advantage over the opponent. The famous Seneca leader Red Jacket, had departed early to travel to the cabin of Mary Jemison in the Genesee Valley, near present day Letchworth State Park. Red Jacket's visit to the Jemison cabin would plant the seed for the conflict that would arise later. During the visit, Red Jacket met Mary's oldest son, John. He was large, strong, and had an infamous temper but most importantly, Jemison was an excellent lacrosse player. Red Jacket recruited Jemison to play for the Seneca team, and it can be inferred that this was a ploy to

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<sup>57</sup> Vennum, 54

secure victory and embarrass his archrival John Brant.<sup>58</sup> As lacrosse matches served as social events, the Seneca and Mohawks socialized and mingled amongst the numbers of acquaintances who had not seen each other in years once they had arrived. They shared stories of war and the Mohawks showed off of their new settlement while the medicine men began to tend to the players. The following morning, a gunshot rang out as a sign for all to gather near the ball field. Four elders, two from each side, would serve as guards and the wagering began. Brant spoke at midfield before the game and initiated the toss-up to begin the match.

At the time of the “incident”, the score was 10-8 for Mohawks. John had lived up to Red Jacket’s expectations and had been antagonizing the Mohawks with his physical style of play. During a scrum for a loose ball, a Mohawk player crosschecked his stick into John Jemison’s face, knocking him unconscious and bloody. Immediately, all action ceased and the Seneca hastily consulted with their elders and sachems. The angry Seneca began to move towards the pile of wagered goods and began to retrieve their property. The basis of the conflict was that the Seneca felt that the deliberately injuring their player was a great offense to the match, but also nation – particularly because the Mohawk initiated the game. The Seneca quickly packed up and headed for their home lands.<sup>59</sup>

The thought of an outbreak of war between the Seneca and Mohawk was unfathomable due to the fragile nature of the Confederacy following decades of war. Any internal conflict between two tribes would further weaken the Haudenosaunee. After a long period of political moves and joint councils, a reconciliation was worked out and a peace pipe was smoked. Part of the reconciliation agreement over “the incident” would be the scheduling of another national

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<sup>58</sup> Vennum, 57

<sup>59</sup> Vennum, 63

game between the Seneca and Mohawk. The match would take place during the summer of 1797 and this time the Seneca would host. Once again, a great amount of betting took place and after three days of playing, the Seneca came out victorious. According to Iroquois beliefs, the outcome was more than enough to avenge what had taken place three years earlier.

The story of these lacrosse matches provides examples of two reasons why an intertribal match would be scheduled. The first was for social purposes because it brought Seneca and Mohawks together, who had been separated for years during the French-Indian War and American Revolution. The scheduling of the first lacrosse match signified an attempt for the Iroquois to return to normal life, despite the changes that had taken place as a result of these wars. The second match serves as an example of a match providing a way to settle a dispute while avoiding war. In Vennum's story, Red Jacket wanted to use the lacrosse incident as a reason to begin a war with the Mohawks, and his rival Brant. Instead, a lacrosse match would settle the dispute, with the blessing of the Creator granting victory in the game. The historical accuracy of this series of events provides a glimpse into the problems that may arise in the study of Native American history. The lack of written accounts pertaining to Native American events, including these lacrosse matches and the controversy that surrounded them causes contemporary researchers to draw their own narratives. As for Richard Vennum, he acknowledges that this story, and others presented in his book, are considered fiction because he had to create much of the narrative and details himself, although presumably based on legends or oral traditions.<sup>60</sup>

As the game of lacrosse is sacred to the Iroquois, the equipment used in the game has created ties to their ancestors. The wooden stick, or crosse, has become the symbol of the

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<sup>60</sup> Vennum, 383. Contact has been attempted to reach Richard Vennum, Jr. regarding the historical accuracy of this story. It has gone unanswered.

heritage of Native American lacrosse. Created centuries ago, the wooden crosse has continued to develop throughout the Anglo-American adaption of the sport and well into the mid twentieth century. The name “lacrosse” stems from an account of Father Jean de Brebeuf in 1636 in which he compares the stick to a bishop’s crosier while he watched a match of Hurons at present day Thunder Bay near Midland, Ontario.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, he made no mention of the techniques used or gameplay, but this was the first mention of lacrosse by a European and the equipment that was used. The sticks used in lacrosse varied depending on region and tribe. Some tribes, most notably in the Southeast and Midwest, played lacrosse with two small sticks. But, the lacrosse stick most are familiar with today evolved from the Iroquois crosse. Until the introduction of synthetic sticks, made out of metal shafts and plastic heads in the 1970’s, the wooden Iroquois stick was the model used for over a century by white players. Although the diverse styles of sticks were used in the pre-European era, this paper will focus on the construction and history attributed to the Iroquois lacrosse stick.

For Iroquois men, the lacrosse stick is one of their most prized possessions. Many children are given their first stick at birth and learn to catch and throw at the same time they are learning to walk and talk. When many former players have passed away, their coveted sticks are placed in their caskets. The reason for this is the Iroquois belief that the game continues in the spirit world, where men will go on to play with their ancestors.<sup>62</sup> Unlike contemporary equipment, a wooden lacrosse stick is a work of fine craftsmanship and to some, a piece of art. From the process of aging and bending the wood, to the intricate weaving of the leather to form the netting, there is no part of this process that can be duplicated by machinery. These wooden

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<sup>61</sup> Weymand, 5

<sup>62</sup> Hsu, Charlotte. "The Stick Maker: The Soul of Lacrosse." The Buffalo Story Project. April 19, 2012. Accessed July 13, 2015.

sticks have evolved over time, to compensate for more accurate passing and faster shots, but they are still fairly close to what the Iroquois would have played with in the period prior to the arrival of Europeans.

Henry Lewis Morgan noted that the equipment used by the Iroquois in recent centuries had evolved from the sticks and balls that were used in “ancient times”. In antiquity, a lacrosse stick was made out of a single piece of wood, with no netting<sup>63</sup>. Also, a ball of knot was used in matches, as the ball, which later would be made out of deer skin. Mrs. Harriet Converse also wrote about the ancient wooden bat and ball style of lacrosse that would have been played with these single wood crosses in a paper on the Seneca Indians in 1895.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, sticks remained a single piece of curved wood, however, leather netting was incorporated.<sup>65</sup>

The closest comparison that early Europeans could make of crosses were that they had a striking similarity to tennis racquets, because of the webbing. An interview from the 1970s with an unknown Seneca elder states that they had been instances of the stick’s webbing had been as tight as a tennis racquet. This would alter game play significantly compared to what we are familiar with today because the player would then be forced to stop the ball with the stick, throw the ball in the air, and hit it to a teammate or through the goal, similar to the Gaelic game of hurling.<sup>66</sup> Though there are no records of the “batting” style lacrosse from antiquity or the type of game mentioned in Wulff’s article in the 1970s, it can be assumed that the playing style mentioned by the Seneca elder over fifty years ago would have been similar to the ancient game.

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<sup>63</sup> Morgan, Lewis Henry, and Herbert Marshall Lloyd (ed. 1901.) *League of the Ho-De-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company. 1901, 287

<sup>64</sup> Weyand, 3

<sup>65</sup> Morgan, 287

<sup>66</sup> Wulff, 16

According to Richard Vennum, the oldest known lacrosse stick was crafted from the Cayuga in Southern Ontario. Information dates the creation of this stick to 1845, or potentially before then.<sup>67</sup> The stick is housed in the archives of the University of Pennsylvania and shows no wear from being used in gameplay. Vennum believes that the stick had some sort of significance, whether symbolic or religious, due to its lack of use and intricate carving seen on the handle, which is not seen in sticks used in matches. These ceremonial crosses are similar to the existence of ancient swords, shields and armor seen in other cultures around the world. Just as with the Cayuga stick, these objects were clearly ceremonial and not designed for use in battle.

For the Iroquois, the stick is an important part of the ceremony of playing lacrosse. In recent years, the traditional wooden stick has become a symbol of Iroquois heritage and pride. Jeremy Thompson, an Onondaga and professional lacrosse player, explains that “The wooden lacrosse stick is essential. It holds the spirit of the tree, connecting players with Mother Earth in a way that plastic sticks can’t.”<sup>68</sup> The most famous wooden lacrosse stick maker today, Alfred Jacques, states that “you can’t play the traditional game without a wooden stick... It’s part of [our] religion... You have to keep making the sticks, it’s part of the medicine. The medicine is all encompassing for all in the nation and it’s a part of this game.”<sup>69</sup>

The creation of a traditional lacrosse stick is a time-consuming and labor-intensive craft. After being cut, the wood must be aged. The wood is then steamed so it is softened and is then bent around brackets to give it its curved shape. The wood ages once again with a wire or string to prevent the wood from changing shape or losing its curve. After time is allocated for the

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<sup>67</sup> Vennum, ix

<sup>68</sup> Hsu

<sup>69</sup> Native American Lacrosse Stick Maker Visits RIT. Performed by Alfred Jacques. USA, 2013. Film.



wood to be conditioned, the leather webbing is strung by hand. The whole process can take over a year from when the tree is cut to when the stick can be laced. There is no universal way to string a lacrosse stick. The netting of modern sticks are made out of nylon, which lasts longer than leather because it does not need to be conditioned. The nylon is also better for play in wet conditions, because it will not weaken and tighten up as it dries. Today, a fairly popular style of stringing among experienced players called the traditional pocket. This style of stringing incorporates both nylon and leather shooting strings. The pocket itself is where the ball generally rests. The location of a pocket depends on the flight of trajectory a player follows when they are passing or taking a shot. It is easy for an experienced player to tell the difference between their stick and the stick of another based on the way it throws.

After the adaption of the sport by white Canadians and Americans in the late nineteenth century, the wooden lacrosse stick would still be used until the introduction of synthetic sticks made of metal shafts and plastic heads in the 1970's. Later on, the use of leather for the webbing would be replaced by other synthetic stringing material. Modern methods would last longer and not deteriorate in the rain. It must be noted that despite the conversion to sticks made from modern synthetic materials in the past thirty years, a lacrosse stick still needs to be strung by hand. Modern technology has not been able to design a machine that can successfully weave a lacrosse head. Some of the best players in the world still testify that a traditional pocket, strung using leather, is the best at handling a ball. The chronological history of the wooden stick will be presented throughout this paper due to its importance in Iroquois lacrosse.

The remaining chapters of this thesis focus on the evolution of Iroquois lacrosse, beginning with the adaptation and creation of set rules by Victorian Canadians, to the exclusions of native players under the cover that they were professionals. Then the use of native lacrosse

for entertainment purposes for white audiences will be examined. Most importantly the final chapter will show that despite decades of obstacles and discrimination, native lacrosse adapted and would eventually thrive. Over a century and a half, the originators of this great sport would be excluded from participating in matches against whites for a number of reasons. Lacrosse is a prime example of Native Americans holding onto a piece of their cultural heritage that would later become an important part of contemporary American and Canadian society.

### **Chapter III**

#### *The Adaption of Iroquois Lacrosse Following the Modernization of the Game in the Late Nineteenth Century*

Following the arrival of Europeans to the North American continent, the types of relationships that were formed between the eastern tribes and the French and British during colonialism differed greatly. In the case of the French, the first contact with natives was made by explorers, representatives of the French government, and most notably, missionaries in the regions of present upstate New York, Quebec and Ontario. In the sense of numbers, there would be far less French immigrants to the New World than English settlements that would soon be established to the south of French territory. Despite the perception that Indians were primitive, early French settlers also felt that they were worthy companions and that good relations were necessary for successful settlement of the New World. The French crown also recognized native rights to self-determination. Fur trade was crucial to the formation of this relationship and the indigenous people of this area would play a key role. The French settlements were usually in sparsely populated areas away from the natives, and exploration was done with the consent and assistance of local guides. A result of this mutually beneficial relationship was French traders intermarrying with their native neighbors.

The relationships with local natives along the eastern Atlantic coast with British settlers were different. First, unlike the French who were traders, the majority of English settlers were either agricultural planters or religious refugees. Mostly in the southern colonies, the planters wanted to transform the land into farming for cash crops such as tobacco, indigo and rice. From their point of view, the indigenous inhabitants of these potential farm lands stood in their way of settling and farming the land, hindering economic progress. To the north, the Puritans hoped to

recreate an Old World society adjusted to their religious ideals. Though early encounters varied depending on unique circumstances, the majority of the English viewed the natives as barbaric and another one of the obstacles standing in front of settlement of the eastern wilderness. This was seen in the northeastern United States, where British settlements were located in closer proximity to native tribes compared to the French in Canada.<sup>70</sup>

The outbreak of the French-Indian (Seven Year's) War in 1754 pitted not only the French versus the British for control of the eastern frontier, it also turned the forced the hand of the Iroquois Confederacy to align with one European power, which ended their ability to play the French and British against one another diplomatically, as one French officer said to a group of Oneida and Onondagas "You pretend to be friends of the French and of the English, in order to obtain what you want from both sides, which makes you invent lies that an upright man would never think of."<sup>71</sup> After the British victory, the Iroquois hoped that their support during the war would force the hand of the British in assisting the ongoing problem of westward white expansion onto their ancestral lands. The British crown would attempt to settle this with the ill-fated Proclamation of 1763, in which no settlement was allowed west of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, the law was a symbolic gesture, and it was not respected by settlers or enforced by the colonial government.

The following decades would find the Iroquois caught in another conflict, the American Revolution. All of the tribes of the Confederacy would align with the British, except the Oneida. This would be the first time recorded that the Confederacy's uniform political stance was broken.

