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New Directions of Play: Native American Origins of Modern Lacrosse

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NEW DIRECTIONS OF PLAY: NATIVE AMERICAN ORIGINS OF MODERN LACROSSE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Jeff Carey
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Accepted by:
Dr. Paul Anderson, Committee Chair
Dr. James Jeffries
Dr. Alan Grubb
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a history of lacrosse from the seventeenth century, when the game was played exclusively by Native Americans, to the early decades of the twentieth century, when the game began to flourish in non-Native settings in Canada and the United States. While the game was first developed by Native Americans well before contact with Europeans, lacrosse became standardized by a group of Canadians led by George Beers in 1867, and has continued to develop into the twenty-first century. The thesis aims to illuminate the historical linkages between the ball game that existed among Native Americans at the time of contact with Europeans and the ball game that was eventually adopted and shaped into modern lacrosse by European Americans.

Archeological evidence indicates that lacrosse originated among indigenous peoples of North America primarily in the southeastern part of the United States and along both sides of the Canadian border along the upper Midwest. By the time of the first arrival of Europeans during the sixteenth century, the game had spread to the many tribes in northeastern North America, where it took on unique regional and cultural characteristics. The thesis shows that the ball game was situated in a cultural context that entailed mythic stories, pre-game rituals, and spectator festivities and gambling among other ceremonies. It also served practical purposes as a means of settling disputes and as a social function bringing the community together.

During the mid-nineteenth century, however, a new version of the game was developed by Native Americans for a new purpose. In these settings throughout the
upper Midwest, Canada, and even in Europe, Native Americans began performing modified versions of the game for the enjoyment of non-Natives. My research shows that the presentation of these “tamer” versions of lacrosse—versions that adopted a greater degree of rules and regulations to suit the tastes of the modern Western spectator—established the condition for the game adoption by non-Natives. Although the game would continue to be altered, and eventually regulated by Canadians in 1867, Native American influences persist today in the equipment, scoring methods, and rules of the game among other features.
DEDICATION

I would like to thank my parents Mindy and Jack as well as my brother Greg for their love and support over the years. I would also like to thank my co-workers at Vickery Hall for their support and for allowing me to spend countless late nights in the office working on this project. Without them I would not be where I am today.

I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Anderson, Dr. James Jeffries, and Dr. Alan Grubb for their guidance and patience.
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This thesis has been years in the making and, despite wondering whether it would ever get done at times, a task and challenge which I have enjoyed. I would not have been able to accomplish it without the committee of Dr. Paul Anderson, Dr. James Jeffries, and Dr. Alan Grubb. As my committee chair, Dr. Anderson has been supremely helpful in not only advice regarding the thesis, but it the process of getting me to actually complete it. His assistance as a thesis advisor and as Graduate Coordinator of Clemson University is both greatly appreciated. Dr. Jeffries has served as the “point man” throughout the thesis-writing process. Through meetings with him, I have helped organize not only the thesis but also my own thoughts, opinions, and direction. Dr. Grubb has provided exceptional advice and provided ideas on what to include in the thesis that have helped it take form. His role as Clemson University lacrosse advisor provides a beneficial tie to the game.
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INTRODUCTION

Since their first contact with European colonists, Native Americans confronted economic, social, and political pressures that have threatened their land claims. In the face of dispossession, Native Americans often adopted nativist strategies that have involved the reclamation and implementation of mainstay “traditional” practices reconfigured to oppose these threats to their sovereignty. This is the case with the various forms of the Native American ball game, which developed into what is today known as lacrosse. Once a ceremonial practice situated in a larger cultural context that entailed ties to ancient narratives, rituals before and after games, and communal functions. These ties endowed the ball game with its existential significance for tribes throughout North America. The game transformed when it was removed from these surrounding ceremonial practices, when Natives began playing travelling exhibitions for financial gain and the entertainment of non-Natives. Canadian George Beers drafted official rules for the game in 1867, at which point the game of lacrosse became mainstreamed, with the Native American version becoming forever altered.

