

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF LACROSSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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## INTRODUCTION

"Lacrosse is played by two teams of ten players each. The purpose of each team is to score by causing the ball to enter the goal of the opponent and to prevent the other team from securing the ball and scoring. The ball is kept in play by being carried, thrown or batted with the Crosse, rolled and kicked in the direction subject to the restrictions laid down by the " rules of the game".

This is the official description of lacrosse, as published by the "Official National Collegiate Athletic Association", which have been internationally adopted as the rules of the game. This basic aim of Lacrosse, has changed little since the Northern American Indians first invented it many hundreds of years ago, although the numbers playing the rules used and the context within it is played has certainly changed.

Lacrosse can be regarded as one of the oldest and most highly developed games played by modern man. True also, is its almost entirely unique nature compared to the majority of team games played today. Firstly, the ball is carried and transferred by means other than with the hand or foot. Second, play may be carried on behind the goals, and of course there are many other features which make it unique, which hopefully will become evident throughout the course of this paper. A HISTORY OF LACROSSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

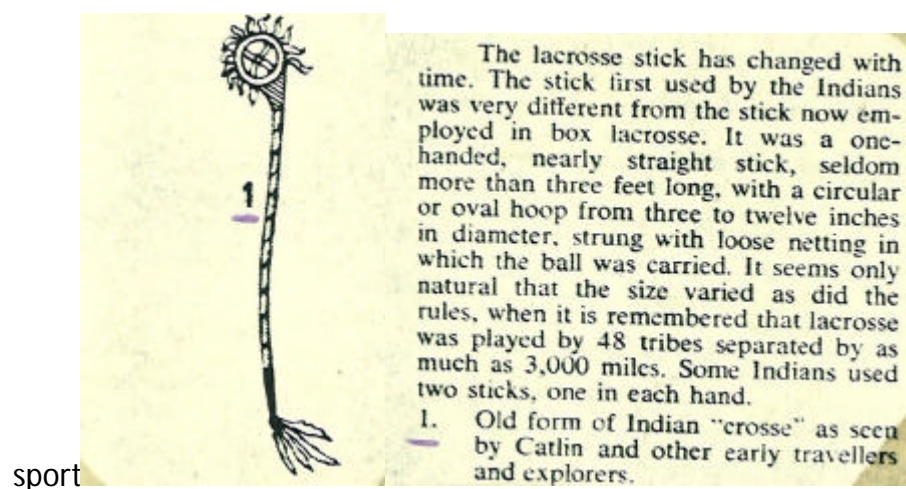
### BRIEF ORIGIN OF LACROSSE

The game of Lacrosse arises from a tumultuous and obscure legendary past, among North American Indian Tribes. It is said that it originated as a "pre-war" ceremony, the aim of which was to motivate the warriors and entertain the spirits so as they may smile upon the ensuing battle

By the time white settlers arrived in North America the purpose of this game locally called "Baggataway" was both ceremonial and means of practicing the skills and tactics of war. The first documented report of one of these games was by George Catlin a French explorer in 1835. This game played two tribes of 700 braves, was played on a field 2 miles long, with goals 25 feet high and 6 feet wide. The implements used were a small ball made from tightly bound rawhide and hair, a short hickory stick netted at one end with rawhide thong and carried in one hand.

This particular game lasted for one week and with a situation where no holds barred ruled and 4 old medicine Men as umpires and this almost unlimited field size, casualties were apparently quite high.

While settlers soon became interested in this game and by 1850, Dr George Beers is said to have been the first to draw up a set of rules which would make the game more civilised and suitable for play by the settlers. These rules restricted the numbers playing on each side to 25 and later 12 depending on the amount of people wanting to play. The field or rather the goal distance was set at between 120 and 150 yards with play allowed to extend as far behind the goals and as wide as desired. Restricted also was the severity with which opponents could tackle each other. Most of the today's rules are merely refinements of this original set. The name "Lacrosse" was given by French settlers in the early 1800's but there are arguments as to how this came about. The more popular though is that the word was chosen to represent the stick used by the Indians which to the settlers apparently reminded them of a Bishop's Crosier- "La Crosier" which later became La Crosse in the English. Others believe that it takes the name from the place where white man first may have become interested in the game, on the shores of "Lac Ile a la crosse", In Canada. Whatever the true reason, Lacrosse is the title of a modern game which has evolved to a high stage of development which requires skill, speed and stamina from its individual players who must combine with perfect understanding with each other in order to be successful in winning. True also is that present stringent controls of rules and regulations the game of lacrosse is one of the safest and more spectacular, compared to most other body contact



sport



SOURCE-Fitness and Armature Sport Directorate, Department of National Health and Welfare, Canada Lacrosse.

#### SPREAD OF THE GAME IN AUSTRALIA

From early accounts it seems as though the spread and survival of lacrosse can be attributed to two basic factors

- 1/ The spectacular and curious nature of the game and its ability to attract attention
- 2/ The extreme devotion of those who become genuinely involved with the sport to see it played and who work tirelessly to see that it doesn't die out.