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<sup>70</sup> Fisher, 19

<sup>71</sup> Shannon, Timothy J. *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier*. New York: Viking, 2008. 149

<sup>72</sup> MacLeitch, Gail D. 2011. *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 181

After the American victory, many Iroquois would resettle in British Canada.<sup>73</sup> The years following the American Revolution would result in rapid white settlement of upstate New York, and therefore the destruction of ancestral lands and forcing the Iroquois onto reservations and other designated areas. This would result in a drastic decrease in intertribal ties and relations among the Iroquois. Additionally, the game of lacrosse would suffer. Games would not be called to settle territorial disputes, because there was no long any territory to dispute amongst themselves over. Attempts at intertribal games such as the story of the Mohawk-Seneca match of 1794 presented in the previous chapter were aimed at increasing intertribal relation and a return to “normal” life after many years of war and the loss of their lands.<sup>74</sup>

Decades of turbulence would leave the Iroquois bruised and battered by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This period would be viewed as the beginning of the end for the North American Indian in the eyes of European settlers. Manifest Destiny and increased immigration from Europe would result in decades of greater losses of indigenous lands throughout the continent. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, legislation passed by both the governments of Canada and the United States directed at the assimilation of Natives would result in the removal of indigenous peoples from their territories and most importantly – affect their cultures.

The adaption of lacrosse in the mid nineteenth century by Victorian Canadians in Montreal and the following decades provides a microcosm of the issues and hurdles that Native Americans faced. But unlike many customs which would fade as older generations passed on, lacrosse would not only survive, but would eventually become one of the Haudenosaunee’s

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<sup>73</sup> Shannon, 198

<sup>74</sup> Vennum, 54

greatest contributions to modern culture. Discrimination, exclusion and racism would no cease Iroquois lacrosse. Instead, prides for their sacred game and the steadfastness of many individuals over the years allowed lacrosse to remain a central part of native culture for one hundred and fifty years.

There are differences between Native American and white relationships in lacrosse when comparing the United States and Canada. In the United States, many native ball games quickly died due to white gambling and the forced removal from their ancestral territories. The period of Indian Removal in 1830-1838 would lead to the death of indigenous lacrosse in the southeastern United States. In New England and the Mid-Atlantic, the native population have been long removed from living in close proximity to whites. This buffer aided the Anglo-American perception of Native Americans as barbaric and primitive. Due to indigenous peoples being out of sight, and out of mind in this region, their culture was not respected, and were conceptualized to be of a lower race. For instance, a Choctaw ball game was exhibited in Cincinnati in 1868, and the crowd greeted the native participants with laughter.<sup>75</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed and hostile tribes of the western frontier were defeated, the conceptions that Indians were no longer a threat to the nation only enhanced beliefs of native inferiority.

In Canada, the British would inherit the colonial French policy of tolerance for indigenous cultures early on.<sup>76</sup> Following the American Revolution, Mohawks and smaller numbers of the Cayuga and Oneida would settle near the border, often near white towns and cities such as Akwesanse, which straddles western Ontario, northern New York and southern Quebec. Along with this migration, the Mohawks brought lacrosse. Early white spectatorship of

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<sup>75</sup> Fisher, 24

<sup>76</sup> Fisher, 23

matches is known, but there is little documentation of any participation. Fortunately for lacrosse enthusiasts, the white attitudes regarding the Mohawk's way of life allowed for the long-term survival of the game. As Donald Fisher stated in *Lacrosse*, "If the French had treated the native people as bad as the English in Massachusetts or Virginia, the Iroquois ball game would have been expunged."<sup>77</sup> Early Anglo-Canadians would view Indians as the forbearers of their own civilization, but Americans only understood indigenous people within the context of savages who were hindering Manifest Destiny.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike the story of the beginning of Iroquois lacrosse, the adaption of lacrosse by Anglo-Canadians and its rapid rise to popularity at the time of Confederation are well documented. The first recorded match between Indians and whites had taken place on August 29, 1844 in Montreal. Interracial matches were sporadic until the formation of the Montreal Lacrosse Club in 1856. This is where a secularized version of the sport was being adopted by whites from Mohawks who had converted to Christianity in Saint Regis and Caughnawaga. These new players used generally larger sticks than their Mohawk counterparts. They also employed a new type of gameplay that emphasized passing and teamwork, but still would use the "mass play" style that had been described in early accounts of Indian lacrosse. Soon after, other clubs would begin to form and would also play against their Mohawk neighbors, who were always the victors. Often times this would lead to white players becoming frustrated and physical confrontations were common. In a July 1860 match in which a fight broke out, it was documented that "We are sorry to see one of the Montreal players strike on the Indians with his crosse. Doubtless the gentleman lost his temper in a rough tumble, but nevertheless it was not the

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<sup>77</sup> Fisher, 23

<sup>78</sup> Fisher, 23

fault of the Indian.”<sup>79</sup> During these early years, there were no set rules. Similar to the tradition in Iroquois matches, rules and the field dimensions were mutually agreed upon beforehand.

The summer of 1860 would be an eventful time for the growth of lacrosse in Canada. First the Prince of Wales visited Montreal in August. Here a “Grand Display of Indian Games” would take place – which included lacrosse matches. First there was a match between the ancient rivals, the Mohawks and Algonquins. There would also be an interracial match with against a white team. In September of that year, George Beers, a Montreal dentist who penned a pamphlet of set rules that would lead to his titles “the father of modern lacrosse.”<sup>80</sup> Most notably in these rules, he drastically shortened the field. Dimensions were limited to not exceed one-half mile because he felt that the traditional Iroquois dimensions were too long. In the years following, there would be three lacrosse exhibition tours of the British Isles between 1876 and 1883 and showcase Mohawk teams versus whites. It was noted that the white teams would wear dull uniforms as the Indians donned bright, extravagant garbs for the purpose of them being the focal point and catch the spectator’s attention. Symbolically, watching whites and Indian players battle one another allowed the spectators to see a representation of the conquest that had been taking place in the New World. After the matches, the Mohawks would pledge their loyalty to the crown. On one occasion, the team received autographed pictures of Queen Victoria at a private game that was held at Windsor Castle.<sup>81</sup>

In 1869, Beers published his book *Lacrosse: The National Game of Canada*. In this work, Beers promoted the game by highlighting the virtues of the game’s indigenous roots. He wrote, “Long, long after the romantic ‘sons of the forest’ have passed away, long, long after their

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<sup>79</sup> Fisher, 25

<sup>80</sup> “Death of Noted Lacrosse Player.” *New York Times*, January 6, 1901. Accessed January 28, 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Fisher, 30



sun sinks in the west to rise no more, lacrosse will remind the pale-faces of Canada of the noble Indians that once lorded it over this continent.”<sup>82</sup> According to Beers, lacrosse should be viewed as a symbolic torch passed from the noble savages of primitive Canada to the modern, progressive gentlemen of a nation-state.<sup>83</sup> In the time following the birth of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1876, lacrosse was quickly being adapted by men throughout the nation. Clubs in the Montreal area continued to form, but clubs also began to pop up in other cities such as Ottawa and Toronto. The rapid growth of lacrosse in Victorian Canada served the function of being a unifying symbol for forging a national identity for the young nation. Here, Canadians were not playing popular British sports such as rounders or football (soccer) but they were adapting a game that was solely North American. Beers believed that by transforming the Mohawk ball game into a “rational” sport, with distinct “primitive” qualities, lacrosse could be made to benefit the “civilized” white culture.<sup>84</sup> Though Beers accepted the idea of the dying noble savage which was popular for the time period, Native American lacrosse skills and athleticism served as the gold standard in which white players hoped to become. Eventually after increased improvement of white skills, and the subsequent exclusion of native players, observers concluded that gameplay had surpassed that of their indigenous mentors. For example, in a match between the Montreal L.C. and Ottawa L.C., the Montreal press commented that the play of the former “could not be excelled by the most practiced Indians.”<sup>85</sup>

In the years following rapid adaption of lacrosse by whites, rules were invented that would aim to help the success of white teams in matches versus Indians. As mentioned, field dimensions were drastically shortened compared to the traditional Iroquois size and whites began

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<sup>82</sup> Fisher, 30

<sup>83</sup> Fisher, 30

<sup>84</sup> Fisher, 26

<sup>85</sup> Fisher, 27

to emphasize teamwork, passing, and finesse over the brute force and mass play that was used in the Iroquois style of gameplay. These shorter dimensions would aid the technical play of white teams and curtail practices of sprinting long distances that were used by native teams to exhaust their opponents. Beers himself admitted that a team of white could not defeat Indians using their traditional style. He said, “The whites have only ever beaten the Indians because they played on smaller field than the latter are accustomed to; and there is no doubt but that if the red skins had goals a half mile apart, the white would seldom, if ever, get a chance to touch the ball.”<sup>86</sup> For a Victorian gentleman, it must have been embarrassing to be defeated on a regular basis by members of a race they viewed as inferior and primitive. Historians such as Don Fisher felt the way that Beers refined the game by implementing smaller field to negate native running tactics ironically paralleled American and Canadian government policies which limited native autonomy by confining Indians onto reservations.<sup>87</sup> Beers’ ideals of racial superiority over the Iroquois are echoed throughout his book. He states, “The present game, improved and reduced to rule by the whites, employs the greatest combination of physical and mental activity white men can sustain in recreation is as much superior to the original as civilization is to barbarism, baseball as to its old English parents of rounds, or a pretty Canadian girl to any uncultivated squaw.”<sup>88</sup> But what will be seen throughout the next one hundred and fifty years is that Native Americans find a way to adapt to the hurdles placed in their way to keep their sport a part of their cultural identity.

As lacrosse grew rapidly in Canada, Beers formed the National Lacrosse Association (NLA) as the first governing body of the sport. To put a chronological context on the

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<sup>86</sup> Beers, 9

<sup>87</sup> Fisher, 28

<sup>88</sup> Beers, 49-50

establishment of the NLA, it preceded the National League of Baseball by nine years. The NLB would become the National League in Major League Baseball and it is the world's oldest current professional sports league. The Montreal Gazette wrote that, "...It now devolves upon the educated and civilized white man to systemize and subject to laws this hereditary but hitherto traditional sport of the sons of the forest."<sup>89</sup> As Beers always acknowledged the importance of the indigenous origins of the game, Native American representatives were invited to the association, but would only play a marginal role. Prior to the formation of the NLA in 1867, the main differences between white and Indian players were social class and skill level. Due to the low socio economic status of Native Americans, paying for Native players to boost a team's skillset was regarded as a problem amongst the Anglos in the early period of organized Canadian lacrosse.<sup>90</sup>

By the 1880's interest in lacrosse had grown in the Montreal area. In 1884, there were fifty four clubs, and a large number of these were located in Ontario, an increase from twenty seven clubs only twenty years earlier.<sup>91</sup> Beers' dream of lacrosse becoming the national sport of Canada was becoming a reality. Unfortunately, there were some negative effects that were the result of the sport's growing popularity. First, Beers' idea of an amateur, gentlemanly game was quickly overshadowed by instances of physical confrontation on and off the field, and the fact that lacrosse was becoming a popular event for gambling. Intense rivalries began to develop, most notably between clubs from Toronto and Montreal on national level, and teams in their respected cities. These rivalries between clubs were not only based upon victory in athletics, but often pitted classes against one another.<sup>92</sup> For example,

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<sup>89</sup> Fisher, 29

<sup>90</sup> Fisher, 87

<sup>91</sup> Metcalfe, 185

<sup>92</sup> Metcalfe, 185

the Montreal LC, which Beers helped establish, was made up of players from an upper middle class, Protestant background. Their crosstown rivals, the Montreal Shamrocks, was a team comprised of individuals from the city's blue collar, Irish Catholic neighborhoods, and a number of hired native players. The spread of the sport to in the 1870's to Toronto and the establishment of the Toronto L.C. would lead to a three way rivalry between these clubs, who were also the most influential and successful in the nation. Disputes over championships, officiating and the continued outbreak of violence in matches would pit the clubs against one another.