The thesis serves not only as an extensive history of the game, but as a comparison of early ball games played by Native Americans against other tribes, and against the game played today. It strives to answer questions regarding the value, functions, and purposes of the ball game to Native Americans historically, as well as how and why the game came to be absorbed and transformed by Canadian and American non-Natives. It is an examination of the game’s evolving meaning.
In addition to the primary documents left by Jesuit missionaries, the thesis relies heavily on a handful of major scholarly treatments of Native American lacrosse. Two of the earliest works—the first by James Mooney, the second by Raymond Fogelson—provide the study with rich ethnographic accounts of the game. Thomas Vennum’s *American Indian Lacrosse* is an extensive examination of the Native American ball game. It, along with Michael Zogry’s *Anetso, The Cherokee Ball Game* serves as the principal secondary sources of this study. In addition to providing valuable ethnographic information, which supplements the works of Mooney and Fogelson, the two books present important perspectives on the cultural history of the game. The thesis draws heavily from Vennum’s comprehensive history of the Native American ball game to highlight the variations of the game across native North America. Zogry’s study of anetso provides an examination of how a specific tribe, the eastern Cherokee, have continued to play the ball game as an integral part of its ceremonial and cultural complex.

The earliest European documentation of the game comes from the account of seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries, which provide us with early descriptions and accounts of the Native American ball game. Games were considered anti-Christian and met with disdain from most missionaries. Copious alcohol consumption and the gambling among players and audience that typically accompanied ball games compounded that disapproval. Referring to the Baptist missionary Evan Jones, Robert Gardner maintains that “two final categories of activities with religious ramifications
attracting Jones’s opposition were the ball plays and dances, both of which involved elements of magic and—sometimes—extensive drunkenness.”

One of the definitive works regarding the Native American ball game is James Mooney’s 1890 report on the Eastern Cherokee form of lacrosse. This report, as Vennum notes, “is useful in corroborating some aspects of the Choctaw practices represented in Catlin’s artistic works. Because most southeastern tribes played essentially the same game, despite their removal to Indian territory in the 1830s, we can work back in time a half century from Mooney and find that many of the details Catlin depicts of the Choctaw seem not only plausible but probable.” Thus, while Catlin may have embellished certain aspects of the game in his work, his paintings also contained much that is accurate. For example, he portrayed the encampment of opposing teams and families at either end of the prairies which served as game locations, accurate field dimensions, and correct goal post constructions. Additionally, his depiction of the elders chosen as judges was accurate, as were his illustrations showing the chaotic betting that took place. His portrayals of the sticks used, match arrangement via runners, ball-play dance prior to the game, and face-off to begin the game were also largely accurate. All of these facets of the game match Mooney’s description of the North Carolina Cherokee game some fifty years later. Catlin’s 1834 Choctaw painting closely resembled Mooney’s 1888 Cherokee photograph which depicts scrums between individuals breaking out during the course of play.

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One problem with the early photographs of the Native American ball game is the lack of documentation—we do not know who and what is being documented and where or when the photograph was taken. When photography became more common, the game and its specific facets came to be easier to capture visually. This problem has been compounded by the attitude of some Native American groups themselves, since some tribes have attempted to keep certain aspects of the Native American ball game secret from outsiders. As Cherokee Gil Jackson stated, “We used to laugh about people coming to the boundary and wanting to do a book on Indians. They could come one day at eight and leave at four and write a full history. Others could come and stay for years and look back and say man I don’t even know where to begin this book.”

Even in modern times, Zogry had to be granted permission formally by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Council to proceed with his dissertation fieldwork and documentary project on anetso.