England and United States of America had seen Lacrosse or herd of it, since it was first known to exist. However it wasn't until 1875 that it was taken up by these countries despite demonstration games put on for them by Canadian settlers and Indians as early as 1865.

Australia in fact beat them to it without this general prior knowledge of the games existence.

In 1874 a man by the name of L.L. Mount arrived in Melbourne from Canada with a set of lacrosse sticks and soon aroused interest as to what they were used for. After some demonstrations of the skills of the game enough people became interested to enable the formation of two teams, Reds and Blues. From these teams came the men who would be the nucleus of Lacrosse development for most of Australia.

A. Wilkinson, a south Australian was responsible for the introduction of lacrosse to his state, after seeing the game played by some friends of his in Victoria. As in Melbourne he soon aroused interest among his friends but it wasn't until 1885 that an official club was formed there. The principal reason for this delay which is one that plagues Lacrosse to this day was lack of good lacrosse sticks. This was in turn due to the fact hickory is the only suitable wood for making crosses and this is only found in North America. As well as this crosses at that stage were solely hand made by the Indians. So the few crosses that were being made at the time had to be imported thus the shortage.

In 1887 the first of many annual interstate encounters between Victoria and South Australia was initiated. This tradition still maintains itself today.

New South Wales was first introduced to Lacrosse in 1884 by G. Beech, a prominent Victorian Lacrosseur and by 1886 an association was formed there.

Also that year Queensland took up the game although who was responsible is not exactly known. It is believed however that a former Cambridge University player was involved although it seems likely that more than one former player was involved. Evidence for this lies in the fact that in the year 1886 the Queenslanders invited a visit from an experienced Sydney team and beat them quite soundly.

Tasmania also had a taste of Lacrosse in the pre World War 1 era, being introduced to the game by Victorian players in 1895.

#### KNOWN PASSAGES OF LACROSSE SPREAD TO AND THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA

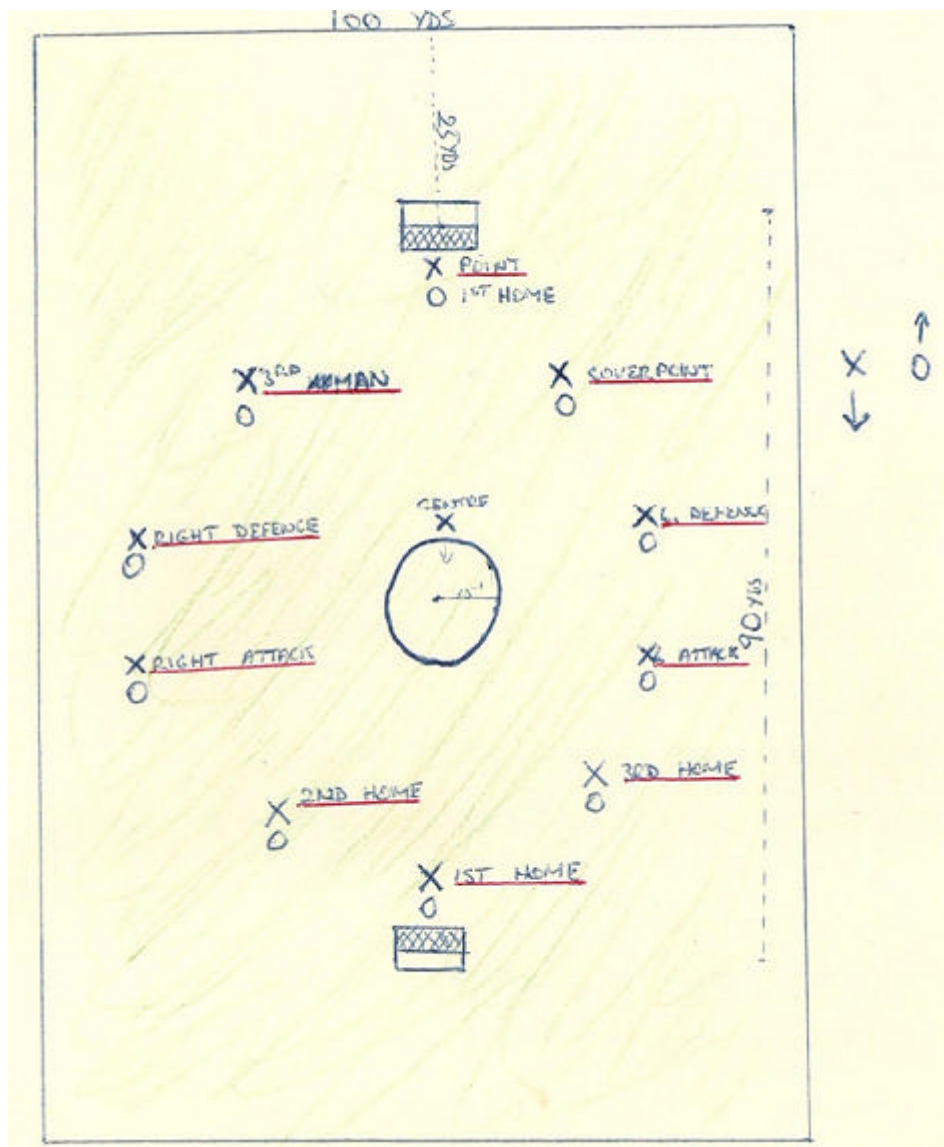
This is not to say that these were only paths and as well as this unofficial unreported spread may have occurred at earlier dates to those reported below