The conclusion drawn by white lacrosse enthusiasts was that many of the players were simply not gentlemen, and were unfit from formal competition. This attitude was especially directed at the presence of Native American players, who played for money, and were believed to be incapable of becoming gentlemen themselves due to their racial inferiority.<sup>93</sup> To curtail the violence, stemming from Native players, the Shamrock's rough play, and the emphasis on winning that was believed to stem from professional hired players, the NLA changed its name to the National *Amateur Lacrosse* Association. Since it was universally agreed that Native Americans were the best players, in September 1868, the NALA adopted a rule that no white club could feature an Indian unless the opposition agreed.<sup>94</sup> This was justified as a way to curtail violence, but it was clearly implemented with the intention to exclude Native Americans and level out the playing field amongst the white players. Roughly during this time period, a Caughanawaga chief rebutted to Beers stating, "You smash heads, cut hands, make blood. We play all day; *no hurt, except when drunk.*"<sup>95</sup> In May 1876, the

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<sup>93</sup> Metcalfe, 195

<sup>94</sup> Fisher, 37

<sup>95</sup> Fisher, 37

association would adopt rigid distinctions between what was considered to be amateur and professional. The constitution of the organization was amended to say “No club in the Association shall play for money except with Indians. Any club playing for money (except as aforesaid) shall be suspended from membership in the Association.”<sup>96</sup> But with the precedent that teams must mutually agree upon having native players on their roster prior to a game, the usual circumstances was that teams would not allow the hiring of Iroquois players. Aside from exhibition matches against white teams, natives were excluded from taking part in organized competition for a sport they created. As a longtime Mohawk stick maker and player Frank Benedict stated:

“They use that as a leverage to ban the best Indian player out of competition. They classified them as professionals. Back in those days, what type of employment did the native or Indian have? They had no means of salary or creating any wages for them to be able to participate or compete in organized lacrosse, so they had to receive funds from somebody or somewhere to be able to play. All this was used against them”<sup>97</sup>

In the twenty years following the expulsion of Native Americans in the NALA, clashes between clubs created a scenario of various associations and clubs being formed and folding, disputes over championships, continued outbreak of violence at matches, as well as ongoing division regarding what it was considered to be amateur. All of these factors would lead to lacrosse’s fall in popularity, ultimately making it a fringe sport in Canada by the outbreak of WWI.<sup>98</sup>

A repeated scenario that will be shown throughout the modern history of lacrosse is that Native Americans would find ways around the hurdles set in front of them. Following exclusion from formal amateur competition in Canada, indigenous players and teams found another way to play the game they loved and also profit from it. This would be through tours of native teams

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<sup>96</sup> Fisher, 38

<sup>97</sup> Vennum, 274

<sup>98</sup> Fisher, 43

that would travel and exhibit games against other Native Americans, or as stated in the bylaws of the NALA, play against white teams for a fee. Mohawk Indians from Saint Regis and Caughnawaga created a traveling entertainment industry that showcased lacrosse games, traditional dancing and the sale of traditional crafts and goods.<sup>99</sup> One newspaper wrote that accounted for an upcoming Onondaga-Oneida match in 1878 wrote, “There will be a green corn dance, with the Indians in paint and feathers, and with all the paraphernalia that belongs to such exhibitions. They will perform the dances strictly according to the ancient custom.”<sup>100</sup> Events such as this drew fairly large crowds due to the interest generated based on the popular assumption that the American Indian would become “extinct” in the upcoming generation, and that traditions such as these would also die. What should be emphasized is that natives of this era were able to capitalize financially on white’s interest in their “primitive” culture. These events also provided many natives the opportunity to travel off of the reservations that they were forced to move onto decades earlier. As Fisher wrote:

“If white gentlemen and their ladies agreed to pay the expenses of traveling Mohawk teams to demonstrate their “noble” skills, then these Iroquois were wiling accomplices by capitalizing on white misconceptions of their people. The Iroquois desire to travel hundreds of miles to play signals their own attempt to thwart complete white takeover of their ancestors’ game. The Indians realized that if they were to participate in lacrosse and retain any personal authority over their sports, they would have to do so in a manner that affluent white athletes and audiences would accept.”<sup>101</sup>

The traveling shows in the northeast, and the immigration of Canadians to the east coast of the United States in the late nineteenth century would plant the seeds of traditional field lacrosse hotbeds in America. It is documented that Mohawks showcased lacrosse in Brooklyn as early as 1863.<sup>102</sup> By the turn of the century, lacrosse had become a popular activity amongst the

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<sup>99</sup> Fisher, 53

<sup>100</sup> Fisher, 57

<sup>101</sup> Fisher, 62

<sup>102</sup> Fisher, 53

social elite in cities such as Boston and New York. Iroquois teams at this time would also tour various cities in upstate New York such as Buffalo, Oswego and Syracuse. In the 1870's the Onondaga, Seneca and Oneida all staged matches, and charging admission of thirty five cents, at the Lakeside Park in Geddes, just north of Syracuse.<sup>103</sup> In 1878 a team of Caughnawaga accompanied George Beers to New York City and met with Mayor Smith Ely, Jr. A few notable thing happened once the team arrived at City Hall that echoed the perceptions of natives in the minds of whites during this time period. The team did have a number of mixed race players and the men wore their hair as whites. However, that did not stop the inaccurate depictions of them and their culture by the press. The *New York World* wrote that "...All had their faces streaked with blue or red paint or spotted with black patches."<sup>104</sup> The mayor even commented that "he was pleased to see before him men who were so simple, innocent and strong," and that, "the Indians in Canada were much better off now that they been adopted by the whites of Canada."<sup>105</sup>

Despite the racial discrimination that was placed upon Native Americans, there were instances of whites appreciating the native's roots of the game in these touring matches. Following a match that in 1885, a reporter for the *New York Times* noted that after a native team was trailing in a match that "they brought out all of their clever tricks of dodging, passing, bumping, and knocking, which were applauded."<sup>106</sup> After one match at the NY Athletic Club, the Indians coached a game composed of two white teams. Eventually three native players joined each side. Usually white clubs would be tutored by a Canadian, but this provides an instance of Native Americans teaching whites how to play lacrosse in the United States.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Fisher, 57

<sup>104</sup> Fisher, 58

<sup>105</sup> Fisher, 58

<sup>106</sup> "A Splendid Game of Lacrosse." *New York Times*, July 24, 1884. Accessed March 17, 2016

<sup>107</sup> Fisher, 59

Unfortunately for these traveling Iroquois teams of the late nineteenth century, most were affected by the need of whites to capitalize off of shows, incorporating entertainment elements that misrepresented native culture knowing that it would draw large crowds. Their competition would be shows funded by white entrepreneurs that became popular late in the nineteenth century. As early as 1872, Sidney Barnett, a museum operator in Niagara Falls, Ontario, advertised an event called “The Grand Buffalo Hunt at Niagara Falls” that included the famous western frontier celebrity, Wild Bill Hickok. The event turned out to be a colossal failure for Barnett and spectators were disappointed with the program. But, due to the US Bureau of Indian Affairs denying Barnett’s attempts to import Pawnee Indians from Oklahoma to wrangle the bison, lacrosse matches between Cayuga and Tuscarora teams were included in the events instead.<sup>108</sup> Unlike the Iroquois organized shows which were an accurate depiction of their respected cultures, these new shows fed into the American perception which was based off of ethnic stereotypes. The organizers did this by hiring Native Americans to portray the "wild" frontier of the west through clashes between settlers completing Manifest Destiny and the barbaric Indians who needed to be removed and "Americanized". The most famous of these shows was Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, which toured from 1882 until 1913. These shows often concluded with a mythical depiction of Custer's Last Stand, reaffirming the victory of civilization conquering the barbarism that was the North American Indian. Inevitably these shows drew larger crowds and were more popular than the traveling Iroquois shows, and led to reduced interest in touring lacrosse teams.

One specific event in which the exhibition of Native American lacrosse was used as an image to showcase the connection of the upper class sport to its indigenous roots was the 1901

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<sup>108</sup> Joseph G. Rosa, “Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody and the Grand Buffalo Hunt at Niagara Falls,” *Nebraska History* 86 (2005): 14-25



Pan-Am Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Over the first week of July, a tournament was held in the exposition's stadium, which was referred to as the "Canadian-American Championship" by exposition's organizers. There were six teams that played, four of them being exclusively white. These teams were the Toronto Lacrosse Club - "the Torontos," the Ottawa Capitols, the Rochester Rangers and the Crescent Athletic Club of Brooklyn, which one of the first clubs in the United States to play lacrosse. The other two teams were made up of local Seneca Indians, one from the Cattaraugus Reservation to the south of the city, which was nicknamed the "Pagans" and the other from the Tonawanda Reservation to the east, nicknamed the "Senecas."<sup>109</sup>

The tournament would end with Ottawa defeating Crescent, however the event was ironically considered the first "Canadian-American Championship." A question to consider is how the Seneca teams taking part in this tournament would be categorized? Both reservations were located in the United States, but there were a number of Seneca also living on the Six Nations reserve in Ontario by this time. Would a white audience of this time period consider that these Seneca teams represented the United States if they would have won the tournament? One would assume that they would not. Labeling one of the teams as the "pagans" and the fact that three of the other four clubs in participation were arguably the best in the sport, it is safe to assume that once again, the Native teams were brought in for entertainment purposes. But the lacrosse tournament was by far one of the most politically correct instances of providing glimpses of indigenous people at the exposition.

Nearly a mile from the stadium, one of the attractions located on the midway of the expo was the Indian Congress and Village. This exhibit presented indigenous peoples from forty two North American tribes, including the infamous Geronimo, who was an eighty-eight year old

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<sup>109</sup> "Indians at Lacrosse: Red Men's Great Sport." *The Buffalo Courier* 2 July 1901: 12 Microform. *Buffalo Courier-Express Library*, 1982.

prisoner of the U.S. government. The Indian Village was wrought with ethnic and racial stereotypes, feeding into the image of the Native American savagery. These type of midway shows began with the Paris World's Fair in 1889 and were expanded to the Chicago event in 1893. The Pan-American theme of human progress from "savage" to "civilized" reinforced negative attitudes towards people of color. These perceptions were also related to the modernist notions that drove the Exposition: everything western and industrial was good; all else was inferior.<sup>110</sup> A daily "battle" put on between the Indians and the U.S. Army in the expo's stadium, echoes this ideology. In his introduction to the Historical Biography and Libretto of the Indian Congress, Frederick T. Cummins writes of the Native participants:

Most visitors to the Midway attraction were aware that the Native Americans living in these "primitive ways" were indeed, performing. Although the promotion of such stereotypes and generalizations would be considered offensive today, the concessionaires were giving the paying public of 1901 what they wanted. Indeed, many paying customers were probably disappointed to find that in reality, the "savages" they encountered were really all that different than themselves.<sup>111</sup>

These attractions were not only limited to Native Americans. Other attractions that fed into racial and ethnic stereotypes for the predominantly white audience were the "Darkest Africa," which recruited sixty two people from thirty five tribe to be the "fascinating but dangerous" people of the continent, "The Beautiful Orient," which recreated the streets of Cairo, "Phillipine Village," showcasing the new colonial trophy from the Spanish-American War, and "Esquimaux" which was championed by President William McKinley for its display of Inuits. African Americans were not excluded from this inaccurate depiction of non-white people. An exhibit called "The Old Plantation," had African Americans on display recreating the image of

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<sup>110</sup> Leary, Thomas and Elizabeth Sholes. *Images of America: Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition*. 1998. Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, 95.

<sup>111</sup> University at Buffalo Libraries: Pan-American Exposition of 1901. Accessed January, 21, 2016.

the "good negroes" with characters such as Old Laughing Ben reinforced the resurgence of racial discrimination that had been observed in the nation since the end of the Civil War. Only the Japanese were presented as equals at their attraction.<sup>112</sup>

Newspaper accounts of the tournament once again echoed the racial opinions of the Iroquois and their version of lacrosse. An account written for the opening match between the two Seneca teams on July 2nd describes the type of match that is echoed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by white observers. The writer describes the highly entertaining and physical nature of the match, stating "Many times the copper skinned players were stretched on the ground from a misdirected whack of the bats."<sup>113</sup> Again, to white observers, the Iroquois style of play would seem clustered and physical, compared to the civilized and scientific nature of gameplay after its modernization. The same account also claims that "Neither team displayed a great amount of science. Their throws were not accurate, and the sprinting of the Indians was not brilliant."<sup>114</sup> The Pagans would play a game later against Crescent and lose by a score of 4-2, though the players were accused of cheating. The team was accused of combining the best players of the two Seneca teams in hopes of defeating the highly skilled Crescents by providing false names.<sup>115</sup> The tournament was well attended and the championship match enjoyed one of the attendances in the Exposition's stadium up to that point.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Iroquois were banned from competing in the Canadian athletic associations and their traveling shows were being undercut by the likes of Buffalo Bill Cody. This resulted in the retreat of many Iroquois to their respective reservations,

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<sup>112</sup> Leary and Sholes, 98-105

<sup>113</sup> "Senecas Won." *The Buffalo Courier*. 2 July 1901: 12. Microform. *Buffalo Courier Express Library*. 1982.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

with the opportunity of low skilled jobs and the occasional match against a white club being the only incentive to venture off. As mentioned before, the problems plaguing Canadian lacrosse prior to the expulsion of Native players did not cease, resulting in Canadians becoming less and less involved in the sport. As many Canadians were abandoning lacrosse for baseball and hockey, it was critical for the future of the game that Native Americans did not.

### Lacrosse at the Carlisle Indian School

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Indian boarding schools were established in an attempt to "Americanize" Native American youths. The goal was to provide Native youths with education that trained students on how to assimilate into contemporary society. This education promoted progressive Victorian ideas, which were contradictory to their indigenous cultures. The Carlisle Indian School in south central Pennsylvania is one of the most famous of these type of establishments. During its existence from 1879 through 1918, over 10,000 students from 140 tribes attended Carlisle.<sup>116</sup>

Student recruitment was often focused on tribes who were the most hostile towards the government, which at the time were the Plains tribes. From these tribes, the kin of Chiefs and other tribal officials were enrolled. They wanted their children to learn English, trade skills and other aspects of European-American culture. The importance of the various versions of lacrosse in Native American culture, it was no coincidence that the sport would play an important role in the history of the Carlisle Indian School. But in an environment that was created to discourage tribal customs and promote "white" activities, lacrosse provided the administrators with an opportunity to use a traditional indigenous activity to combat certain evils in society. The

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<sup>116</sup> Witmer, Linda F. (1993). *The Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1879-1918*. Carlisle, PA.: Cumberland County Historical Society, prologue

lingering evil that troubled Carlisle administrators so much was professional baseball. To combat the recruitment of students from partaking in attempts to make a living in professional baseball instead of abandoning school, which is similar to George Beers' philosophy that sports should remain amateur and gentlemanly, the administration would shut down varsity baseball and only field intermural teams.