The earliest Native American narrative that referenced a ball game is a legend about a game between birds and animals which has been accepted by many tribes. Prevalent themes in ancient narratives were bravery, acceptance, and manhood, all of which helped provide later games with added importance. These qualities were often displayed by participants in ball games and were praised and respected. The myths, narratives, and stories about ball games endowed the game with meaning and social

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3 Zogry, Anetso, 5.
4 There are some slight differences in the specific narrative among some tribes but the narrative is generally the same across Native American culture. The Eastern Cherokee and Mohawk depict the game as birds versus animals; the Creek version pits animals with feathers against animals with teeth.
significance. Beyond the final score, the games tested sportsmanship, honor, toughness, and bravery.

This thesis uses the information provided by these and other sources to provide a look at the various forms of the Native American ball game; but also to study the impact the Native game has on the modern game. Additionally, it attempts to point out when and how the modern game was created and examines the various ways the modern game still manifests Native American features. The thesis will argue that the modern game of lacrosse took root from the travelling exhibitions performed by Native Americans in the nineteenth century. When the Native American ball game was separated from its surrounding ceremonial complex and began to be played regularly in exhibition form for the entertainment of non-Natives, it became more appealing to non-Natives and easier to adapt.

The first chapter of the thesis aims to examine and explain differences in methods of play among tribes and distinguish the game from its surrounding social and ceremonial activities. The different rules, equipment, and strategies used by tribes depict how the game was played in its earliest stages when Europeans first came into contact with it. In the second chapter, the importance of the game, examined through its meanings and social functions among those who participated, is described. The social and spiritual functions of the game that helped provide its import are examined. In the third chapter, the thesis explores the advent of exhibition games that tribes engaged in lacrosse for non-Native audiences and its impact on the evolution of lacrosse. The final chapter examines how Canadians and Americans adopted and transformed the Native American ball game.
Altogether, the thesis serves as a history of the game of Native American ball game and its cultural import across time and among different people. It serves to explain how the game of lacrosse propagated into its modern form, and how elements of the Native American ball game are evident in the modern game.
CHAPTER ONE

THE BALL GAME AT EUROPEAN CONTACT: INSIDE THE FIELD OF PLAY

In his work *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian*, artist and author George Catlin produced a wide-ranging history of “forty-eight different tribes,” and examined their customs, cultures, and practices. While visiting with the Choctaw near Saint Louis in the mid-nineteenth century, he was fortunate enough to witness a great ball play where he “witnessed the ceremony of measuring out the ground, and erecting the ‘byes’ or goals which were to guide the play.” He described the goals as “two upright posts, about 25 feet high and six feet apart, set firm in the ground, with a pole across the top. These goals were about forty or fifty rods apart; and at a point just half way between was another small stake, driven down, where the ball was to be thrown up at the firing of a gun, to be struggled for by the players.” He went on to describe the old men who set up the game and who he assumed to be the judges of play, as well as the pre-game gambling which “seemed to be chiefly left to the women, who seemed to have [martialed] out a little of everything that their houses and their fields possessed. Goods and chattels—knives—dresses—blankets—pots and kettles—dogs and horses, and funds; all were placed in the possession of *stake-holders*, who sat by them, and watched them on the ground all night, preparatory to the play.”

Catlin spent a great deal of time with various Native American tribes and the majority of his work features various aspects of tribal culture and customs. His paintings

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are best described as a combination of reality and preconceived bias of Indian life. In 1832 he took a 2,000 mile journey up the Missouri River with the intent of documenting “the history and customs of [Indian] people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, themes worth of the life-time of one man.”6 He desired to be remembered as an Indian historian. An 1834 visit to Fort Gibson in present-day Oklahoma provided him with his first experience with the Native American ball game which would serve as an inspiration for a painting. Following his trip, in 1837, he opened up an Indian gallery of art in New York and two years later he took his collection to London. By that point he had completed some five hundred paintings, the majority of which depicted various aspects of Indian life. The sheer volume of paintings Catlin was able to produce over a relatively short period of time lend credence to the belief that details were added to his paintings either by memory or liberally. In point of fact his work included many exaggerations and some outright fictions.