Western Australia is one of these states in which it has survived despite many ups and downs. Today however this game receives much less following than it did prior to World War 1.

#### FIELD LAYOUT 1907-1962



SOURCE- THE AUSTRALIAN LACOSSE COUNCIL CONSTITUTION AND LAWS OF LACROSSE.

The above sketch map of the Lacrosse field in 1954 represent the same design governing 12 a side Lacrosse after introduction by the Canadians in 1907. The only thing to change up until the American visit of 1959 was the dimensions of the field which gradually decreased



through Australian Lacrosse Council ruling or restriction on space imposed by government land allocations for sport and recreation.

### LACROSSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The first appearance of lacrosse corresponds closely to the “Gold rush” period of the 1890’s and it is to this event that West Australian Lacrosseurs attribute the introduction of the game to this state. At this stage too Lacrosse was played according to the rules laid down by Beers in Canada 1850. So even though it was played, it was still in its crudest form with many injuries due to Stick-body contact. This may account for its apparent popularity among the men of the time as a social game. It wasn’t until 1896 that first organised games took place.

Lacrosse was played on an organised scale in two areas of WA

1. The goldfields 1898 – 1915
2. The Perth Metropolitan area 1896 - ?

### LACROSSE ON THE GOLDFIELDS

The first reported official game on the Goldfields appeared in the July 16 edition of the “Coolgardie Pioneer” in 1898. The association in that year consisted of four teams, two each from Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. Prior to this all reports on Lacrosse consisted of Adelaide fixtures with the occasional important Canadian fixture. If we assume that the newspaper cater for the majority of the population, then we can assume that there were a number of South Australian and Canadian Lacrosseurs on the Goldfields at this time who were probably responsible for starting the game as a relief from their mining tasks or otherwise.

1898 saw the first visit from a team representing the West Australian lacrosse Association formed in Perth two years earlier. The highlight of this tour occurred when the combined Goldfields team led by former South Australian in R. B. Andrews beat the W.A.L.A. team 4 - 0 in front of an estimated crowd of 4,000. Note the low score line which was almost a direct consequence of having the goals 150 yards apart and the general “all in melee” type of play.

From this date Lacrosse on the Goldfields grew at respectable rate, although players in this region were given the opportunity to officially represent the state in interstate games until 1911. Between this however Goldfields Lacrosse managed to keep pace in most developments of the game through getting its own share of interstate visits as well as a real highlight in the Canadian team visit in 1907. This tour by the Canadians completely revolutionized Lacrosse in Australia and even though only one game was played on the Goldfields, the improvements initiated enabled Goldfields players to be in the position to insist that at least 4 players in any W.A.L.A team would come from the Goldfields in 1911 that year also saw the amalgamation of the two associations.

By the start of World War 1 lacrosse was wide spread throughout the Goldfields and received as much spectators following as any sport in the time. Possibly the only restrictor of growth to that stage was in the availability of the Canadian Hickory crosse. World War 1 then became the initiator of the extinction of Lacrosse on the Goldfields with most of the men gone to war by 1916, official games ceased completely. By the end of War no one seemed to want the responsibility or have the enthusiasm to start from scratch again and with the end of the gold rushes of early days most of the population, including undoubtedly many Lacrosseurs had moved to Perth in any case. With the backbone of the sport removed therefore Lacrosse became non exist ant other than on an occasional social level.

Some attempt to revive the game was reported in 1935 by former and Perth enthusiasts. At the start with the support of the W.A.L.A. and a visit from the Victorian team it seemed a though things would happen again. However by 1937 with zero growth to show for 2 years the association was again disbanded. Two reasons appear obvious for the failure:

1. A tight money situation during the period probably discouraged may potential new players from investing in equipment other than boots.
2. Rather than to spend extra to play an unknown sport people tended to stick to football which by that stage had reached immense popularity on the Goldfields as "Australia's national game". Where lacrosse on the Goldfields failed the game has survived in Perth as the Western Australian lacrosse Association.