Administrators discouraged students from joining professional baseball teams in the summer by replacing baseball with other activities. The first was football, which produced one of the most famous Native American athletes ever, Jim Thorpe.<sup>117</sup> But the sport of lacrosse provided a situation that encouraged students to take part in a beloved activity from their homes in an environment that was created to discourage such activities. Ironically, school officials concluded that the modernized version of lacrosse could teach Native Americans to become respectable citizens by emphasizing teamwork. In the early twentieth century, Glenn Scobey "Pop" Warner served as the school's athletic director, and would become one of the most famous college football coaches ever. He led the charge against the recruitment of students by baseball teams, and even wrote articles such as 1914's "Lacrosse v.s. Baseball: One Solution of the Summer Ball Problem" that highlighted the problems of students who decided to abandon school in hopes of making a living off of playing baseball, instead of continuing their education or learning the skills of a trade. Warner had to consistently defend this stance, despite himself labeling baseball as "the greatest game ever invented for the general public and the masses." Warner believed that for colleges, lacrosse was the ideal sport because it could be quickly learned, promoted teamwork, encouraged skill and speed and the cost of outfitting teams was

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<sup>117</sup> "Gridiron Guts: The Story of Football's Carlisle Indians." NPR.org. May 19, 2007. Accessed March 29, 2016.

small.<sup>118</sup> Supporters of baseball felt that lacrosse could either be labeled "elite" due to its roots in the North Eastern upper class, which was out of the reach of the average American or that it was "savage" because of its Native American roots.<sup>119</sup>

The Carlisle lacrosse team, coached by William T. O'Neill of Cornwall, Ontario, would see great success against the Ivy League teams. Due to the fact that many of the players were familiar with some form of lacrosse prior to their arrival at Carlisle, it was no surprise that they were able to succeed against their opponents. The Carlisle team provided a glimpse in to the larger assimilation of the fading Native Americans into contemporary culture. Native players were able to learn the modern version of the game, and were able to keep only certain characteristics pertaining to their indigenous roots intact. This was done with proper tutoring of the newer scientific, teamwork-based type of gameplay adopted by Canadians, still including the infamous speed and physical play that had been practiced for centuries. The hybrid adaptation of lacrosse created by the Carlisle Indian School can be compared to what was taking place in many tribes in North America at this time. While their traditional way of life was drastically being changed to conform to Anglo-European society, many Natives were able to keep certain aspects of their cultures alive. For example, Tuscarora student Edison Mount Pleasant told his peers about a contest in which his tribe was successful in beating a Mohawk team because of effectiveness of their medicine man. He wrote: "The modern Tuscarora Indian athletes are considered dauntless by their white brothers... The athletic teams tour the white communities but they no longer rely on the medicine man, with his magic bone, but upon strength, brain and courage."<sup>120</sup> For these student athletes at Carlisle, lacrosse provided two functions. The first was

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<sup>118</sup> Warner, Glenn S. "Lacrosse vs Base Ball." *Spalding's Official Lacrosse Guide*, 1914, 77-81. June 25, 2009. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<sup>119</sup> Fisher, 11

<sup>120</sup> Fisher, 117

to enhance the athlete's desire to preserve their cultural heritage. The second was to confront the new conditions of the modern world.<sup>121</sup> Numerous newspaper accounts from matches against white teams praised the Carlisle team for both their athleticism, and their gentlemanly conduct.

Lacrosse at Carlisle presents an ironic situation in that an activity which at one time was considered barbaric, would eventually be modernized by whites, then would later be used by whites to forge a model for Indians on how to become civilized members of a progressive society. The greatest significance of the Carlisle lacrosse teams is that it increased interest of lacrosse in reservation communities.<sup>122</sup> The success of the Carlisle team led to an increase in matches on reservations, and reenergized many Iroquois teams. Through lacrosse in the early twentieth century, Natives were able to demonstrate their cultural vitality to themselves, but also to the world surrounding them.<sup>123</sup> Once again, Native Americans were finding ways to adapt to the changes that were taking place to their ancient sport, and overcoming these changes to promote the game of lacrosse as a vital part of their culture. Leon Miller, who played lacrosse at Carlisle from 1912-1915, would be the first Native American to be inducted into the US National Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 1960, only three years after its establishment.<sup>124</sup>

### The Native Influence on Lacrosse throughout the Twentieth Century

During the interwar period, several developments would affect the world of Iroquois lacrosse. The first was social change that invoked stereotypes and inaccurate depictions of the indigenous roots of the game. By the twenties, the "founding fathers" of lacrosse became older, and would become less and less involved with the sport as a new generation took over. As

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<sup>121</sup> Fisher, 117

<sup>122</sup> Fisher, 119

<sup>123</sup> Fisher, 119

<sup>124</sup> "Leon A. Miller." National Lacrosse Hall of Fame. 2005. Accessed January 21, 2016.

sportswriters and coaches read the words of commentators from the nineteenth-century, the sport's origins became more fictitious and embellished. These individuals combined an aristocratic celebration of the "noble savage" with commercial images of Natives that were seen in Hollywood westerns at this time.<sup>125</sup> We also see the emphasis of lacrosse as a form of intertribal warfare, a misinterpretation that continues to this day, begin to be emphasized by sports writers. "Only war seems to have been more absorbingly interesting to lacrosse to some Indians" Baltimore journalist W. Wilson Wingate wrote in 1930.<sup>126</sup> Though the socially elite proponents of American lacrosse celebrated the intellectual and historical function of the "savage", the popular inaccurate depictions of the indigenous roots fed into the mass consumer interests regarding Native Americans.

By the mid 1930's depictions of the infamous attack on Fort Michilimackinac during Pontiac's Rebellion reiterated the violent past of the sport. Former white player Kyle Crichton boosted the idea that lacrosse was naturally violent when he wrote, "I have never been able to understand why the Indians bothered with tomahawks when they had those lacrosse sticks already at hand."<sup>127</sup> A selection from *Literary Digest* in 1936, also depicted Native Americans as savages who craved violence, showed no remorse for their victims and presented no background on the outbreak of Pontiac's Rebellion. The article said that, "[The Indians] wanted to cripple as many opponents as possible before settling to the business of scoring a goal," and that these injuries, "had been taken as jokes" . When it became time for the attack, the *Digest* said, "The British cheering section was intrigued with the fascinating game until suddenly every warrior on the field dropped his lacrosse sticks, rushed into the fort and proceeded to tomahawk the English

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<sup>125</sup> Fisher, 168

<sup>126</sup> Fisher, 168

<sup>127</sup> Fisher, 168



spectators."<sup>128</sup> Depictions like this reinforced the conception that lacrosse was nothing more than organized mayhem prior to its "modernization" by whites. Many of these characterizations crossed over to the collegiate game, which was growing in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic United States.

Throughout the twentieth century, many college coaches maintained ties with native teams for matches. The closest relationship was between Syracuse University and the Onondaga Reservation, located just a few miles to the south of the city. Just as with other Iroquois communities, the Carlisle team had boosted interest in lacrosse amongst the residents of Onondaga, and the tribe would form a four decade long rivalry with the nearby institution.

Another nearby college that also had many matches against native teams was Hobart, located Geneva. Aside from comparisons of these matches to modern versions of "cowboys versus Indians," "scalpings," and "aggressive onslaughts," commentators of these matches emphasized the different style of play between the white and Native teams. Once again, native practices of running, bunching, physicality and the lack of passing were attributed to the backward life of the American Indian. Collegiate gameplay was describe as "scientific" and "clever", and whites were usually victorious in these matches. Prior to an Onondaga-Syracuse match in 1930, local papers referred to the Indians as "a fighting band of Redskins" who were "out to scalp the Hillmen" which "pitted a team of clever stick wielders" against "a well-coached outfit that has been trained to the minute."<sup>129</sup> In cases of Indian victories, commentators suggested that the Native teams had begun to adopt collegiate methods, reinforcing feelings of racial and intellectual superiority in the face of defeat.

Most importantly, despite what writers and spectators thought about Iroquois lacrosse,

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<sup>128</sup> Fisher, 169

<sup>129</sup> Fisher, 172

coaches believed that much could be learned from their approach to the sport. This resulted in Syracuse beginning to recruit Onondaga players and coaches to their squad, an act that was unheard of in many elite northeastern and mid-Atlantic universities. The first coach was Ike Lyons in 1919 and one of the first Onondaga players on Syracuse's roster was Clint Pierce in 1930. The close recruitment between the Onondaga reservation and the university is still seen today. In 1924, the USILL (United States Inter-University Lacrosse League) encouraged colleges and clubs to schedule games with Onondaga or Seneca teams: "They play excellent lacrosse and put on a picturesque game. Properly featured, they should add much publicity of the game, and more of the college and club teams should meet them."<sup>130</sup> Throughout the interwar period, Native matches would be played at Penn State, Yale, Dartmouth, West Point, John Hopkins and even the New York World's Fair in 1940.

For the native teams, these intercollegiate matches once again were a source of revenue during the Great Depression as hosts would provide part of the gate receipts, similar to the practice of touring teams seen at the end of the nineteenth century. In one instance a Syracuse-Onondaga match was called in order to raise money for a player who broke his arm in a prior game, and needed money for his medical bills and loss of wages. Just as their ancestors would have called games to heal the sick, instances like this showed that the Iroquois were still practicing cultural elements of the game, but instead of hoping the Creator would cure the ill they were raising money for the same cause. This is an example of how Iroquois lacrosse had changed symbolically by the mid twentieth century. Since many Iroquois had converted to Christianity, lacrosse became a secular activity that provided a tangible link with the past.<sup>131</sup>

The Syracuse area and its proximity to the Onondaga Reservation provided a unique

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<sup>130</sup> Fisher, 174

<sup>131</sup> Fisher, 175-177

environment that fostered the growth of lacrosse amongst middle class and blue collar children that was not found in other American center. Sunday afternoon games on the reservation drew crowds into the hundreds in some instances, creating a situation where cross-cultural contact in lacrosse could be experienced outside of the realms of the collegiate exhibition matches. School-age children of nearby towns began to play against their peers from the reservation, eventually resulting in many of the same problems seen in past white-Native matches. The Onondaga children were usually easily defeated by the whites, and this was once again attributed to the different playing styles each side employed.<sup>132</sup> Just as many collegiate coaches and players felt that playing Iroquois teams helped improved their skills, the white schoolchildren felt that the weekly scrimmages on the reservation accomplished the same thing. However, feelings were not always positive for the defeated Natives. One young white player at this time, Albert Paige, recounted that, "Because they started the game around this area they figured they should be better. Of course when we beat them, it didn't sit too good with them. They'd razz us a little bit as you walked off the field, but you had to accept it. 'Oh you think you're so good! You think you're good!'"<sup>133</sup>

Lacrosse provided a microcosm of white-Indian relations during this period. As Fisher wrote, "Despite a significant degree of acculturation to the ways of colonizers, these natives believed they possessed cultural authority of the modern version of their ancient sport. So any victory on the field against a white team signified a temporary success against a dominant culture."<sup>134</sup> Participating in the field lacrosse community showed that during the interwar period the Iroquois found themselves caught between continuing traditions of the past and coping with

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<sup>132</sup> Fisher, 177

<sup>133</sup> Fisher, 178

<sup>134</sup> Fisher, 177

the problems for their community such a poverty and alcoholism that arose in the contemporary world. This study is presented extensively in Don Fisher's book.

### The Creation of Box Lacrosse

The most important development in the early twentieth century that would alter Iroquois lacrosse was the creation of indoor lacrosse, boxla, or box lacrosse. This new version of the sport was developed in the 1930's by hockey rink owners as a way to increase revenue during the summer, hockey's offseason.<sup>135</sup> Due to the tight quarters compared to field lacrosse, and that the glass and boards of the rink prevented the ball from going out of bounds as much as on the field, gameplay was much quicker and more physical than its outdoor sibling. Also the number of players to a side was seven, later changed to six, compared to twelve in field lacrosse at this time. Unlike the amateur and elite roots of field lacrosse, box lacrosse was created for the purpose of entertainment and making money. Owners hired teams consisting of former field lacrosse players, out-of-season hockey players and most importantly, many Native Americans. There were attempts at professional leagues that would fail during the Depression era, especially in the northeast. Box lacrosse would have a lasting effect on not only Native lacrosse on both sides of the border, but the way the sport was played in Canada. Box lacrosse would become the primary form of lacrosse played in Canada following its introduction. Even Canada's national championships, the Mann and Minto Cup, were changed to award the best box teams in the country.<sup>136</sup>

For supporters of field lacrosse, their advocacy for a gentlemanly concept of the game

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<sup>135</sup> Barrie, Don. "Lacrosse on Ice Sounds Nice." *Peterborough Examiner*, October 18, 2008. Accessed March 29, 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Fisher, 157

was confronted by their worst fear. Box was a new form of lacrosse with commercial and professional roots that was supported by fans and businessmen who were more concerned with victory and roughness over character and skilled athleticism. As mentioned earlier, many Americans still perceived the modern field version of the sport as organized mayhem because of its' indigenous roots. Now with the growth of box lacrosse, those stereotypes were reinforced. Longtime coach of Syracuse University, Laurie Cox, attended a box lacrosse championship in Canada in 1934. Upon his reflection of what he witnessed, he penned a critique of the new developments in the lacrosse world in a piece titled "The Future of American Lacrosse-What?" He classified box lacrosse as, "a peculiar hybrid between ice hockey and basketball" and blamed lacrosse's reputation on, "the many published accounts of the brutality of early Indian games."<sup>137</sup> Coincidentally, this is the same coach that began to pluck Onondaga players a decade earlier, choosing individuals he thought were talented enough to contribute to his Syracuse team. An article describing a match held in Chicago in the early 1930s against a team named the Buffalo Indians describes what unfamiliar spectators thought of lacrosse, including the author hearing one fan ask out loud, "What, nobody has been killed yet?" The author would go on to describe that lacrosse, "lived up to its proud boast of 'the roughest sport in the world" and that, "It seems that when one of the of the lads gains possession of the ball it is legal for the opposing players to start bashing his skull or any part of his anatomy." The article concludes that the "Injuns" like it and that "there was much booing and cheering. Which is pretty good sign that Chicago's baby sport has a chance to gain popularity."<sup>138</sup> This is the type of reputation that Laurie Cox and other field lacrosse purists hoped would never take place in their sport. The same type of schism would

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<sup>137</sup> Fisher, 163

<sup>138</sup> Prell, Ed. "Lacrosse Real 'He-Mans' Game." *Unknown*. Accessed January 28, 2016.