Catlin also, as Vennum has noted, spent time with the Dakota Indians near Fort Snelling in present-day Minnesota, although, “how many games Catlin actually saw is questionable, given his short stay at Fort Snelling and the fact that in the background of a portrait of one of the Dakota players he depicts the double-post goal of southeastern tribes rather than the customary Great Lakes single-post goal, which suggests he simply borrowed what he had seen among the Choctaw for a prop.”7 This would seem the case by comparing his paintings to another artist, Seth Eastman, who was also stationed at Fort Snelling several years after Catlin, starting in 1841. None of Eastman’s paintings

6 Ibid, 237.
7 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 162.
featured players dressed with distinctive animal tails adorned on their rears, nor with body paint, as Catlin’s did. Perhaps the most falsified aspect of the ball game in Catlin’s work was in his depiction of team sizes. While some tribes did not feature a set number of players per team, Catlin commonly portrayed games between teams with anywhere from six hundred to one thousand players on the field at one time. These exorbitantly high numbers were likely used with the intent to mesmerize his East coast and European audiences and confirm the notion of the game as savage and unruly. This would seem to follow a published account of a 1797 game between the Seneca and Mohawk that indicated that “the combatants numbered about six hundred a side.”

If Catlin’s portrayals were to be believed as accurate, how would players have been able to spot teammates to pass to, use, or help on the field of play? These tasks become even more difficult to explain when one considers the players who Catlin depicted were all dressed similarly. Also, hundreds of players on the field at once would have meant that goals were scored infrequently. Many tribes played games up to a certain number of goals, and with anywhere from six hundred to one thousand players on the field at once, the games seemingly would have lasted for an unbelievably long time. Catlin’s suggestion to his audience that the games were high scoring were presumably made to make the game more appealing and only further damages his credibility. All of this would suggest that Catlin took liberties because he let his preconceptions of Indians as an exotic, inferior races guide his paintings.

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Catlin described the sticks used, which were “bent into an oblong hoop at the end, with a sort of slight web of small thongs tied across to prevent the ball from passing through. The players hold one of these in each hand, and by leaping into the air, they catch the ball between the two nettings and throw it, without being allowed to strike it, or catch it in their hands.” Players wore nothing but breech-cloth around their waists during the game which had been arrange three or four months before by “champions who led the two parties, and had the alternate choosing of the players through the whole tribe, sent runners with the ball-sticks…to be touched by each one of the chosen players; who thereby agreed to be on the spot at the appointed time and ready for the play.”

The game began with “the judges throwing up the ball at the firing of a gun; when an instant struggle ensued between the players, who were some six or seven hundred in numbers, and were mutually endeavouring to catch the ball in their sticks, and throw it home and between their respective stakes; which, whenever successful done, counts one for game.” Catlin claimed that every player was dressed alike, which would assuredly have caused mass confusion if his presumption about the number of men playing were accurate. Catlin’s description at times painted a picture of mass hysteria among players, such as when “there are times, when the ball gets to the ground, and such a confused mass rushing together around it, and knocking their sticks together, without the possibility of anyone getting or seeing it…when the condensed mass of ball-sticks, and shins, and bloody noses, is carried around the different parts of the ground, for a quarter of an hour at a time, without any one of the mass being able to see the ball.” According to Catlin, games were played until a team scored 100, after which teams joined in
drinking whiskey and celebrating their performance. Catlin was one of the earliest documenters of Native American lacrosse, and his account perhaps best illustrates the issues presented in seventeenth and eighteenth century documentation of the game—accurately portraying the game itself in the face of the biases prevalent among non-Natives who interacted with it.