## THE WEST AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE ASSOCIATION. (WALA)

### The first few years.

The WALA was formed in 1896 by a group of Eastern States enthusiasts headed by F.C. Parsons and started but with the formation of two clubs in Perth and Fremantle, the latter which still runs today. The teams at this stage as we have mentioned consisted of 12 men with the goals being two upright sticks 6 feet apart and 150 yards away for each team.

From a playing point of view Lacrosse was initially slow in catching on among the locals. However from a spectator scene it is apparent that a good deal of interest was expressed towards the game. A number of reasons have been speculated to explain this slow playing start. Firstly that Lacrosse sticks availability and cost problems again. Secondly securing enough playing area to play in many cases retarded the development of new clubs. A number of approaches to the Minister for Lands at the time were apparently unsuccessful.

Lastly and probably most important the Young Australian League initiated a movement around the early 1900's to make Australian Rules Football the "Australian Game". This in particular involved directing this game at the junior level which would not only guarantee future players but attract the interest of the parent population. Despite all this WA Lacrosse still grew and strengthened enough to make a real game out of their first inter-state encounter against South Australia in 1903 there were 8 teams competing on a highly competitive basis.

## THE CANADIAN VISIT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN 1907.

1907, was an extremely significant year in early West Australia and indeed Australian Lacrosse. It was in this year that a Canadian representative side toured Australia which included 4 games against association teams. The main effect of this tour was to make the players and administrators of the game think about its rules and the practicality of them based on the results of great changes in Lacrosse overseas. As a result changes on a rule and tactical scale were introduced prior to and after the Canadian visit. Following are reports given by the West Australian newspaper concerning the Canadian tour:

July 6 1907: The W.A.L.A. passes a rule that the ball may be kicked, in lieu of the Canadian visit whose team plays this rule. A goal may not be scored from the boot however.

August 2 1907: After losing their only match on tour in the first test against Australia, the Canadian team requests to the tour committee that the distance between goals 150 yards be shortened to 115 yards as it is in Canada.

August 3 1907: The tour committee agrees to a compromise field length of 130 yards for Canada v Australia games. Discussion on this WA resulted in the popular decision of catering for the Canadians by having intergoal distances of 115 yards. The result that this would have been a far more action packed and easier scoring game right up to the final whistle. As there was no substitution allowed at this stage games on the longer fields often ended up as very slow battles for survival.

August 15 1907: The W.A.L.A approaches the Football league and other major sporting bodies to cancel the fixtures for the main Canada v W.A. game.

The aim of this was to increase the status of Lacrosse in this state and in a fine sporting gesture the major sporting bodies cancelled their major fixtures for this event.

August 24 1907: The Canadian team lands in Perth at the Port of Fremantle. On that day the "West" published an exclusive interview with the Captain of the Canadian Team. When asked for what he considered the major differences between the Australian and the Canadian game he described

1. Australian Lacrosseurs had their crosses strung tight in accordance with the rules, which enabled fast accurate throwing but much less consistency in catching the ball.

2. Australian Lacrosse played with a slightly larger but lighter ball than used in Canada.

3. Canadian lacrosse involved much greater use of the body check to such an extent that they were often accused of unduly rough play. This however was all fair and part of the Canadian game.

4. The Australian tended to play more as a team of individuals and were continually rushing the ball.

During the course of their stay the Canadians played and won 2 games against the full WA side, 13-4 and 14-6 respectively. In a report by "Lallee" the sports writer- critic of the time. The lessons learnt from the Canadians were put forward as being

1. Don't rush things and make the opposition make the moves
2. Play as a team.
3. How to construct and combat crowding in defence tactics.

It is this latter tactics which dominated Lacrosse for many decades until the offside rule was introduced. It involved the defending team pulling back all 12 players around the goal mouth to crowd the defence and make it very difficult for goals shots to penetrate. It is the opinion of many of the older players that this tactic served to reduce the game as a spectacle to the extent that it may have had an inhibiting effort on the growth of the game in later years.

As a direct consequence of the Canadian visit the WALA changed its rulings to allow shorter grounds which would partially solve space problems, baggy strung crosses and kicking of the ball which served to drastically improve and refine the skills of the game.

As the Canadian tour of Australia came to a close, two men a Canadian by the name Garland and an Australian by the name of McHarg, donated a large silver cup to be used as a prize in a tri-annual all states carnival as a stimulus for developing Australian lacrosse. This cup is still keenly competed for today on a yearly basis between Victoria, South and Western Australia and has done much for raising the national standard of the game. On top of this the Canadian team donated a set of hickory crosses to be used for the advancement of the game.

Following the Canadian tour Lacrosse had the potential to take giant developmental strides as a result of its increased public status as a sport. Despite the apparent large number of enquiries by athletes wanting to play the WALA could not cater for them in terms of land to play and of course the number of lacrosse sticks available for use. Remember at this time

the quantity relied solely on the limited shipments from North America and in turn the Eastern States. Hence by the start of World War 1, only six more teams had evolved.