From a scrapbook compiled by Judy Garlow of articles from the 1930s pertaining to lacrosse. Hosted on the website [wampsbibleoflacrosse.com](http://wampsbibleoflacrosse.com)

come to the forefront of the lacrosse world sixty years later when the MILL began operating and expanding.

An exhibit entitled "We Play Lacrosse" that was on display throughout 2015 at the Seneca National Museum in Salamanca, NY included a program from a 1930s box match between Buffalo and Geneva that showed the attempts by lacrosse promoters that aimed to change the perception of spectators that viewed lacrosse as a barbaric, savage sport . The program said that "It is interesting to note that, since the local introduction of box lacrosse in 1932, there has not been a single crippling injury. In spite of the fast, rough, play, the frequent bruises and occasional minor fracture every injured player has returned to competition before the season's end."<sup>139</sup>

Meanwhile in Canada, a sports revolution occurred when box lacrosse's popularity skyrocketed due to its similarities to hockey, and participation in field lacrosse began to decrease even further. This trend could also be seen in border communities in upstate New York like Buffalo, where some of the first box matches in the United States took place at the Broadway Auditorium.<sup>140</sup> The most well-known Native to play box at this time was Harry Smith, who was later known as the actor Jay Silverheels, and would go on to play a number of famous roles on television and film such as "Tonto", the sidekick to the Lone Ranger. The rise of professional box lacrosse during the Depression provided Smith with a job off of the Six Nations reservation located near Brantford, Ontario. He was hired to play on barnstorming teams in Buffalo, Hornell, Akron and Atlantic City, where he spent the entire summer of 1931 along with other players

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<sup>139</sup> Curator Rebecca Bowen, *We Play Lacrosse* (Salamanca, NY: Iroquois National Museum, September 2014), "Game Program"

<sup>140</sup> Klein, Jeff. "In Buffalo, Hockey History Survives (Barely) in What Was the Broadway Auditorium." *New York Times*. February 15, 2012. Accessed February 7, 2013.

from Six Nations as they competed against the top Canadian and American players.<sup>141</sup> Due to the close proximity of Iroquois reservations in upstate New York compared to the large and small cities of the region, Natives playing box lacrosse were a regular sight at various arenas, which was unique compared to the rest of the United States.

Though reservation communities may have continued to play field lacrosse among themselves, and the occasional scrimmage against a college team, the Iroquois overwhelmingly favored box lacrosse. This was because of the fact that the enclosed playing areas and the lower number of players favored the run-and-gun style that Native players favored. According to the oral tradition of Akwesasne Mohawk elders at Saint Regis reservation, box lacrosse was closer to the spirit of tradition Iroquois ball play.<sup>142</sup> Gameplay that included lots of quick offense and lenient penalties regarding cross checks and hits, provided the individualism that many Native players yearned for quickly drew attention from the field game. The ties between Saint Regis, Onondaga, Tuscarora, Six Nations, Seneca and other Iroquois communities allowed for the quick diffusion of box lacrosse during the 1930s.<sup>143</sup> Similar to the ancient practice of lacrosse matches serving as social events for the different tribes, Native box lacrosse matches during the twentieth century provided the same opportunity. Tuscarora stick maker Wes Patterson recalled, "When we played the Senecas, we always had a big picnic or party after the games. We'd talk to each other and be friends..... And then we'd go to the Onondaga and do the same thing. I think it was a very cultural and social game among the native people."<sup>144</sup>

Racism in the world of field lacrosse and the lack of opportunities for Iroquois players at the majority of American colleges would also assist in the shift from field to box. Aside from

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<sup>141</sup> Misiak, Zig. *Tonto: The Man in Front of the Mask*. Brantford, Ont.: Real People's History, 2013. p.7

<sup>142</sup> Fisher, 222

<sup>143</sup> Martin, 54

<sup>144</sup> Fisher, 224

rare instances other than at Syracuse, Native players were not encouraged to play scholastically for much of the twentieth century.<sup>145</sup> In Canada, where box had taken over as the major form of lacrosse that was played, teams were not hosted through local colleges and universities, but instead through municipal recreation departments and private organizations. Native players felt that the environment was less racist than what they had experienced in the United States and they were encouraged to play at all levels from youth to senior. This would lead many Iroquois players in upstate New York to make the trek to play for teams in Ontario versus dealing with the discrimination that they experienced when playing scholastically. At the end of the twentieth century, some of Iroquois professional players were getting their start in the game through playing juniors in Canada rather than in NCAA, though this has changed in the last decade.<sup>146</sup> For many Iroquois, box lacrosse became a way of life and field lacrosse was virtually nonexistent to some. Longtime player and referee, Pete Hill, grew up on the Six Nation reserve, but would move to California for a period during his adolescence. He said while he was in California, it was the first time that he had ever seen field lacrosse. Hill thought that field lacrosse was an invention of Californians, and due his lack of experiences with American lacrosse, he thought that all college teams also played box, because that is the only type of lacrosse he had seen in his life.<sup>147</sup>

The most important aspect of the invention of box lacrosse was that the Iroquois were able to find ways to adapt and overcome the discriminatory hurdles that were placed in their way by a white upper class society that inherited lacrosse as their own. Ironically, box lacrosse would be many Americans first exposure to lacrosse at the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>145</sup> Hill

<sup>146</sup> Inside Lacrosse Staff. "Lacrosse Leads NCAA Participaton Growth; Demographic Data." Inside Lacrosse. October 31, 2015. Accessed March, 24, 2016.

<sup>147</sup> Staff



As discussed in Chapter 1, the wooden lacrosse stick is often used as the symbol for the Native American roots of the game. The wooden stick was also a way to keep white teams dependent on Native Americans for manufacturing the equipment that was used predominantly until the 1970's. Rapid industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had little effect on the process of making a wooden lacrosse stick. Attempts had been made to industrialize the process, but they had failed. One sporting goods executive from Baltimore who was interviewed in 1951, explained the endeavors. "Machines have been tried, of course....but never with any success. An automatic bending machine for example, will bend every stick the same amount. Due to variations in the fibers however, sine sticks can't take as much bend as others and therefore split. The Indians seem to anticipate this danger point. They know when to stop; the machines don't." The skill of the craftsmen, their access to wood, and the year-long process of aging the wood guaranteed Iroquois control over nearly every stage of production.<sup>148</sup>

As the participation in lacrosse began to grow after WWII, these small batch stick makers were finding difficulty with satisfying the market's demand for their products. Most sticks were sold through retailers such as the Lacrosse Emporium in Toronto and Lantry Brothers in Hogsburg, NY during this time period.<sup>149</sup> But for many Iroquois stick makers, there were a number of risks associated with their trade. A duty was to be paid on importing lacrosse sticks, and makers often could lose their entire year's inventory if they were not properly declared at customs, which many did not do for financial and political reasons. It was a common practice for customs agents to hire natives to be whistle blowers of an upcoming shipment of lacrosse sticks in exchange for half the worth of goods seized.<sup>150</sup> In a community with social problems

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<sup>148</sup> Fisher, 258

<sup>149</sup> Venum, 285

<sup>150</sup> Venum, 284

including widespread poverty and alcohol abuse, customs agents used the appeal of quick money to turn community members against one another.

An event that drastically changed the production of wooden lacrosse sticks was the establishment of the Chisholm Lacrosse Factory, located on Cornwall Island, on the Mohawk Akwesane reservation. Two brothers, Frank and Alex Roundpoint, launched their own stick making operation and were in need of a fluent English speaker to help market their product. They reached out to a local teacher named Colin Chisholm, who boarded and taught on the reservation. Chisholm was convinced that the endeavor would be worthwhile after securing orders for five dozen sticks from Toronto buyers. The full operation was then set up.<sup>151</sup> Though Chisholm was closely affiliated with the Mohawk on the reservation, the combination of increased demand for their sticks and capitalist endeavors created an environment that would revolutionize the world of lacrosse stick making. The factory would attempt to create as many sticks as possible annually, taking away the spiritual connection and art form that once existed in these crosses. This would also be a blow to other Iroquois stick makers because the Chisholm factory was producing sticks faster, and at a lower cost, while creating a virtual monopoly. At its peak production, ninety seven percent of all wooden sticks came from Chisholm.<sup>152</sup>

As demand and production increased, more Mohawks were hired to work in the factory, but pay was low and the working conditions were far from ideal. Roy Simmons, who was head coach at Syracuse University for over twenty-five years, described a visit he had to the Chisholm factory. He said:

"I can vividly remember going up there in the middle of winter, and they were carving like crazy, because Mr. Chisholm was smart and shrewd, he wouldn't buy any fuel for the wood burning stove that kept them warm. The workers had to rely on the shavings from carving, and if they slacked on their carving, then they didn't

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<sup>151</sup> Mitchell, 110

<sup>152</sup> Mitchell, 121

have fuel for the fire; they got cold. So to keep themselves warm, they carved like crazy to keep the fire stoked and also increased the output"<sup>153</sup>

The Chisholm factory would continue to flourish for its owners until a fire destroyed the factory in 1968, leaving the operation to start from scratch. The drop in crosses available on the market created an opportunity for competitors to move in, which would lead to lasting circumstances for wood stick production.

Within two years of the Chisholm fire, the W.H. Brine Company of Boston introduced the first plastic molded lacrosse head. Due to their ability to be produced inexpensively, quickly and at an even lower cost to consumers than wood stick makers could offer, this new technology quickly took over the market. In the spring of 1971, Brine sent a letter every known field program and dictated that they would switch to providing only plastic sticks, ending any partnership with remaining wood producers, Iroquois, or non-Iroquois. This move singlehandedly put an uncounted number of Native stick makers out of work, hastening the decline of yet another centuries-old American Indian craft.<sup>154</sup> But once again, the diligence of a group of individuals would keep the craft of stick making alive by continuing to produce despite a drastic drop in demand.

Two individuals during this time period were critical to the survival of the wooden crosse. The first was Alfie Jacques of Onondaga, and the second was John Wesley Patterson of Tuscarora Reservation. After years of coaching and teaching physical education in the Baltimore area, Patterson retired to his home and turned his hobby of stick making into a business. He remembered how during his time in Baltimore he would conceal his ethnicity at overheard how white coaches had ridiculed Indian [Mohawk] stick makers. "They'd say, 'these are Monday

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<sup>153</sup> Venum, 286

<sup>154</sup> Venum, 287

morning sticks we're getting, they're drunk all weekend and look what we get Monday morning, nothing but junk .... I knew the Mohawks were falling apart. I knew they weren't getting a quality stick."<sup>155</sup> By the 1990's Patterson and his staff were producing thousands of sticks, despite that synthetic materials had dominated the market for decades. He credited this success due to the fact that he was able to combine his sense of Native traditionalism with capitalism.

Despite the incorporation of modern materials, many players still felt a deep connection and admiration for their wooden crosses. Former All-American at Cornell University, Eamon McEaney, compared the modern plastic cross to "disposable diapers, the aluminum bat, the fast food chain and the drive-in movie."<sup>156</sup> Patterson passed away in 2000, but the mark he left on Iroquois lacrosse was permanent by being one of the key individuals to keep Iroquois stick making alive.

Iroquois lacrosse had seen numerous, drastic changes from the end of the nineteenth century throughout the twentieth. Whites had adopted their traditional their game and modernized it by adapting uniformed rules for matches that were acknowledged to hinder the skills of their Indian opponents. Native players would then be labeled as professionals, and became the scapegoats for the problems that had become associated with lacrosse, such as violence and gambling. Lacrosse had become an outlet where the cultural, social and religious spheres of the time period combined on a field. Through the steadfastness of a countless number of individual who played, coached, produced crosses, the game and its spiritual heritage onto new generations. Native American lacrosse during this period was so unique because it was always able to move forward, but did not follow a single, straight path. Despite racism, exclusion and the emergence of the plastic lacrosse stick, the efforts of the first century of

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<sup>155</sup> Fisher, 263

<sup>156</sup> McEaney, Eamon. "The Death of the Wooden Lacrosse Stick," *Lacrosse Magazine* 22 (Jan/Feb 1998): 60-61

modern lacrosse would create a golden age for the Haudenosaunee to play a key role in the contemporary development of the sport.

## **Chapter IV**

### *How the Haudenosaunee Will Play an Important Role in Lacrosse's Future*

Through the efforts of countless individuals who worked to preserve the indigenous presence in lacrosse over the past one hundred and fifty years, the Haudenosaunee's influence on the game has not only survived, but thrived in recent years. The past twenty five years have shown that the inventors of the game are not only being acknowledged, but are playing a key role in its expansion internationally. What is key to this contemporary presence is that this acknowledgment is not in a manner that was seen in the early twentieth century, which included the imagery of the noble savage. Lacrosse enthusiasts are not only appreciative of the indigenous heritage, but are yearning to learn more about its cultural significance that make it so unique compared to other sports. For example, almost every Iroquois reservation in New York now has an individual producing wooden lacrosse sticks, and are having a difficult time keeping up with demand.

