The Healing Sport

When you think of team sports in the United States, you probably think of baseball, football, or basketball. Soccer has become popular too. But what was the first team sport in the country? And when did it start?

You might be surprised to know that the first team sport in America was played way back in the 1100s. It was called stickball, and it was an important pastime of the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) people in what is now New York and Canada. At that time, stickball games included 100 to 1,000 men or more. Players used sticks with attached net baskets made from deer sinew. The ball was small, made from stone or clay and wrapped in deer hide. The Haudenosaunee played the game barefoot, with few rules and no extra equipment. The fields did not have borders, and the play could range for miles in many directions. The games lasted for days.

Stickball, named lacrosse by French missionaries in the 1600s, served a number of purposes in the Haudenosaunee culture. The game prepared men for war and also acted as a social event bringing together different groups from nearby areas. Sometimes the game was played to settle disputes between neighboring groups.

Haudenosaunee legend tells the story of the first stickball game, which was played between birds and mammals. The sport is part of the

Haudenosaunee creation myth, and the belief is that the game should be used for enjoyment and also for medicine. Haudenosaunee communities continue to play ceremonial healing games of lacrosse in honor of those original beliefs.

Modern day lacrosse, which has been called "the fastest game on two feet," has more rules than the original sport. It takes place on a delineated field, with players shooting the ball into the other team's goal. Plastic and metal sticks and rubber balls have made the game faster and higher scoring. Now women play lacrosse too, with the first women's team forming in Scotland in 1890.

Lacrosse was played at the Olympics in 1904 and 1908, and it may return in 2028. If you find yourself watching Olympic lacrosse, you will no doubt be amazed by the speed and athleticism of the players. But don't forget the roots of the sport as a game for healing and community. As one Haudenosaunee player stated, "it's medicine that speaks to the spirit and the soul."

This page has been intentionally left blank.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Where was stickball first played?
   a. Virginia
   b. France
   c. Scotland
   d. New York

2. Which of the following was NOT a reason that the Haudenosaunee played lacrosse?
   a. For enjoyment and as a social event
   b. To settle disputes and prepare for war
   c. To use deer sinew and skin
   d. As a medicine to promote healing

3. Why is modern lacrosse faster?
   a. Because of the new rules
   b. Because of the new materials for sticks and balls
   c. Because the field is smaller
   d. Because women play

4. What is the most important reason to remember the origins of the game of lacrosse?
   a. Because it was an integral part of Haudenosaunee culture
   b. Because it was played in the 1100s
   c. Because it was played barefoot
   d. Because the French named it

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

1. Where was stickball first played?
   a. Virginia
   b. France
   c. Scotland
   d. **New York**

2. Which of the following was NOT a reason that the Haudenosaunee played lacrosse?
   a. For enjoyment and as a social event
   b. To settle disputes and prepare for war
   c. **To use deer sinew and skin**
   d. As a medicine to promote healing

3. Why is modern lacrosse faster?
   a. Because of the new rules
   b. **Because of the new materials for sticks and balls**
   c. Because the field is smaller
   d. Because women play

4. What is the most important reason to remember the origins of the game of lacrosse?
   a. **Because it was an integral part of Haudenosaunee culture**
   b. Because it was played in the 1100s
   c. Because it was played barefoot
   d. Because the French named it