

Bagataway Was National Game and May be That Again

Writer in Western Magazine Gives History of Toughest Game on the Continent.

(Condensed from an article in the National Home Monthly by J. Lewis Brown)

Bagataway is coming back! What's that? You never heard of it? Maybe you haven't by that name or many another which the Indians used to call it, but if I told you it was Canada's national game, lacrosse, that was being resurrected, then you might not be so inclined to shrug your shoulders. Of course, most of us know that lacrosse came from the Indians but outside of that its origin is as wrapped in obscurity as the place from which the North American aborigines sprang. Not even

the Brave of yester-years can throw any light on the game's birthplace. Fulsome numbers of intrepid investigators during the mid-Victorian era ferreted out all the folklore they could but nary a bit of sense did it make as to how, where and why lacrosse.

As originally played, Canada's national game was midway between sport and deadly combat. The braves selected to play in the inter-village or inter-tribe contests had to be strong and swift of foot. The occasion of such games were little short of religious panics. All the players were put on rigid diets and they literally war-

danced themselves into condition, taking time out only to dash down into the nearby cooling stream, and then back to the dance. As the day of the match drew near the players drew apart from the tepees and departed into the forests. There they remained unseemly until the moment of the game. Sometimes the ball was thrown into the centre of the field or on another occasion it was tossed high in the air. There was no face-off as is known today. As soon as this was done it was the signal for the game to start and out streaked the players from the woods, stripped of all but a breech cloth, their bodies daubed with paints and their hair adorned with feathers. Sometimes as many as eight hundred players would be in action and what a shellacking they took. Apparently, everything went. Tripping, gouging, butt-ending and just plain ordinary slugging were all part of the struggle; anything to keep the ball from being

thrown into the tree which served as the goal. On each side of the field the squaws would line up with the goods in front of them which would go to the victors, except that when the game was over the womenfolk pre-empted the spoils while the men attended to their wounds.

Most of the players used two sticks but they were far different from the implements of to-day. Rarely under three feet in length but oftentimes four and five, the real Indian lacrosse stick's hoop was round and just big enough to hold the ball. By slapping the hoop over the ball and giving it a quick twist of the wrist, the ball could be picked up from the ground. It was hurled with terrific force by a full-arm movement. The green twigs which were used to make the hoop were woven lattice-like and thus the French came to call this part of the stick a "crosse" which later was merged into lacrosse. Often as not the ball was a good hard pine knot.

As far as the white settlers in Lower

Canada were concerned it was a novelty to watch from a distance and this left slightly ajar. Meanwhile the squaws had shouted themselves hysterical as they danced up and down the sidelines, but gradually neared the gate. Time after time the ball had been tossed over the palisades. Each time the ball had been tossed back and the game continued. Lulled into carelessness the Britishers were having a grand time until suddenly a tense moment saw a lithe-limbed brave dash down the field. In hot pursuit came the other players and they overtook him right in front of the gate. In the next moment the squaws raced toward the players and the braves seized the tomahawks and knives which they had kept hidden under their blankets. For further details of the ensuing massacre please see your history books.

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proceedings. Oftener and oftener the great gate was opened and finally was left slightly ajar. Meanwhile the squaws had shouted themselves hysterical as they danced up and down the sidelines, but gradually neared the gate. Time after time the ball had been tossed over the palisades. Each time the ball had been tossed back and the game continued. Lulled into carelessness the Britishers were having a grand time until suddenly a tense moment saw a lithe-limbed brave dash down the field. In hot pursuit came the other players and they overtook him right in front of the gate. In the next moment the squaws raced toward the players and the braves seized the tomahawks and knives which they had kept hidden under their blankets. For further details of the ensuing massacre please see your history books.

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Rough play helped kill the game just before the war. For years it thrived in Ontario and Quebec, even in the days when it was considered "sissy" to wear a cap, but gradually the better teams made the jump to the professional ranks taking with them the coveted Minto Cup, emblematic of the lacrosse championship of Canada. Tight-gutted sticks were then the vogue. There was very little carrying of the ball. Long and skilful passing was the order of the day and the boys in the street talked in awe-stricken tones of such stalwarts as Sir James L. and Sir Sam Hughes, only they were Jim and Sam then; of Ross Mackenzie, the king of them all, and later of Hughie Lambe, of Toronto; Henry Hoobin, of the Montreal Shamrocks; Johnny Powers, of Ottawa; Dade and Finlayson, of Brantford; and the ever-green Johnny White, of Cornwall. Gradually, loose-gutted sticks replaced the tight ones and into the ranks of the National Lacrosse Union such magnificent exponents of the art as the late Billy Fitzgerald, of St. Catharines; that brilliant general and deadly shot, Charlie Querris, of Tecumseh; "Daredevil" Gauthier, of the Montreal Nationals, a player who really lived up to his name; that almost unbeatable combination, the Scott brothers, of Montreal; "Newsy" Lalonde, of Cornwall, goal-getter extraordinary and "goat-getter" personified; the effervescent Georgie Kalls, of St. Catharines; and the high-powered Harry Murton, of Tecumseh, to mention but a few of them.

Canada's national game under post-war conditions saw the amateurs in the ascendancy and senior lacrosse earned its spurs with the assistance of such simon-pure performers as Bill McArthur, of Young Toronto, a goalkeeper who is making a comeback in which he is still as great as ever; Elerby Farr, of Weston; Gene Dopp, of St. Simons; Teddy Reeves, of Brampton, now retired because of a trick knee to the life of a columnist; Clyde Gordon, of Orangeville; George Sprule, of Brampton; Bill Scott, of St. Simons; and the even more famous Lionel Conacher. It should be said for the last-named that he was not at his best as a lacrosse player. His great strength and aggressiveness made him a most formidable opponent but he could hardly be classed among the great stick handlers.

Since 1920 to the present time lacrosse has seen many ups and downs. It has flooded and ebbed on the tide of public enthusiasm but mostly because many youngsters who should have been potential "greats" responded to the call of other sports. Box lacrosse came into vogue producing a flurry by professional teams attempting to draw the elusive dollar through the turnstiles, but without much success. It folded up without much comment, proving very definitely that as a box office attraction professional lacrosse is a thing of the past. The game is too strenuous on the players to ask them to play more than once a week and from the box office standpoint that is too infrequent. The only possible solution is unlimited substitutions and there is hardly enough high-class material to make this possible.

Two years ago the amateurs set under way a campaign for a definite revival in which box lacrosse is playing a big part. It is apparently making headway and the rivalry between the East and West has once more developed. Orilla Terriers are the present holders of the Mann Cup, and in 1935 they were a very formidable aggregation. When they defeated the Pacific Coast champions the backers of the New Westminster Salmon Bellies cast covetous eyes upon them, with the result that a large number of their stalwarts have been induced—for the good of the game, of course—to do their prancing on British Columbia swards this season. At any rate it is a healthy sign that so much rivalry exists and the chances are it may be the beginning of a lacrosse boom which will once more establish lacrosse as Canada's national game in actuality.

Possibly the game lacks the lust of yore. The pale faces frown too much upon scalp lifting and to the braves the letting of a little blood is an integral part of the games. Moreover, box lacrosse demands too much hard work to interest the Redskin. He likes to lope down the field and do his stuff close in on the nets. The new game calls for constant action and that means superb condition so that the natural ability of the Indian peters out quickly under the stress of uninterrupted movement. But it is a better game to watch. The crowds are saying so by their attendance and while the passing of the Redskin removes a part of the traditional colour there is little question that lacrosse is back to stay but as a pale-faced sport.

Toronto Globe.—The latest music from Spain is reported to be the rumba of heavy artillery.