The revitalization of Native American lacrosse in the mainstream culture is traceable to a number of factors. First, participation in lacrosse is often the closest that many non-native players and spectators come to experiencing indigenous culture, especially in regions where their footprint has been long removed. The second is through the efforts of individuals, organizations and tribal nations that promoted the preservation of not only lacrosse, but all indigenous cultures in the modern world. The third is the rise of Native American nationalism that would result in the establishment of significant events such as the acceptance of the Iroquois Nationals team by the Federation of International Lacrosse in 1987, the fielding of the Haudenosaunee team at their

) first international competition in 1990, and hosting the World Indoor Lacrosse Championships in 2015. Finally, as lacrosse had provided glimpses of Native American and Western relations throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many contemporary issues such as the use of the term "redskin" and the acknowledgement Haudenosaunee sovereignty are deeply ingrained in lacrosse. Most importantly, lacrosse provides opportunities for many native youths that would otherwise be difficult to obtain from their lives on reservations. The result of this has been that despite a drastically smaller player pool compared to Canada and the US, Iroquois players and teams are at the top of the high school, collegiate, and professional levels.

#### The Establishment of the MILL/NLL

Until the 1990's lacrosse remained a niche sport in its traditional centers. Box would be played primarily in Canada and on reservations in upstate New York. Field would remain a game that was almost exclusively for upper-middle and wealthy classes along the east coast from Massachusetts to Virginia, and smaller pockets such as Syracuse. Participation in the United States was primarily limited to students of parochial schools, and private universities. These demographics kept with the gentlemanly, amateur ambitions set forth by George Beers a century earlier. But by the early 1990's, two unlikely individuals, sports marketers from Kansas City, would bring lacrosse to the forefront of the North American sports spectrum through the development of a professional indoor lacrosse league called the Major Indoor Lacrosse League (MILL), which would later become the National Lacrosse League (NLL).

Professional lacrosse leagues had been attempted multiple times, beginning with the barnstorming box leagues that popped up in the interwar period and then later in the 1970s. The

first NLL, which has no relation to the current league, existed for two years, 1974 and 1975. Over the two seasons, teams were placed in Toronto, Montreal, Rochester, Syracuse, Philadelphia, Quebec City, Long Island, Boston and Baltimore. Similar to the invention of box lacrosse in the 1930's, the original NLL was established by hockey arena owners who were looking to find tenants during the offseason. Aside from hiring Canadian box and former college players, the league provided extra revenue for professional hockey players during the summer, such as the Buffalo Sabres' Rick Dudley who played for Rochester. Unfortunately, the league barely survived its seasons with six teams going bankrupt, and there were only a few instances of decent attendance. Ten years later, two sports executives formerly with the Kansas City Chiefs of the NFL, Chris Fritz and Russ Cline, were kicking around ideas for new sports promotions. They were trying to come up with something novel that could be played indoors and marketed to a different audience. Numerous ideas were brainstormed, many that consisted of inventing a brand new game. One day someone showed Fritz and Cline a tape of a NLL game. What those two viewed was the exciting and fast paced event that they had trying to invent on their own. Fritz's jaw dropped and ran out of the viewing room with enthusiasm and energy. For Cline, this was all • that he needed to realize that they had a good idea, but one that required further research.<sup>157</sup>

In 1984, Fritz and Cline organized a small city tour showcasing an American team made of former college field players versus a Canadian team filled of box players. Unfortunately the rosters changed between each event and there's no indication of how many Iroquois players suited for either team. Crowd sizes varied on each event but there were high turnouts in

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<sup>157</sup> Huelskamp, Jim. "Kansas City." *Indoor Lacrosse: The Story of the Major Indoor Lacrosse League*. Baltimore, MD: Publishing Concepts, 1992. 1



traditional lacrosse markets such as New York, Boston, Baltimore and Rochester. Though the tour lost the two partners nearly \$250,000, they still felt that the promotion deserved further development. Unfortunately for the Americans, they were consistently mismatched against the Canadian team. For many American players, it was the first time they had ever participated in box lacrosse, even though in some instances, it was being played on a nearby reservation. Three years later, the Eagle Pro Box Lacrosse League was launched with four teams, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and New Jersey. Each team would play six games. "The championship game was held on March 21 in front of a crowd of 7,019 between the Washington Wave and Baltimore Thunder, with the Thunder winning."<sup>158</sup> A second season was played in 1988 that included the same teams, this time with Washington defeating the New Jersey Saints in the championship. The seed was planted for financially successful professional lacrosse in the United States, which would result in an opportunity to grow Native American's influence on the modern game. On May 1, 1988 after the conclusion of the season, the league changed its name to the Major Indoor Lacrosse League (MILL). This name would remain until 1997. The league and its teams would still be owned and operated by Fritz and Cline with two more teams, the New England Blazers, who called Worcester, Massachusetts home, and the Detroit Turbos. Subsequently, two games would be added to the overall schedule to accommodate the additional franchises.

One of the most important events that would have a lasting effect on Iroquois lacrosse came on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1991, when the Buffalo Bandits franchise was formally established as a new expansion team. A press conference followed on October 10th to announce that Buffalo would

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<sup>158</sup> "Eagle Pro Box Lacrosse League." Fun While It Lasted. Accessed February 16, 2015.

join the league for the 1992 season.<sup>159</sup> Unlike the other MILL teams, the Bandits would be partially owned by the league and the Buffalo Sabres. All daily operations would be inherited by the Sabres staff and profits, if any, would be split between the two. Seymour H. Knox, former chairman of the board and president of the Sabres stated that "We are looking forward to our association with the MILL to bringing the sport of indoor lacrosse to Buffalo."<sup>160</sup> The ultimate goal of bringing a franchise to Buffalo was not to promote lacrosse and its ties to the local Iroquois community, but it was to create events that would take up more dates at the Memorial Auditorium. This could justify the public expenditure for constructing a new arena downtown, which the Sabres were lobbying for. Knox himself explained this idea, "The addition of sports like indoor lacrosse to Memorial Auditorium's schedule of events fits well with our plan of developing a variety of sports and entertainment offerings for Buffalo's new sports and entertainment complex."<sup>161</sup> The administrative support from a major professional sports franchise such as the Sabres can be attributed to the instant success of the Bandits franchise. The strong presence of the Iroquois community has been visual since the very beginning. A number of Iroquois players from different nations were on the original roster and have been on the roster every season since. The organization even had local Iroquois liaisons to drum up support for the new team in the community. One of these liaisons, Pete Hill, said that he knew the Bandits would be a success before they even played a game.<sup>162</sup>

The Bandits franchise would be unique for its time. Due to the league's territorial restrictions regarding rosters, the Bandits were the only team that was able to tap the Canadian

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<sup>159</sup> "Indoor Lacrosse Loops Expands Into Buffalo For '92 Season." *Buffalo News*. October 2, 1991. Accessed February 11, 2015.

<sup>160</sup> Indoor Lacrosse

<sup>161</sup> Indoor Lacrosse.

<sup>162</sup> Hill.

and Iroquois box talent from the region, which would be a key component to the team's immediate success. Iroquois players would become legends. These included the Kilgour brothers from the Tuscarora Reservation, roughly thirty miles north of Buffalo. Darris and Rich were both former All-Americans that played at Niagara Wheatfield High School, but had box experience playing in Canada and also played collegiately. Their brother Travis, would join the Bandits in 1994. After their playing careers concluded, both Darris and Rich had their numbers retired by the franchise and have banners with their names hanging in the First Niagara Center alongside banners commemorating the Bandits' championships. It cannot be emphasized enough how important of a role the Kilgours have played in the past thirty years of lacrosse in Western New York. Aside from playing and coaching the Bandits, the Kilgours have coached numerous box and field teams on both sides of the border.

The Bandits saw success very quickly, winning the league championship three times in their first five seasons. The success on the floor translated to success at the box office. Fans were taking on the game very quickly and any paraphernalia with the "Buffalo Bandits" on it, whether shirts, jackets, jerseys or pennants began to fly off the shelves.<sup>163</sup> Intrigue for the new team and sport were rapidly spreading throughout the country, even games were being broadcasted on ESPN. Columnists for local media outlets such as the Buffalo News' Donn Esmond dubbed indoor lacrosse as "the sport of the future".<sup>164</sup> The Memorial Auditorium was packed, and the fans were loving it. In Esmond's words, "this is not for the Philharmonic crowd and field lacrosse played by college and high schools teams is a pastoral walk in the park."<sup>165</sup> Other journalists, such as Bob Curran of the Buffalo News, wrote at the time that the Bandits' success

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<sup>163</sup> Huelskamp, 103

<sup>164</sup> Esmond, Donn. "Instant Gratification Makes Box Lacrosse the Sport of the Future." *Buffalo News*. March 18, 1992. Accessed February 5, 2015.

<sup>165</sup> Esmond

was due to its low ticket prices and appeal to the MTV generation.<sup>166</sup> Even though indoor lacrosse had existed for nearly sixty years at this point, American sports fans were finally discovering it, and sports writers in Canada were taking notice to what was happening in Buffalo. Tony Saxon, a journalist for the Guelph Mercury wrote "The games are affordable at priced ranging from \$12-\$19, and the game itself is great -it's fast paced, hard hitting and high scoring.... That's what the Buffalo sport fans like."<sup>167</sup>

The success of the Bandits on the floor, with their ties to Canadian and Iroquois players, and their success at the box office, provided the league a blueprint for other franchises to follow. In 1995, the Bandits' closest rival, the Rochester Knighthawks were established. What makes the Rochester franchise so important for the Iroquois community is that they were the first native- owned franchise in the league. Curt Styres, a successful businessman from the Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario, purchased majority ownership of the team in June 2008, and became the team's General Manager a year later. Aside from being native owned, the Knighthawks have a heavy presence of Iroquois players on the roster, and which is a reason they have been so successful in recent years. Rochester won a league record three straight Champion's Cups, the NLL title, from 2012 to 2014, with many key players being Iroquois. The Knighthawks jerseys even have shoulder patches that depicts the clans of the Iroquois League. Styres also owned the now defunct Hamilton Nationals of Major League Lacrosse, the professional field league that plays in the summer. Once again, he had a high percentage of native players of the roster. The Nationals' logo also incorporated the maple leaf, because it was

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<sup>166</sup> Curran, Bob. "Why the Bandits Are So Successful." *Buffalo News*. April 23, 1992. Accessed February 5, 2015.

<sup>167</sup> Saxon, Tony. "Hitting the Big Time." *The Guelph Mercury*. February 1, 1994.

the only Canadian team in the league, and a purple Iroquois belt representing the team's ownership and ties to the Haudenosaunee community.

But the growth of the MILL/NLL in the 1990's also had a large vocal group opposition. New fans were drawn the physicality of box lacrosse, but field "purists" felt that the new league had no part in the lacrosse community. Similar to the condescending attitudes of Victorian gentlemen towards the style of play that the Iroquois implemented, critics of indoor lacrosse felt that the "lack of rules" and "madness" seen in the league would have a negative effect on the growth of lacrosse, especially at the youth level.

Local officials such as Al Kerstein, founder of the Western New York chapter of the Lacrosse Foundation, stated that "If my 10 year old wasn't kicking my butt to take him, I wouldn't go....I don't like the uniforms they wear. I don't like the music they play. I don't like the officiating ... I'm a purist, I prefer the outdoor game."<sup>168</sup> Kerstien adds that in TV commercials for the Rochester Knighthawks franchise that would take the floor in 1995 that for "every goal they score, they'd show about 15 illegal hits ..... They (the MILL) promoted the violence, I know if I didn't know anything about the game and my kid showed interest, and that's what I saw on TV, I'd have some second thoughts."<sup>169</sup> For the Iroquois, this was not violence or chaos, it was the sport that they hold so dearly and grew up playing. This was the closest connection to the game of their ancestors, and the masses were loving it. After decades of being excluded from field lacrosse, professional indoor was a way in which native players could make money, be appreciated for their athleticism and increase their influence on the game as a whole.

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<sup>168</sup> Maiorana, Sal. "Not Everyone Sold on Indoor Lacrosse." *Rochester Times-Union*. February 26, 1996. 1C

<sup>169</sup> Maiorana

## The Establishment of Youth Leagues

As years have passed, the vocal opposition for box has subsided. This has been caused by the drastic increase of box trained players, both Iroquois and Canadian, which have been filling NCAA rosters in recent years. Many high level coaches are recruiting players with a box background for a numbers of reasons. First the net in box is much smaller, and the goalies wear a lot more padding compared to field. The theory is that if you are able to score goals on a 4x4 net filled by a giant goalie, then the player should have no problem scoring on a 6x6 field net. Second, the tight quarters of playing in the rink and the thirty second shot clock, requires players to make quick decisions and precise passing. Players are able to do this while being covered by defenders, and unlike the large field, there is no space for an offensive player to take gain space and take the time to readjust. Unlike the generations in the early twentieth century, Iroquois players have found that adapting their skills to the field has been easier. This has resulted to proportionately large numbers of Iroquois players being successful at all levels, resulting in their prominent role today. In the 2016 NLL season, there were nineteen players of Haudenosaunee descent on rosters, nine percent of the entire league.<sup>170</sup> This outnumbered Americans, who held thirteen roster spots despite the much larger talent pool of 6,500 player registered with the US Box Lacrosse Association.<sup>171</sup>

The most notable of the rise of Iroquois box trained players taking over the world of field lacrosse is a family from Onondaga, the Thompsons. Brothers Jeremy, Jerome, Miles, Lyle

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<sup>170</sup> Stevens, Neil. "History and Heritage: NLL Looks to Enhance League's Standing among First Nations." Yahoo Sports Canada. March 15 2016. Accessed March 21, 2016.

