

Brief History of Lacrosse

With a history that spans centuries, lacrosse is the oldest sport in North America. Rooted in Native American religion, lacrosse was often played to resolve conflicts, heal the sick, and develop strong, virile men. To Native Americans, lacrosse is still referred to as "The Creator's Game."

Ironically, lacrosse also served as a preparation for war. Legend tells of as many as 1,000 players per side, from the same or different tribes, who took turns engaging in a violent contest. Contestants played on a field from one to 15 miles in length, and games sometimes lasted for days. Some tribes used a single pole, tree or rock for a goal, while other tribes had two goalposts through which the ball had to pass. Balls were made out of wood, deerskin, baked clay or stone.

The evolution of the Native American game into modern lacrosse began in 1636 when Jean de Brebeuf, a Jesuit missionary, documented a Huron contest in what is now southeast Ontario, Canada. At that time, some type of lacrosse was played by at least 48 Native American tribes scattered throughout what is now southern Canada and all parts of the United States. French pioneers began playing the game avidly in the 1800s. Canadian dentist W. George Beers standardized the game in 1867 with the adoption of set field dimensions, limits to the number of players per team and other basic rules.

New York University fielded the nation's first college team in 1877, and Philips Academy, Andover (Massachusetts), Philips Exeter Academy (New Hampshire) and the Lawrenceville School (New Jersey) were the nation's first high school teams in 1882. There are 400 college and 1,200 high school men's lacrosse teams from coast to coast.

The first women's lacrosse game was played in 1890 at the [St. Leonard's School in Scotland](#). Although an attempt was made to start women's lacrosse at Sweet Briar College in Virginia in 1914, it was not until 1926 that Miss Rosabelle Sinclair established the first women's lacrosse team in the United States at the Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore, Maryland.

• [Women's Lacrosse Timeline](#) (pdf)

Men's and women's lacrosse were played under virtually the same rules, with no protective equipment, until the mid-1930s. At that time, men's lacrosse began evolving dramatically, while women's lacrosse continued to remain true to the game's original rules. Men's and women's lacrosse remain derivations of the same game today, but are played under different rules. Women's rules limit stick contact, prohibit body contact and, therefore, require little protective equipment. Men's lacrosse rules allow some degree of stick and body contact, although violence is neither condoned nor allowed.

Field lacrosse is sometimes perceived to be a violent and dangerous game, however, injury statistics prove otherwise. While serious injuries can and do occur in lacrosse, the game has evolved with an emphasis on safety, and the rate of injury is comparatively low. Ensuring the safety of participants is a major focus for US Lacrosse and its [Sports Science and Safety Committee](#), which researches injury data in the sport and makes recommendations to make the game as safe as practicable.

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