**LACROSSE: THE CREATOR’S GAME**

Dewa:è or lacrosse is the traditional sport of the Hodinohsionh (People of the Longhouse), the six Iroquois nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Onieda, Mohawk, and Tuscarora) who inhabited the north eastern region of the current United States for thousands of years. The Hodinohsionh believe the game of lacrosse is a gift from the Creator and he gave it to the people for his entertainment and enjoyment. Lacrosse also has ceremonial and spiritual significance to the Hodinohsionh, thus the reason to always play with a “good mind.”

Lacrosse was also used in place of physical warfare between feuding nations. A brutal match consisting of hundreds of warriors, a wooden ball, and lack of padding made for a ferocious battle that could last for days and stretch across acres or even miles of land. The goal was usually between two large trees at the ends of each boundary and traditional handmade wooden sticks with leather nets were used to throw heavy softball size wooden or rock balls thru the opposing team’s goal. The rules and penalties of the historic lacrosse game were nonexistent; the players were fierce warriors who took pride in their agility, bravery, and pride.

Onehjih or “long ago” lacrosse was a game of honor, agility, warfare, and a way to settle disputes. The Hodinohsionh introduced the sport to the European settlers, and the game has evolved over centuries into an Olympic game, a college sport, a professional box and field league, and has sparked international interest. It is currently the fastest growing sport in the U.S. and is Canada’s national sport.

The Hodinohsionh have carried the tradition and spirit of lacrosse through generations and the future looks bright enough to carry it on for seven more.

Today, lacrosse as we know it has come a long way. In Canada and the US, there are two variations of lacrosse that are played, box lacrosse and field lacrosse.

Box lacrosse, which originates from Canada, is played in an indoor arena. The game is essentially ‘hockey without ice and with a ball instead of a puck.’ Teams consist of five players and a goalie, with the objective for each team to score the most goals by the end of the allotted time. Players are outfitted with protective padding, helmets with facemasks, and utilize sticks to wield a solid rubber ball. The primary difference between box lacrosse and it’s counterpart, is the 4’ x 4’ goal and having the rule that all players’ sticks must be between 40” – 46.”

Field lacrosse by nature is much more aggressive and it’s enclosed area lend to the game being much more fast paced as well.

Field lacrosse, which is the more popular variation, is played outdoors and on a much larger 110 x 60 yard field. Again, the game consists of two teams, but each team has 10 players on the field at a time, one of which is the goalie. The field is not enclosed and there are designated positions and marked areas to which each position is confined. The two marketed differences in field lacrosse are that offensive players utilize 40” – 42” sticks and defensive players utilize 52” – 72” sticks. This, along with a larger 6’ x 6’ goal, make for a very different game altogether. Field lacrosse also has a less-aggressive female version that is extremely popular across the US.

With a multitude of leagues ranging from children’s box lacrosse among Native Nations in New York and Canada to International field lacrosse championship tournaments featuring teams from around the world, lacrosse is growing at an exponential rate. According to data from the National Federation of State High School Associations by Buzzfeed.com, “Between 2008-09 and 2012-13 years, participation in high-school lacrosse grew 19 percent among girls (to more than 77,000 players) and 15 percent among boys (to nearly 102,000 players).”

In 2015, lacrosse “came home” as the Federation of International Lacrosse’s (FIL) World Indoor Lacrosse Championships (WILC) were hosted by the Onondaga Nation. Teams representing Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Serbia, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey and the United States competed along with the Iroquois Nationals, who are the only fully sovereign Indigenous team in world sports-travelling on Haudenosaunee passports and flying their own flag.

From September 18 to 27, lacrosse fans from around the world were given a warm welcome by the game’s founders and treated to a special view of the cultural and historical importance of lacrosse to Native peoples. The Seneca Nation was a major sponsor of the event and represented by Josh Becker hailing from the Allegany Territory. Ainsley Jenison, the Executive Director of the Iroquois Nationals is also Seneca. Canada has won the gold every year and this year was no exception. However, the Iroquois Nationals, who won the silver, are the only team that gave them neck and neck competition in games that had fans on the edge of their seats. An epic multimedia opening ceremony featuring over 50 dancers and singers that highlighted the deep historic roots of the game, presentations by world renowned traditional stick maker Alf Jacobs and respected Native leaders, as well as banquets of traditional Native foods, and a pavilion of Native artists and craftspeople selling their wares led FIL President Stan Cockerton to offer the highest praise for the hospitality and rich legacy of “The Creator’s Game” that was shared by the host.