<sup>171</sup> Tutka, Paul. "American Made: The All-Time NLL Top 30." USBoxla. March 31, 2016. Accessed March 31, 2016.

Thompson and their cousins, Ty Thompson and Bill O'Brien, have all made an impact on the lacrosse world by playing collegiately and professionally. Most notably, Miles and Lyle have taken the lacrosse world by storm and have become the icons of not only the Iroquois influence of the game, but the face of the next generation of players. They were born and raised on the Onondaga reservation and were surrounded by lacrosse from a young age. Their father had played box on the reservation and the family would spend hours shooting on the backyard net. The eldest brother, Jerome "Haina", would play for some of the best junior box teams and at the powerhouse Onondaga Community College before he was drafted by the Buffalo Bandits in 2011. He would be cut during training camp, but would eventually gain a roster spot by the 2015 season. Jeremy, the second oldest, would be the first member of the family to make the transition to Division I lacrosse and played four years at Syracuse University. He would graduate as a two time All-American and as the program's highest scoring midfielder. Following Syracuse, he would be drafted by the Buffalo Bandits in 2011 in the NLL, and the Hamilton Nationals in the MLL.

The next brothers, Lyle and Miles, a year apart in age, both committed to playing at the University of Albany. Aside from Syracuse University, Albany was one of the first collegiate programs to recognize the untapped talent of Iroquois players that could make the transition to field. By the time Miles, the elder of the two, graduated in 2014, the brothers would become the most iconic lacrosse players in a generation. With their trademark braids, the brothers implemented a quick, finesse style of play that was rarely seen outside of games on reservations. The brothers broke scoring records both for the program and in the NCAA. In the spring of 2014, both Miles and Lyle were co-awarded the Tewaaron Trophy, as college lacrosse's top players, the first time that the award had ever been shared. The Tewaaron Trophy began in

2001 and is endorsed by the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. Each year the award recognizes one of the tribes, and has a former outstanding player from that particular tribe to present the award to the winner. The award also has a scholarship program that has provided over \$100,000 to Native American student athletes since 2007.<sup>172</sup>

What is most significant is that when the Thompsons won in 2014, it was the first time that the award had been given to Native American players. "The Tewaaron Award is built on a mission to celebrate the excellence in the game, recognize the game's Native American heritage and to give back in a meaningful way to the Native American community, said Jeffrey T. Harvey, chairman of the Tewaaron Foundation. "We are also committed to a set of values that brings honor to the game today and the heritage of the sport. First and foremost, we are proud to recognize these worthy players, the first Native American recipients."<sup>173</sup> Fifty years earlier, native players were being excluded from playing collegiate lacrosse, and now they were celebrated as being the best in the game. After Miles graduation, Lyle would go on to win the award solely in 2015, and was the first male player had ever won back to back. Both Miles and Lyle would be drafted by the Minnesota/Georgia Swarm franchise in consecutive years in the NLL, and Miles would join Lyle in the MLL at the Florida Launch. Just as in their college years, crowds are flocking to see their unique style of play at the professional level. This is especially significant because participation of the game at the youth level is growing exponentially in the US, and internationally.

Most importantly, the Thompsons are role models for a new generation of Native American youth, who are realizing that lacrosse can be a launch pad to a life outside of the

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<sup>172</sup> "Native American Scholarships." Tewaaron.com. 2016. Accessed February 25, 2016.

<sup>173</sup> Inside Lacrosse Staff. "Thompson Brothers, Cummings Win 2014 Tewaaron Award." Inside Lacrosse. May 29, 2014. Accessed February 25, 2016.



reservation. Longtime coach at Princeton and the University of Denver said in response the 2014 ceremony that "I hope there are lots of kids in backyards right now trying to do one-handed shots, and lots of kids on reservations saying 'I want to play in college'."<sup>174</sup> The New York tribes have realized the potential that lacrosse can bring to native youths. Prior to the establishment of American-Iroquois leagues, parents would have to drive their kids to Canada in order to play organized lacrosse. Though lacrosse seemed to have skipped a generation, and play on reservations had decreased post WWII, lacrosse participation has drastically grown over the past twenty years. The North American Minor Lacrosse Association (NAMLA) was established in 2004 and is comprised of lacrosse organizations that represent the Native communities Alleghany, Newtown (Cattaraugus Seneca), Tuscarora, Tonawanda (Seneca), Oneida and Onondaga.<sup>175</sup> The league provides teams in at different levels for ages from three to twenty. For these young players, youth leagues provide the opportunity to get in touch with their ancestral heritage, while also combating childhood obesity and keeping kids from getting involved with drugs, alcohol and illegal activities. Funds from casinos are used to build better playing facilities, which used to be grass that had plywood arranged as boards, and provides the equipment and jerseys for the players.

A generation prior to the Thompsons, Emmett Printup, of Tuscarora, was recruited by Syracuse when he was a junior at Niagara Wheatfield High School. He would go onto be an All-American during his tenure with the Orange, play on the inaugural Iroquois Nationals team in 1990, and would play a key role in the establishment of youth teams across the Six Nations, creating the environment for its revitalization over the past generation. Printup describes that

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<sup>174</sup> Vock, Casey. "Albany's Thompson Trio Captivated Lacrosse World, and Impact Could Change the Game." *Inside Lacrosse*. May 20, 2014. Accessed February 25, 2016.

<sup>175</sup> "About NAMLA." NAMLA. Accessed February 25, 2016.

growing up in on the Tuscarora Reservation in the 1970's, he was surrounded by extreme poverty, alcoholism and substance abuse. The only way he ever came in possession of a lacrosse stick was because of one fateful night.

One evening, the young Printup went out for a walk and found a quarter on the ground outside of the community center down the road from his house. That night the center was hosting a Christmas Bazaar. He took the quarter that he found inside with the intention of purchasing a soda or a snack, but instead he felt the intuition to buy one raffle ticket, which coincidentally was priced at twenty five cents a ticket. As he sat at the event, his ticket was called and the prize was a wooden lacrosse stick, made by the legendary coach, player and Tuscarora stick maker, Neil Patterson. Despite having a brand new stick, Printup could not play because neither he, nor his grandmother who raised him, had the funds to buy a ball. It was the efforts of his grandmother to secure funds from his substance abusing mother's next welfare check before it was spent to be able to get a ball for Emmitt to play with. After that, Printup spent hours throwing the ball against walls to improve his stick skills. He eventually would inherit some second hand football pads and begin playing junior lacrosse over the border in Ontario, because an organized youth league did not exist on the Tuscarora reservation at that time.

By the time he was a junior at Niagara Wheatfield High School, Printup was being recruited to play at Syracuse. From 1982 to 1985, Printup had an illustrious college career, and most importantly in his opinion, that he was able to receive an education that otherwise would have been unattainable. Printup feels that if it wasn't for lacrosse, he never would have completed high school, let alone get a college education. To this day, Emmett Printup feels that it was the Creator's destiny that he would find that quarter on that cold winter night and win a lacrosse stick at the raffle. Printup feels that his purpose in life has been to spread the gift of

lacrosse that the Creator has provided to not only the Haudenosaunee, but all ethnicities and races, which is a reason why he helped establish NAMLA.<sup>176</sup>

The NAMLA games have also served as a catalyst for creating intertribal community social events. Games are usually full day marathons in which teams from two tribes play against each other all day, beginning with the youngest kids in the morning all the way through the senior men's teams playing in the evening. It is not uncommon at these daylong events to see large groups of people with popup tents, tailgating, watching games, and socializing. Lacrosse events also provide the opportunities for craftsmen, dancers and musicians to gather and share the various parts of their culture that have survived the test of time.

The league has resulted in a number of Iroquois players being recruited to play collegiately and has improved the gameplay of the high school programs with large Iroquois populations. The most notable recent player who is an example of this lacrosse revitalization is Zed Williams, who grew up on the Cattaraugus Reservation, and broke the New York State record for most goals scored in a single season. He was recruited by the top collegiate programs and committed to the University of Virginia where he is currently a standout midfielder. The high school programs themselves have grown by leaps and bounds due to the influx of Iroquois players who have grown up playing the game.

NAMLA is not limited to just native players. Some of the top college players from New York in recent years also played in the league as a way to gain an advantage over white players who only play field. All-time leading scorer at Cornell University, Connor Buczek, who hailed from Ohio spent time learning box skills from Iroquois coaches prior to playing collegiately.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Printup, Emmett. Interview by the author. Tuscarora Reservation. February 3, 2016.

<sup>177</sup> Printup

Most recently, Connor Fields, from the affluent Buffalo suburb of East Amherst spent his summers playing for the Tuscarora team. He is considered one of the top attackmen at the collegiate level and is the heir to the Albany offense after the graduation of the Thompsons.

### The Lancaster Redskins Controversy

In the Buffalo area, school districts such as Akron, located near the Tonawanda Seneca reservation, went from losing every single game in 2005, to becoming an undefeated Section VI Class-C champion in 2015. Some of the school's top players have all received scholarships to play collegiately, an opportunity that did not exist just ten years ago. Other local schools with large Iroquois populations such as Niagara Wheatfield, which was one of the first districts to field a lacrosse team, Salamanca, Gowanda, and Silver Creek have all reached the level of challenging the historically good programs, which are located in affluent suburbs such as Williamsville, Amherst, Hamburg and Orchard Park.

The recent growth of high school programs with predominant Iroquois rosters have resulted in lacrosse playing a large role in contemporary issues related to Native Americans. Located a mere 15 miles from the Tonawanda Reservation is the Lancaster School District. For over sixty years, Lancaster's athletic teams donned the nickname "Redskins". But just as the ongoing controversy with the Washington NFL franchise, calls for a name change have become louder in recent years. The catalyst that sparked created national attention to Lancaster was that in 2015, the Akron Tigers, announced they were boycotting their upcoming game against Lancaster because of the Redskins nickname. Controversy quickly arose throughout the region over whether the school district should change their name, and whether the term "Redskin" is

either racist, or a part of Lancaster's heritage. Soon after, other schools with large Native American populations announced that they would also boycott Lancaster in the upcoming season, such as Niagara Wheatfield and Silver Creek, in a sign of solidarity with Akron. Lancaster Superintendent Michael Vallely acknowledged that the nickname had become a "symbol of ethnic stereotyping" and said that "I hope that the Native American community understands that while the mascot is still in place at Lancaster High School, we have worked diligently to treat it with respect and honor, removing any stereotypical behaviors and images."<sup>178</sup> Many members of the community and Lancaster students and alumni opposed the removal, citing that it was a part of their history. The school board meetings quickly became chaotic events where those who supported keeping the nickname would bring signs, and had numerous vocal outbursts towards the board members who were trying to change the name. Opposition even reached the level of flying in two Native Americans to express their support for the Redskin nickname. Joe L. Milk, an Ojibwa Sioux from South Dakota had all of his travel expenses paid for by an anonymous Lancaster graduate and was paraded in front of the local media expressing how he opposes changing the name. "There's plenty of Native Americans don't find it racist at all...I want to help Lancaster save their name and keep the tradition going" said Milk as he donned a shirt that said "Once a redskin, always a redskin."<sup>179</sup>

Despite the vocal opposition of those who did not want the name to change, the Lancaster school board voted to remove the nickname immediately on March 16, 2015. The district then conducted a contest in which students would submit the new nickname and logo. By June, the district announced that they would change their nickname to the "Legends", which was

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<sup>178</sup> Bever, Lindsey. "The 'Redskins' Are No More – at least in Lancaster, NY" *Washington Post*. March 17, 2015. Accessed February 26, 2016.

<sup>179</sup> Robinson, Karen. "Pro-Redskins Group Brings Out-of-Town Native Americans Who Support Redskins Mascot." *Buffalo News*. March 2, 2015. Accessed February 26, 2016.

submitted by eighth grader Karissa Godzak. Unfortunately at a board meeting that announced the change, and to congratulate Godzak, a number of individuals from the opposition group stood up and turned their backs in a sign of protest while wearing shirts that said "Bring the mascot back."<sup>180</sup> Though the district has followed through with the transition to adopting the new mascot, opposition to its removal is still very vocal. During the school board elections in May 2015, two incumbents who voted for the removal of the Redskins name, Wendy Buchert and Kimberly Noawk, were defeated by two individuals' who had been involved in the opposition movement, Brenda Christopher and Kelly Depczynski.<sup>181</sup> The Lancaster controversy signifies ongoing battle between those who are willing to continue to use mascots and nicknames in sports, citing their personal heritage and tradition, despite the ongoing support that the practice is sometimes deemed racist by ethnic communities. Unlike other controversies pertaining to the use of Native American imagery as sports mascots, such as the Cleveland Indians and the University of North Dakota Fighting Sioux, the Lancaster quarrel is unique because lacrosse was the catalyst that brought the dialogue to the masses. For large number of Akron team members who are predominantly made up of Tonawanda Seneca, lacrosse had become something much more than the game of their ancestors. It had been used as a principle to bring attention issues pertaining to Native Americans in contemporary society. Through their boycott, lacrosse has provided a voice for issues that indigenous peoples are facing in contemporary American society.