Encouraging though was the apparent large spectator interest after 1907 until World War 1 when it was not uncommon to find as many as 4,000 people at a major game. In relation to the population in that period this was quite respectable. In comparison to today's attendances this was mammoth. This situation can probably be attributed to two major factors:

1. With the visit of the Canadians, Lacrosse became recognised as a sport with international potential. With this in mind the status of the game must have rose considerably especially as to my knowledge no international teams in any other code of sport had visited Western Australia. This effort would not be so marked now, since WA has many successful national representatives in so many sports bigger than Lacrosse

2. Today's sporting scene is considered dominated by one or two sports, eg Football which have suffered less in their development and been given greater opportunity in junior recruiting at the school level and in coverage by the media. In the early days of course living in a small community as well as the lack of real dominance meant greater opportunity for to exposure to the game and hence more chance of people being caught in the curious nature of lacrosse.

### WORLD WAR 1.

Little can be said of this period other than it saw all competition cease by 1915 as more went to war. Unlike other sports which were under the wing of the Young Australian League eg. Football, hockey and boxing, lacrosse had no junior participation. This is not surprising in a way since the game during that period still resembled an unrefined no holds barred contest with little strict umpire control. To the unsuspecting parents. Lacrosse at that stage although fun to watch would probably have little appeal to them as a sport their children could play.

Nowadays the rules have been refined and the games more strictly controlled to the extent that it is even safe enough for 7 year olds to play in an "F" grade competition.



World War 1 therefore exposed a major problem in that without junior participation, similar crisis could lead to extinction as had happened on the Goldfields. The event of the war also had the retarding effects on growth loss of players in battle or through loss of enthusiasm after a 3-4 year break from play.

### BETWEEN THE WAR.

Unlike on the Goldfields there was no shortage of enthusiasts around who were willing to restart Lacrosse after the conclusion of the war. On June 11 1919, a group of enthusiasts met to form a committee whose responsibility it would be to organise the coming season. The Perth and Fremantle clubs reform, although official games between the two were minimal. Instead teams were selected on a weekly basis in order to maintain interest for the year. The year was dedicated to the revival of the game and through the efforts of a backbone of enthusiasts mainly in Messrs Hickey, Whiteman, Taylor and Grace, Lacrosse was put back on its feet and pushed on from there.

Growth after 1919 was quite slow and this is attributed to the fact that in the efforts to get lacrosse moving again, teams tend to maintain an emphasis on using the older players which in most cases was at the expense of new younger players. As with anything in life interest can only be maintained when opportunity is given. Players may have been lost through this.

1925 was a significant year in West Australian Lacrosse, with the adoption of "Canadian rules and regulations. The main rules were:

1. The use of the smaller but slightly heavier 5 1/2 oz rubber ball
2. Stricter control of the stick to body contact
3. Rectangular goal zone 18 feet by 12 feet.
4. Centre circle 15 feet radius within which the centre men only could be at the face-off. This rule leads to the possibility that if one player disposed of opposite number at the face-off, he would be entitled to hold on to the ball for as long as he liked without being molested by any other player on the field outside that circle.

5. The umpire would have the power to invoke penalties on offending players, the severity of which would be at his own discretion. Penalties ranged from loss of possession to the offending player being sent off the field for varying periods of time.

6. Under no circumstances is a player from one team allowed within the opposing team's goal zone. The purpose of this restriction and the one as mentioned concerning the centre circle, wherein no player may enter, until one of the centre players clears the ball outside after the face-off was to prevent melees from developing with all 24 competition involved. This rule often came open for abuse as an avenue of time wasting and certainly had a slow down effect on the game.

These rules in general did much to refine the game and made it far less dangerous than it sometimes was in the early days. As well as this it brought our rules more into line with the other states, useful in inter-state competition.

1925, also saw the first visit by an interstate team since the war. It illustrated that even though WA lacrosse was slow in growing the standard was quite high as Western Australia best the South Australian visitor's in two of the three encounters. A fine gesture was made by the football league on this occasion, in their help to procure the Royal Show Grounds for this visit by South Australia, which was the only well prepared turf in the metropolitan area. This allowed for faster play and ideal for spectators to come and see top Lacrosse on the best of facilities.

From 1925 rapid growth in members of players with a corresponding increases in standard of play such that by 1930, numbers had doubled and there were 17 teams competing in two grades. This was primarily due to the great enthusiasm shown by members in advertising the game and with the refinement of rules Lacrosse became more attractive to greater numbers of the community. More significant than this however was probably the receiving of large consignments of crosses from South Australia which enabled members to rope in families and friends to play. A strong feature of the Lacrosse communities since 1900 to 1975 is the way very large participation by family groups and their friends who eventually became related through marriage. This is a very interesting tendency which could do with some looking into. However to comment on it, it might be said that this feature may have had some restricting effect on mass growth of the game. Its advantage especially during times of growth was that it provided a nucleus of players for competition and a friendly

atmosphere which would attract people. Its long run disadvantaged lies in the possibility that with such a large family club players may tend to form cliques in teams which would make it very difficult for new comers to break into and play in top competition. Thus they may become discouraged and give the game away. More factors than this would be responsible for the limited growth of the game and its significance is undermined.