Many versions of the Native American ball game were played among different tribes. Rules, methods of play, and equipment varied depending on who was playing the ball game and where it was being played. By providing specific evidence of Native American rules, equipment, and methods of play we are able to study details of the ball game. The game of lacrosse has undoubtedly progressed in complexity, coaching, and officiating, not to mention equipment and safety. But the centuries-old influence of the Native American ball game cannot be denied. It is important to acknowledge and illustrate the similarities between Native American lacrosse and the modern game in order to properly credit the game’s creators with their influence, just as it is crucial to examine differences among various tribes in rules, equipment, and methodology used in ball games. Despite the ceremonial and celebratory nature of early ball games, the practicalities of how it was played are important to understanding the evolution of the game.

In the Native American ball game scoring methods and tallies varied greatly among tribes. There were three ways of scoring in Great Lakes games: striking the post with one’s stick when possessing the ball, hitting the post with a thrown ball, or running

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past the post with possession of the ball. If one threw the ball unsuccessfully, the ball would be returned to centerfield to be tossed up again. The Choctaw practiced similar customs: the flat surface of their single post had to be hit by the ball either being thrown or carried. Where goals featuring crossbars were featured in Indian lacrosse, a ball hitting any part of the goal counted as a goal. In Cherokee “stickball” 12 goals were needed for a win. In the Great Lakes Region two of three points won the game. Winnebago and Menominee games were played to four. For the Iroquois, ceremonial and secular games featured different numbers of goals required for a win.10 For secular games, the number of goals required to win was agreed upon prior to the game and was usually an odd number. Cayuga games played to help the sick during midwinter ceremonies were played to seven goals.11 “Winning was really of no particular importance in the dream-dictated games…the fate of the patient was not determined by wins or losses, for the efficacy lay solely in the playing of the game itself.”12 Goals were traditionally tallied by special scorekeepers, with tallies tracked by sharpened pegs inserted into the ground for each team. Historical accounts of lacrosse feature the term “innings”, which usually references a goal having been scored and a break in action. This break period, which may have taken up to thirty minutes, was used for refreshments, the awarding of prizes, smoking, and resting.

Field length was determined by where the goals were placed at either end. The size of an Indian lacrosse field was generally much larger than the standard 110 yard by

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60 yard field that is used today, and the field rarely had defined sidelines.\textsuperscript{13} The distance between two goals was invariably up for negotiation between the two teams and involved several factors, namely the number of players involved in a particular game. Field lengths could be up to two miles in length to accommodate games of eighty players. Field lengths could also vary by the tribes participating in the game. For example, a relatively consistent field length—from between a quarter of a mile to a half mile—has been documented among the Great Lakes tribes over long periods of time. Field location was also important; many fields were located next to rivers or lakes for the practice of going to water (which will be discussed in depth later in the chapter). Henry Timberlake once identified a small body of water in Cherokee territory as “Ball play creek”, which ran through the middle of a large, flat plain.\textsuperscript{14} This area was later described as providing “a natural amphitheater for hundreds of spectators.”\textsuperscript{15}

Often times, games were organized following an informal challenge from one team or community to another. Neighboring towns often played each other, which made rematches frequent. These rematches were often arranged following the end of a game after a challenge from the losing team. Cherokee rematches always took place on the field of the challenged team, which created a home-field advantage for the winning team. Games between two Cherokee teams having yet to face each other took place on neutral fields located between the teams’ communities. After a game was decided upon, a council was called to define the terms of the challenge. Runners delivered the terms on


\textsuperscript{14} Timberlake, \textit{Lieutenant Henry Timberlake’s Memoirs, 1756-1765}, 102.

“message sticks”. Choctaw message sticks also served as a primitive scheduling method. The chief of the challenged village threw away one stick each day. When he got to the last stick, he knew the game would be the next day.\textsuperscript{16}

Recounting a game between two Cherokee villages in the early nineteenth century, adopted Mohawk member John Norton mentioned how “a heavy rain shower interrupted preparations and one party asked to postpone until the next day; an argument ensued, but there was to be no contest.” When the game was cancelled, the crowd, despite having placed great wagers on the game and some coming from as far away as forty miles, returned home “without any apparent discontent at the disappointment; only observing that these boasted players were afraid to come into contact with each other.”\textsuperscript{17} The game was played some two weeks later, with the conclusion reached after a team scored twelve goals. Norton pointed out that through gambling, “Much was lost by the vanquished, and by those who had better in that favour, in horses, money, and goods; but not one murmured; they only blamed themselves for having been too negligent in preparing for the contest by practice.”\textsuperscript{18} While this passage demonstrates the effect that inclement weather could have on ball games, it also shows the respect afforded to players not only from one another but from spectators as well. The status of and respect for the game in the minds of participants and players was such that behaviors disrespectful of the game were avoided.

