

LACROSSE IN CANADA

Its Present and its Past Status

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A CORRESPONDENT writes a letter in which he claims that lacrosse is on the decline in popularity, not so much in the larger cities as in the smaller towns and rural districts of Canada. In the populous districts, judging from the crowds who attend to see first-class teams play, the game is as much enjoyed as ever. It is, however, a question if professionalism has not eaten further into the marrow of the game, than is generally supposed. Lacrosse undoubtedly possesses many desirable elements in the creation, not alone of athletes, but also of men who may be expected to develop into desirable citizens. In days of yore, when the game was entirely amateur and young men of Canada in their enthusiasm were wont to rise early in the morning and run and practise just for the pure love of the thing, many of the best men the country has known were the outcome. It is only necessary to refer, in support of the statement, to the present Chief of Staff, General Otter, who in his youth was an enthusiastic lacrosse player; the late Major Michie, a citizen of repute, whom everybody admired and respected; the late Colonel Arthurs, a man of the same calibre, although much less in stature; Mr. W. K. McNaught, M.P.P.; Mr. W. K. George, president of the Canadian National Exhibition; Mr. J. G. Kent, an honourable vice-president of the Canadian National Exhibition; Mr. James Carruthers, a leading merchant both of Toronto and Montreal; to several men prominent in financial and railway circles and to hundreds of good, honourable and successful men throughout Canada. If we go abroad we shall find men there like George Massey, who had their early training on the lacrosse field and who have profited by the lessons of manliness, courage, quickness and forbearance there acquired.

The game of lacrosse undoubtedly had its origin with the Indians. The story that they fooled an enemy while playing, luring that enemy into the unsuspectingness of spectators, is probably true; for there is no game so actually innocent in itself and yet so absorbing and exciting to the looker-on. There is no game so spectacular as lacrosse. There are possibly more scientific games, although even that is doubtful, but to watch, there is not its equal under the sun. Played in the true spirit, lacrosse teaches much that is noble in character; it is unavoidable in the game that hurts should occur, and

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it is the man who can brush accidents aside and cultivate a spirit of forbearance, remembering that he is playing a game, who will ultimately conquer the difficulties of life and establish a claim to a seat among the mighty.

The citizen residents of Quebec, or Lower Canada, were the first to recognise the beauties and possibilities of the game. From Montreal, between forty and fifty years ago, after an introduction to Ottawa by George Massey, of the Beaver Club, and H. A. Stafford, of the Montreal Club, and the establishment of a club which existed for some years under the captaincy of C. Cluff, lacrosse travelled west and found a temporary abiding place, first of all, good old Moses Oates was wont to declare, in the town of Fergus. After a bit, the game was taken up in Toronto by some of the best middle-class families of those times, and it was not long before it became the rage and we find some keen and bitter contests being waged between the Torontos and Ontarios. To refer to these in particular would be kind of ante-dating events, for while the annals of lacrosse in Toronto only go a little farther back than the year in which this great Dominion was born or became federated, it was played in the district of Montreal upwards of sixty years ago.

The beginning of lacrosse is said to have been in competitions between the Olympic Athletic Club of "the Commercial Capital," and the Iroquois braves from the Caughnawaga Reserve. These competitions were held annually, until finally in 1856 some of the crack athletes of the Olympic Club met and organised the Montreal Lacrosse Club, the first club of its kind in Canada. This club in its turn was the foundation of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association and aided materially in the maintenance of that organisation. After the Montreal Club, came the Hochelaga Club, then the Beavers and many other organisations with players of various ages. It is stated that the first public appearance of the Montreal Lacrosse Club that excited more than local interest occurred in 1860, when a game was played between twenty-four players taken from the Montreal and Beaver Clubs and twenty-four Indians. Seven years later, lacrosse having attracted attention by its distinctiveness as well as its desirability in character, was adopted as the national game, simultaneously, as has been said, with the birth of the Dominion, and in 1867 the Shamrock Club was formed in Montreal and the Toronto Lacrosse Club in Toronto. Then came the organisation of the National Lacrosse Association of Canada. From this on, the game spread and grew in popularity, being taken up by the then high schools, the public schools and the preparatory schools of the country.

At this time lacrosse was undoubtedly both in name and in character fairly entitled to be con-

sidered the national pastime. Baseball was unknown, cricket was little known, and lacrosse filled the void which the patriotic young men of the day felt for a sport that had sufficient legitimate individuality to be considered indigenous. At that time the poles were decorated with golden-fringed flags, which frequently were wound round the top, the whole being surmounted by figures of beavers or by an ornament not exactly eagle-like in shape, but that still had the appearance of birdliness from the distance.

In 1869, at a tournament arranged for the benefit of His Royal Highness Prince Arthur, now Duke of Connaught, flags were presented to the Montreal Lacrosse Club and medals were given to those players who played for the flags, among whom were the late Dr. Beers, W. L. Maltby, John Henderson, Hugh W. Beckett, Angus Grant, E. Ermatinger, and our present well-known fellow-townsmen and George W. Torrance. During the next few years the Montreal Lacrosse Club travelled extensively, and introduced the game into many parts of Canada, even carrying it into Great Britain, which country was visited by a team of Montrealers and a team of Caughnawaga Indians in 1876, who had the honour of playing before Her Late Majesty Queen Victoria. The players of that period included Dr. George Beers, Kingston; H. W. Beckett, D. E. Bowie, Angus Grant, Sam Massey, of Montreal, W. O. Ross, of Toronto, "Royal Bill" as he was termed after his return; T. G. Ralston, St. John, N.B.; Henry Joseph, T. C. A. McIndoe, Sam Struthers, later of Toronto, G. S. Hubbell, J. T. R. Green, Thomas E. Hodgson, S. R. MacDonald, and R. Summerhayes, of Montreal.

Here I shall perhaps be pardoned for harking back a bit. It was in 1866 that George Massey, who had migrated to Toronto, formed a club here in conjunction with his brother John Massey, and John Henderson, George Leslie and others. So well did the game catch on that before the end of the year the Toronto Lacrosse Club had all the members it could accommodate, and the Ontario Lacrosse Club was formed by Colonel Arthurs, A. A. Miller and Joseph Lugsdin.

Early in 1867 the Montreal and Beaver Clubs amalgamated and formally adopted the first laws of lacrosse, as compiled by Dr. Beers. Later in 1867 was organised the National Lacrosse Association of Canada and in the fall of that year the Montreal Club called a convention at Kingston of all the white clubs then existing in Canada, numbering about fifteen. Definite rules were adopted at this convention. A year later at Montreal they were revised, but although many revisions and amendments have taken place in the two score years of the existence of the game on an organised basis, the fundamental principles have remained unchanged. In the days of the Indians, lacrosse was called "Baggetaway," which, considering the nature of the stick and the desirability of getting rid of



The Toronto Lacrosse Team in 1871

R. B. Hamilton. J. Massey. J. L. Hughes. J. B. Henderson.
C. McVittie. C. H. Nelson. C. E. Robinson. H. Langlois. T. Hodgetts.
T. Mitchell. R. H. Mitchell. (General) W. D. Otter.



The Toronto Lacrosse Team in 1875