The 1930's was a significant period with so many events occurring. 1930 itself saw the introduction of three positive events in the boom of lacrosse during this period:

1. The introduction of the District System which was constituted and drawn up by I.J. Taylor in 1925 and discussed by the April 30 edition of the West Australian. This system involved the sectioning of the metro area into nine sections within which a club would form through reshuffling players. Provision was also made for a University team. The senior A Division would consist of the top team from each district and the B Division the second team. The aim of each district club would be to roster lacrosse in the district, in particular at a junior level. This was shown to be possible by a Maylands School teacher who successfully introduced the game to his school and encouraged the older boys to join the Maylands Club by 1929. The apparent reasoning behind the introduction of the district system was to stimulate community interest in the game and through individual campaigning of the club expand Lacrosse in their district.

2. The reported introduction of the West Australian Referees Association. The aim of this association was to give consistency to Umpiring of game games as well as stricter control and enforcement of the rules by training and suppling referees. This was far more satisfactory than having any handy player to do the job and showed the beginning of a professional attitude by the W.A.L.A.

3. Yet another feature of 1930 was the initiation of the annual Lacrosse Gala day. Including on this day's program were such things as:

- A six a side round robin Lacrosse Tournament

- Relay races

- Distance and goal throwing competition and

- Club marching

Points are awarded to event winners and a trophy was presented to the club with most points on the day. The consequences of these Gala Days were concerned with developing a social event which would not only publicise the game but create a social atmosphere between enthusiasts, which would not only encourage people to stay on in the game but attract new blood.

The 1931 season then saw the constitution of Australian Lacrosse Council whose aim was to nationalise lacrosse, organise interstate and international games and change rules to maintain development of the game. Its effect on W.A. Lacrosse would only occur in the 1960's on a major scale when so many changes were made. Up until World War 2 Lacrosse in W.A. continued to grow in size and strength. By far the most significant feature was the development of junior under 16 competitions as stimulated by the presentation of a silver cup to be used for this purpose by the Victorian Association in 1932. As we shall see the development would stand the game in good stead after the war.



## WORLD WAR 2

At the start of World War 2 Lacrosse was in a strong position especially in the junior field, despite wide public and school support for the playing of football. It does seem though that most junior players either belonged to a Lacrosse family or were friends of players. This is attributed to the fact that only those exposed to the game as in the family situation would ever get the inclination to play the game, especially as the in thing was football through the efforts of the Y.A.L.

As the war went on and players were called up the senior competition was abandoned leaving only those under the age of 18 to run the show. Only three clubs had sufficient numbers to field teams, even though games were altered to include 8 to a team. These clubs were Wembley with 2 teams, Midland Junction also with 2 and Fremantle with 1. Not surprisingly it was these teams which dominated the Lacrosse scene during the revival years following the war. Many clubs never really recovered from the set back of the war and the feature of the revival years was disbanding or amalgamation of the old clubs and the springing up of new ones in the newer areas of the metro areas.

## POST WAR LACROSSE

Growth immediately after the war was quite rapid such that by 1946 things were at a level comparable to the pre-war period. The advantage of maintaining junior competition during the war became evident in 1947 when W.A. with a team of youth and experience won the Garland-McHarg cup for the first time since its inception. The next 5 years saw the first real restriction to the games growth as a result of political decision making.





An action shot of Lacrosse in the 1950's. From THE WEST AUSTRALIAN, MAY 10 1954

During 1947 the government imposed dollar restrictions on imports of goods from North America. This resulted in the stop of flow of Lacrosse sticks from Canada because of this when equipment broke it more or less meant that players could not play and as a result playing numbers almost halved by 1954.

This is not to say that Lacrosseurs gave up since many attempts at substitutes were made from using other timber such as ash, which was unsuitable, to even trying tubbed steel which was eventually banned due to its danger in use. It is interesting to note that plastic was not even considered at the time. Plastic sticks (after much trial, heartbreak and



experimentation) are now quite common in today's scene. With the acquisition of Hickory in 1954 by the C.S.I.R.O., South Australia took on the job of supplying Lacrosse Sticks to the states, so that by 1956, W.A. Lacrosse was back to the 1947 level.

One cannot deny the fact however that this period had a serious detrimental effect in prohibiting growth especially among juniors and in schools, where many sports by 1954 had established themselves.

Once sticks became available junior lacrosse became the centre of attention by the W.A.L.A.