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<sup>180</sup> Perlman, Marissa. "Lancaster Legends Mascot Becomes Official with School Board Vote." *WIVB*. June 08, 2015. Accessed February 29, 2016.

<sup>181</sup> Ro, Karen. "Pro-mascot Candidates Win Seats in Lancaster." *Buffalo News*. May 19, 2015. Accessed March 1, 2016.

## The Iroquois Nationals

The most important event in recent decades for the preservation and promotion of native lacrosse was the establishment of the Iroquois Nationals team. The significance of the Nationals is that they are the only Native American authorized to play a sport in international competition. The Federation of International Lacrosse accepted the Iroquois Confederacy as a full time member in 1987. The first competition that the Nationals took part in was the 1990 Field Lacrosse Championships that were held in Perth, Australia. Though the team was under funded and depended on donated equipment and airline tickets, they were still able to make the trek to Australia. For the Iroquois this was a symbolic of pride and resilience despite decades of discrimination in the world of lacrosse after its adoption by whites. Despite the hurdles that the Iroquois had to overcome during the twentieth century that would result in their participation in 1990, there were still racist sentiments experienced by some of the Iroquois players. One player recalled that:

"When we were in Australia, [the USA team] acted like we didn't belong there. They were the ones that voiced it the most; they thought we played the game in such a manner that they didn't like it. They thought we played dirty, you know, because our style of playing was different, and they were frustrated. But they beat us pretty easily, but physically I think we came out on top and with more dignity, because they were doing a lot more whining and crying about things. They were the ones that stepped in the racial slur kinda zone there, and they were apologetic afterwards"<sup>182</sup>

The Nationals would finish fifth place at the tournament in Perth, but participation in the tournament was the first step in establishing one of the top national programs in international lacrosse within the next decade. In 2008, the Nationals signed an endorsement deal with Nike,

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<sup>182</sup> Vennum, 280

and now receive funding from other sources such as the individual tribes and Native American businesses.

The history of lacrosse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides a microcosm of white-native relations. Though the issues of taking indigenous lands and forceful removal have subsided, controversies involving Iroquois lacrosse in recent years have trickled over to issues such as sovereignty and nationalism. The 2010 World Field Championships were a significant event for Iroquois lacrosse not because of what took place on the field, but the controversy that arose between the Haudenosaunee and the United States and United Kingdom governments. The first passports for the Iroquois League were 1923, but regular travel use with the document began in 1977. In the post-9/11 world, international security has drastically changed, and this is a point of conflict for the Haudenosaunee, who live and travel on both sides of the American- Canadian border. Following the requirements put forth by the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative in 2009, the governments of Canada, United States and the United Kingdom do not recognize the Iroquois passport. This is due to the fact that portions of the passport are hand written, and lack holograms and other security features that guard against forgeries. But for the Iroquois, these passports are a symbol of their national sovereignty that despite centuries' old treaties, continue to be objected. This source of the controversies regarding sovereignty can be traced to the 1831 Supreme Court decision in *Cherokee Nation vs Georgia*, in which Indian tribes were considered "domestic dependent nations", self-governing but only within the US borders.<sup>183</sup>

The 2010 World Field Championships in Manchester, England provided a situation in which the subject of Iroquois sovereignty would become an international news story. Days

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<sup>183</sup> "Cherokee Nation v Georgia." Cornell University Law School. Accessed February 20, 2016.



before the beginning of the games, the Nationals were told that the UK would not allow them to travel to the world championships because they were not assured that the team would be able to reenter the US on their tribal passports. The United States first offered immediate passports for the players, the Nationals rejected this offer, and reaffirmed that if they were traveling to represent the Iroquois Confederacy internationally, then they should be able to use their nation's passports. Executive Director of the Nationals, Percy Abrams, said "We have our principles, and with that sovereignty goes the idea that our country has been accepted."<sup>184</sup> After two days of pleading and negotiations, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, granted the team a one-time waiver to travel without American or Canadian passports. But British officials informed the Nationals that they would not approve their travel at all, despite the assurance from the United States government of the Iroquois' return. The Nationals rejected this offer. Nationals' officials reaffirmed that if they were traveling to represent the Iroquois Confederacy internationally, then they should be able to use their nation's passports. Negotiations between legal advisors for the Iroquois, British and American diplomats spilled over to when the Nationals should have been playing games, which they were forced to forfeit. By the end of the week, the Nationals accepted the inevitable and forfeited all of their matches at the tournament and returned home. The games went on without one of the top teams in competition, but the Iroquois won a small moral victory in which they showed three governments that they were willing to stand by their beliefs.

The 2015 Women's U19 World Championship was held in Edinburgh, Scotland and the same issue arose. Once again, the Iroquois were instructed that they would not be able to travel unless they provided Canadian or American passports, which the Nationals refused to comply

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<sup>184</sup> Hamill, Kristen. "Iroquois Lacrosse Team Still Caught in Bureaucratic Net." CNN. July 15, 2010. Accessed February 24, 2016.

with. "If we get Canadian and American passports, we're basically agreeing to be Canadian or American citizens. And by doing that, we are undermining our treaties that we have with those governments," said Kathy Smith, chair of the Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse board, "We can't have treaties with ourselves."<sup>185</sup> For nearly a year prior to the tournament, numerous attempts were made by Smith through British Parliament members and the British deputy consulate general in Toronto to sway the UK Border Agency, but to no avail. The only accommodation that the British were willing to provide was that the Iroquois were allowed to travel to Scotland with their Haudenosaunee passports, but would also need Canadian or American passports to verify their identities.<sup>186</sup> After the board met and discussed the matter, the Nationals withdrew from the competition. The issue to Iroquois passports has not been solved may arise again in the near future. England is scheduled to host the 2017 Women's World Cup and the 2018 Men's World Field Championship.

As the 2010 Men's and 2015 U19 Women's Championships raised consciousness regarding Iroquois sovereignty in the eyes of world governments, international lacrosse events have also enforced native pride. In September 2012, the FIL announced that the Iroquois would be the host nation for the 2015 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships. Originally the itinerary called for preliminary games to be held on the arena on Onondaga reservation and, for games that would draw larger crowds, to be held in Syracuse. The semifinals and championship were to be also sponsored by the Buffalo Bandits, and were scheduled to take place at the First Niagara Center in downtown Buffalo. Later, this would change and preliminary games would be hosted by the Iroquois at facilities on the Onondaga territory, the Oncenter War Memorial Arena in

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<sup>185</sup> DaSilva, Matt. "Passport Impasse Keeps Haudenosaunee Home." *Laxmagazine*. July 24, 2015. Accessed February 24, 2016.

<sup>186</sup> DaSilva

downtown Syracuse, and the championships to be held at the Carrier Dome on the campus of Syracuse University.

The significance of the 2015 WILC is that not only are the Iroquois Nationals the only indigenous team that competes internationally, they were now the first indigenous the nation to host an international championship. Press releases and flyers dubbed the event as "Lacrosse is coming home" and symbolically, through over a century of discrimination and exclusions, this is what took place. They carried their flag, fielded their national teams, exercised the sovereignty of indigenous nations, shared their culture, welcomed guest nations, and proudly hosted the games of their ancestors. Over the course of two weeks in September, the Iroquois would host teams and fans from twelve nations.

The first game the Iroquois played was against the USA, which they easily beat by the score of 13-9 in front of a sold out "home" crowd decked in Nationals' colors of purple and gold,. It would be difficult for one to imagine fifty years earlier, at the Onondaga-Syracuse University scrimmages that such an event was even feasible. For over a century, the Iroquois were acknowledged as the creators of the sport, but those who adapted the game from the Iroquois felt that they not play a significant role in the game's future. The 2015 WILC signified that not only the Iroquois were an important part of lacrosse's growth in the past twenty years, but they would play an important role in its future, despite the hurdles that were placed in their way. The Nationals would finish second to Canada for the fourth time since the inaugural quadrennial event in 2003, but the event meant so much more the people of the Haudenosaunee than simply a tournament. It signified to that despite centuries of exclusion and discrimination, both through lacrosse and socially, that the indigenous people of this continent were still proud of their ancestral heritage and how it has shaped their lives. The Nationals' motto of "We win,

you win" shows the deep connection to the team and the people that they represent on the world stage, on and off the field.

## **Chapter V**

### *Conclusion*

The important heritage that the Iroquois have played in lacrosse had never been denied by whites, but it was often inaccurately depicted. Their exclusion and the numerous ways that they were able to overcome the hurdles placed in front of them shows the resilience and dedication of the Haudenosaunee have paid off. They now have their own international team, are hosting tournaments, and are supplying some of the top players at all levels. Examining the history of Iroquois lacrosse and the achievements that have been accomplished despite the hardships they have faced. As presented in Chapter 1, an understanding of the meaning of lacrosse to the Iroquois and the folklore of the first match provides a glimpse into the culture of these people. Despite the lack of written records, stories such as this one have been passed for generations, despite the growth of western influences on their way of life. Along with the folklore of the game and its religious significance, the wooden lacrosse stick is presented as an artifact that was long important after the adaptation of the game by whites. Though production reduced after the introduction of synthetic sticks in the late 1970s, the wooden stick has always remained a symbol of Iroquois lacrosse. With the recent growth of the game outside of its traditional regions, the wooden stick is greater demand, and more individuals are picking up the craft.

Chapter 2 presents the changes that were forced upon the creators of lacrosse following the modernization of the sport, and its rapid adoption by whites. During this period, native players were considered professionals and were for the most part excluded from organized gameplay though that did not solve problems facing Canadian lacrosse prior to World War I. During the same time, traveling native teams were trying to take advantage of white interest in

the American Indian by providing more accurate glimpses of native life compared to the more popular traveling western shows.

One of the most important events that would have a lasting effect on Iroquois lacrosse would be the invention of box lacrosse in the 1930s. This new version of the sport not only provided the opportunity for native players to make money professionally in its early years in barnstorming leagues, similar to Negro League Baseball, boxla would also become the version of the game that was the first successful professional league. Box lacrosse also gained popularity among the native communities because its physical, high speed nature was closest to the original game that was invented centuries ago.

Finally, the contemporary role that the Iroquois play in the game today has done nothing but grow in recent years. Due to the efforts of a number of individuals, the Iroquois now have their own national team for international competition, and have begun to host world championships. The presence of Iroquois in lacrosse today has also crossed the line from athletics into social issues such as the passport dilemma that has not been resolved, and the ongoing efforts to extinguish the nickname “redskin”. The history of lacrosse has always provided a microcosm of white-native relations over the past one hundred fifty years, but it is important to acknowledge that relations meant that the indigenous people of this continent were not simply absorbed into western society as it was believed they would at the end of the nineteenth century. Lacrosse has always been one of the most important aspects of their culture, and will be an even bigger part of their future.

This thesis was aimed to show the various adjustments that were made by the descendants of the ancient indigenous peoples of this continent after the adaption of lacrosse by whites in the middle of the nineteenth century. Despite numerous attempts to purposefully, or

inherently, exclude them from taking part in the spread and modernization of the game, Native Americans have always been able to hold onto their identity and kept lacrosse a key component of their culture. Further research on the subject of indigenous lacrosse will continue to develop as the game continues to expand internationally. As box trained players continue to take over roster positions in the NCAA and the professional field levels, it will be interesting to see if this coincides recruitment of local native players and the recent success of high school programs with large Haudenosaunee populations such as Akron, Niagara Wheatfield, Gowanda/Silver Creek and Salamanca.

The recent additional income provided to tribes by casino profits that go to various community projects on the reservations include proceeds going towards lacrosse clubs and buildings. In 2011, the Seneca Nation built a new community center in Salamanca, NY which includes a state of the art lacrosse facility. Prior to this building, the old lacrosse box was made out of wooden boards and the playing surface was not artificial turf or concrete, as with most facilities, but grass and dirt. How these additional funds dedicated to the promotion of lacrosse among that community and its effects will be interesting to examine the results after a full generation of children have gone their entire childhood playing at a state of the art facility. These young native players are the first generation to have the most recognizable faces in lacrosse look like them. Only time will tell whether despite the small pool of players, that native plays will continue to take a larger share of collegiate and professional rosters.

For decades, whites were dependent on native construction of wooden lacrosse sticks simply because they were the only type made until the introduction of plastic and metal crosses in the seventies. Despite the rapid decrease in the use of wooden sticks, individuals such as Alf Jacques and Wes Patterson kept the art alive. Now that there is so much interest in native

lacrosse, many stick makers are having a difficult time keeping up with the demand of their sticks on the market. If production and demand continues to increase, analysis and research on the economic impact for these wooden crosses and among the overall market of indigenous goods in North America would provide insightful assistance in understanding what is driving recent interest in indigenous culture.

Most notably, the western New York region is unique because it is the only area in the lacrosse world where all three divisions of lacrosse are in close proximity to one another. The location of reservations to the north, south and east of the city and its proximity to the Canadian border is key to why it is the epicenter of American box lacrosse. Though some high schools did have teams as early as the seventies, it was only until the turn of the century when lacrosse became a popular sport among most districts. As of the 2016 season, the area of western New York is fielding thirty five programs. Since players from this area are provided the unique opportunity where they can play both versions of lacrosse with a variety of players from different backgrounds, the impact of this area on the sport overall will have to be reexamined down the road. The game of lacrosse as a whole is expanding and gaining popularity so quickly, that much of what is presented in the final chapter of this thesis may be outdated in a matter of only a few years.



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