\textsuperscript{16} Vennum, \textit{American Indian Lacrosse}, 185.
\textsuperscript{17} Norton, \textit{The Journal of Major John Norton}, 65.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 79.
Goal frames were typically one of three types: either a single post (scoring occurred when a ball hit or travelled past it), two upright poles (scoring occurred when a ball went between them), or two upright poles with a crossbar on top (scoring occurred when the ball travelled through it). The Winnebago were unique in that their goal consisted of a single arched pole—similar to a croquet wicket. Games involving the Iroquois and most southeastern tribes featured goals of the two-pole variety. In the Great Lakes area, games typically featured the single post. The single post was frequently a section of tree that had been stripped of bark, usually a wooden pillar. Goals featuring two poles usually were made of saplings approximately ten to fifteen feet high and stripped of branches. Oklahoma Creeks used goals that were eight feet tall with a four-foot crossbar. When a crossbar was unavailable, a string could be used, or marks could be made at an agreed-upon height that served as the de facto crossbar. The Dakota were said to have improvised when necessary with piles of blankets set twenty feet apart.19 Vennum described scoring in a southeastern game as, “more a combination of luck and individual skill than or preplanned strategy.”20 Poor accuracy and bad passes and shots meant there were much higher numbers of shot attempts than goals scored.

The manufacturing of equipment was entrusted to tribal specialists before being decorated. The sacred nature of game is exemplified in the attention given to equipment, specifically sticks and balls. The English and French provided surprisingly little description of equipment, but, generally, there were two kinds of balls used: solid balls, usually made of wood and lighter balls, usually stuffed with buckskin. Lighter balls

19 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 243.
20 Ibid, 121.
could still be very hard and capable of injuring players. Southeastern tribes used a small hide ball because their sticks were fragile and have been easily destroyed by wooden balls. The southeastern ball was about the same size as a golf ball and made of a soft skin which made it difficult to spot on the ground, especially when the game was played in long grass. The Ojibwe used wooden balls made from the charred knots of trees and carved so that two holes were in each ball. When the ball was thrown it whistled through the air. The Iroquois used a stuffed deerskin ball, while the Dakota tribe used rounded wood knots or clay covered with hide, usually deer or bucks skin. Some balls were considered to have magical properties, especially those made by specialists or medicine men. Commercially made hard rubber balls replaced the widely used deerskin ball in the late nineteenth century.

Sticks were special for Native American lacrosse players. In various tribes “the sorcerer produced special ointments for the players to rub on their lacrosse sticks, as well as feathers that could be tied onto them.” There were two types: those with pockets that were completely enclosed wood and those with unenclosed pockets. Early enclosed sticks were usually used in pairs (one in each hand) and used in Southeastern tribes (Choctaw, Creek, Yuchi, Seminole, and Cherokee).