#### JUNIOR LACROSSE DEVELOPMENT TO 1975

Once the flow of Lacrosse sticks became more prominent motions were passed in the W.A.L.A. to pay for half the cost of a new Lacrosse stick for any new junior player. On top of this juniors ie. 16 years and under were exempt from paying association fees. These concessions remained until quite recently around 1970 when due to financial strain some charges had to be made in order to reach the demands of rising costs as well as the cost of an adventurous effort to supply schools with a set of Lacrosse sticks in 1969. The full benefits of this move have still to be achieved as far as securing more players goes but at least it represents a concerted effort to introduce the game at a school level where success of many other sports has been determined. Meanwhile it was and still is hoped that the individual clubs would take the task of subsidising new juniors. As a point of interest concerning the potential of school lacrosse. It is recorded in the January edition of the Lacrosse news 1974, that in the previous year, the John Forrest High School achieved a record in the D Grade under 14 competition in:

1. Having the D Grade fairest and best, who scored 150 goals for the season.
2. Grand Finalist
3. Minor Premiers
4. Undefeated in all games played through the season.

### Hickory sticks

LACROSSE players will be pleased to learn that hickory lacrosse sticks will soon be available again.

The South Australian Association has imported some hickory logs and hopes soon to be able to supply all Australia's demands.

Since the war, because hickory wood comes from the dollar areas, lacrosse players have had to content themselves with imported and local substitutes, which do not possess the elasticity of hickory.

The hickory stick also has the considerable advantage of lasting about ten times longer than any other variety.

★ ★ ★

### STICK SHORTAGE

The progress of lacrosse in this State is being held up by an acute shortage of sticks and many an old favourite which had been put away as a souvenir has been brought out of retirement for further use in weekly matches. A broken stick nowadays is little short of a catastrophe.

Australia has had to import its sticks from Canada but in recent years their importation has been prohibited because dollars were involved. Sticks made in England have not proved suitable and lacrosse officials in despair made inquiries about Australian manufacture. A Queensland timber had been used experimentally with success and lacrosseurs turned their attention to that State. Forestry experts, however, report that there is not sufficient of this timber to warrant the cost of establishing a manufacturing plant. Plastic sticks are said to be out of the question.

When the importation of sticks from Canada was banned the W.A. Lacrosse Association bought all the sticks available in Victoria for distribution among the clubs. These have all been given out and the outlook is grim.

Mr. R. Page, the secretary, estimates that but for the stick shortage the association would have about 45 teams instead of 30 and considers that the game would be established among the schools.

If present arrangements can be adhered to a South Australian team will play in Perth next month. Alternative dates for the main games are August 6 and August 20. Next year W.A. will send a team to Victoria to defend its carnival title won in 1947.

## No Dollars No Crosses

### W.A. LACROSSE RECOVERS FROM POST-WAR SETBACK

[Dollar restrictions which were imposed after World War II had a serious effect on lacrosse in Western Australia and at one stage it was feared that the game might be forced out of existence in this State.

The dollar restrictions when this State won its only carnival stopped the flow of Canadian sticks to Australia and for five years no new sticks were brought into W.A.

Sticks became scarce and gradually the number of lacrosse players began to decline until in 1950 there were only about 200, or half of the 1947 total.

Experiments in England, Pakistan and Australia to find a substitute for hickory in the making of sticks were unsuccessful.

Although sticks made from ash were used in W.A. after 1952, they were unsatisfactory.

However, these ash sticks helped to save the position, but when the C.S.I.R.O. was granted a licence to import raw American hickory in 1954 the game began to recover strength.

#### HIGH LEVEL

At the start of this season the number of W.A. lacrosse players had risen to the 1947 level—a peak year in W.A. lacrosse.

A total of 400 players, representing nine clubs, play in regular competitions on Saturdays and the game is becoming increasingly popular with junior players.

One of the most pleasing features of the game in W.A. has been the good record of colts.

W.A. has lost only one of the nine colts' matches it has played since 1947.

W.A. was responsible for the establishment of the first colts' carnival for southern States in Perth last year.

W.A. went through the carnival unbeaten and became the first holder of the Clive Hekey Shield.

The main feature of the current season will be the first senior interstate carnival in Perth since 1947.

Top left WEST AUSTRALIAN 1952, Top right WEST AUSTRALIAN 1954

Source Scrapbook courtesy W.C. Brown

Middle WEST AUSTRALIA May 29 1956

The other major development in junior Lacrosse occurred in 1962 with the formation of the E (Under 12) and F (under 10) grade. The aim of these two grades was to introduce the game to the younger age group and by giving them confidence in play. It was hoped this would maintain their interest through to adulthood. Competition in these grades involved playing clubs throughout the year, during which no premiership points are rewarded. Fields and equipment is smaller and the rules altered to prevent any chance of serious injury. The emphasis is not so much on winning but teaching the basic fundamentals of the game and learning the correct skills. Some competition is introduced towards the end of the season, by running a knockout competition to determine the best team. The standard of these grades are improving and numbers are growing. A number of today's most promising players have developed through the ranks of E and F Grade.

Through the efforts of a number of older players particularly in the area of Wembley, Nollamara, Melville and East Fremantle, junior lacrosse in W.A. has reached quite a high standard with Under 16 and Under 19 competition at the interstate level being successfully contested. As well as this the future of the game and in particular the above mentioned clubs is quite secure. With only minimal support at financial level by the major Youth Physical Education administration, Lacrosse could take on in a big way.

#### OTHER DEVELOPMENT IN LACROSSE 1950 TO 1975

Prior to 1959 a number of innovations were tried that never really got off the ground but laid foundations for changes in the game. One of these was the introduction of the Canadian game of Box Lacrosse which is played in restricted confines such as an Ice Hockey rink, basketball court or gymnasium. Tactics and rules are similar to that of Ice Hockey, probably since it was developed by hockey players in their off season. Although it never really caught on mainly due to unavailability of suitable venues, it did provide a variation and made players more aware of the fact that good Lacrosse means team work and a high degree of skill.

Probably the greatest influencing factor in changing the West Australian game and indeed the Australian game was the tour by a visiting party of lacrosse players from Washington &

Lee and Virginia Universities on introducing a number of rule and tactical changes. A brief summary is listed below:

1. The introduction of the off-side rule which involves restricting the movement of the whole team with the path of the ball ie; a minimum number of players must remain on the attacking and the defence halves of the field, Three and four respectively. The consequences of this were to open up the game particularly around the goal mouth. As well as this, this rule made necessary the use of a roving midfield to transfer the ball between the attack and defence. This immediately increased the speed of the game and this factor coupled with the revolutionisation of tactics to cope with the new situation, greatly increased the game as a spectacle and soon earned the label, "The fastest game on Two Feet".

2. The change of the field dimensions and features saw the abolishment of the centre circle for the introduction of restraining lines behind which players stand until the whistle blows for the face-off. This of course eliminated the possibility of time wasting as was discussed earlier. Also the goal square gave way to a 9foot radius goal circle which allowed for greater fluency in attack movement around the goals, thus further enhancing speed and skill of the game.





3. The wearing of protective gear including face masks, gloves, helmets and various assortments of body padding. This equipment was necessary in the American game as a result of its accelerated speed and hence probability of accident. Although most of this equipment was adopted voluntarily by players, it wasn't until 1974 that this equipment became compulsory to wear as the game by this stage had developed much of the spectacular potential introduced by these rule changes.

4. Shortening of the ground and reducing width. This move confided the room for movement and thus increased the frequency of interaction between players and the pressure on them. In time this would also increase the speed and skill of teamwork and individual players.

5. Substitution of playing. Because of the speed of the game and heavy demands placed on midfield in particular the American game had developed a rule to allow substitution of players, any number of times with the change being made between quarters and at the scoring of a goal. Any number of substitutes was allowed. The idea behind this was to keep fresh players on the field at all times and thus maintain a high standard of play.

In Western Australia the role has changed many times in accordance with Australian Lacrosse Council decisions to the stage where a team may have a six substitution which may change at random with any of the players on the field. Note the reduced number of players from twelve. This move would further decongest the game.

These rules were not used in games against Australian players and were only seen in the demonstration matches between the two universities. The changes were adopted gradually within three years, however it did nothing but improve the game to the extent that those who were introduced to it tended to become involved in some way.

In the last ten years Lacrosse has slowly grown despite financial difficulties and lack of publicity. There is no excuse for this latter aspect since in Western Australia there are a number of World class players. The standard of the game is also of a level which would appeal not only to players but to spectators who would more often than not see twice as much action than in say a football match and pay nothing for the privilege. The game also does not discriminate between the sexes in so much that there is even a Women's playing association another American idea and plays under similar rules with the exclusion of the contact and some others so as to maintain femininity.

Lacrosse in Western Australia although not as popular as it was prior to World War 1 is slowly gaining ground and has developed into a far more refined and skilled team game despite its hardships. Its particular feature is the extent of family involvement in the game and the extreme dedication towards the game shown by so many enthusiasts to mention them individually. Their attitude however which is responsible for the presence of lacrosse in Western Australia can be illustrated in the information of an old players club the "KULJAK" in 1963 with the active objectives of:

1. To provide a means by retired players and supporters can retain their contact and association with all matters appetizing to the game and can periodically meet and mix with their contemporaries.

2. To further the game of Lacrosse and to encourage the game amongst juniors (Lacrosse News January 1974) as for the future of Lacrosse in this state who knows.



One thing is for certain the game is firmly established and junior competition is strong. This forms the foundation for growth and hopefully with the help of support it deserves it may even grow to rival the codes of Football currently at the top of the popularity table.

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### **Illustrations**

Newspaper cuttings from the year 1946 to 1960, was supplied by a Scrapbook,  
Courtesy of W.C Brown.