The Iroquois used the largest stick, “the progenitor of all modern forms of regulation lacrosse sticks, both wooden and plastic.” The shaft was bent to form a crook at end, and the webbing was more densely laced and more elaborate than the other

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21 Ibid, 73.
22 Ibid, 227.
23 Ibid, 21.
24 See appendix for pictures of various sticks.
25 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 81.
two types of sticks. Generally speaking: the earlier the version of the Iroquois stick, the looser the webbing was. Iroquois’ sticks among different nations featured great uniformity, and the general shape of Iroquois sticks remained the same for almost two centuries. The stick was in use until about 1860 but had no guard strings, meaning that juggling skills or what is today called cradling, was vital to retaining possession. Great Lakes woodlands tribes such as the Ojibwe, Menominee, Potatwatomi, Saulteaux, Miami, Sauk and Fox, Winnebago, and Eastern bands of Dakota (Sioux) used sticks with an enclosed pocket. The Southeastern sticks were the shortest, usually between 24 and 30 inches long, although length could vary because many players made their own. These sticks, made of hickory, were conducive to the Southeastern style of play. The ball was cupped between two sticks, with smaller pocket fitting into the larger pocket. The ball was kept as close to body as possible to protect possession. Southeastern sticks featured lacing made of a variety of materials inserted through holes in cups at the end of the stick to form pockets.

Great Lakes sticks show a great deal of uniformity in length and were typically three feet in length on average. The sticks featured a round pocket, about four-to-five inches in diameter. The pocket of stick was fastened to shaft using rawhide. Like southeastern tribes, lacing was inserted into holes drilled through the cup. The pocket was two and a half to three inches deep (balls were four inches in diameter), which meant cradling was necessary to secure possession of the ball, just as it is in the modern game. In his comprehensive history, Vennum references a leader named Makoons of the Ojibwe tribe who measured sticks using his outstretched arm plus the width of one hand. The
Ojibwe used white ash trees for many of their utensils, which were ideal for lacrosse sticks because ash is a strong wood with straight grain. Indian players, like modern ones, developed appreciation for their specific sticks and sizes, as “some guys may like the big stick, like big, long one.”

Southeastern and Iroquois lacrosse sticks were even catered to left and right handed players. Many Cherokee sticks were engraved, painted, or burned with designs that represented lightning or a rattlesnake skin pattern. Some were painted red and affixed with hummingbird feathers or pieces of bat wing, a direct tie to the ancient narratives that were so esteemed among players.

There was a distinct correlation between type of stick and ball used and techniques of play in Indian lacrosse. The Native American ball game typically featured the ball on the ground more than in the air, due to the high number of players on the field at once and the physical nature of the game. Southeastern Indian lacrosse differed greatly from northern lacrosse in all aspects of ball control—scooping, passing, and carrying. The size of the ball allowed for much deception in ball handling. The use of two sticks only compounded the issue and allowed players to act as decoys.

In southeastern lacrosse, a group of up to six players would form a tight circle around where a loose ball had landed. Poke-checking and body checking ensued to gain possession of the ball. The southeastern Indian version of lacrosse did not feature passing as much as throwing the ball. Players often chucked the ball downfield with the hope that a teammate would find and retrieve it. Sometimes it was simply thrown to get it moving in the right direction. Great Lakes tribes played differently. The ball was

26 Ibid, 127.
thrown, caught, and carried much the same way it is today. Players moved the ball “rapidly from side to side, and at the same time turning the stick so as to keep the ball always in front and retained by the pocket.”

Sticks were handled by players in two manners: with both hands on the stick and with one hand on the stick. Players move easier and with more speed when cradling with one hand on the stick, but lose some elements of control. Generally, players in the Great Lakes region used one hand on the stick. They also had sticks of different lengths based on position played. Longer sticks were better for passing, as they were used to throw the ball further than short sticks. However, shorter sticks were more ideal for scooping the ball off of the ground. Pocket size also affected throwing accuracy. If a Great Lakes’ player was unable to pass to an open teammate, he often would throw the ball in the general direction of the goal.

Iroquois techniques are the least well documented, but Iroquois valued the style of play that showcased individual skills. Iroquois pockets had very little depth, which caused players to balance the ball in their stick rather than cradle it. Sometimes, when players were unable to access lacrosse sticks, they used tennis rackets instead. This point illustrates that prior to the use of guard strings in a stick’s pocket; the Native American ball game was more of an individualistic running game than a team-oriented passing game. Fieldwork carried out mostly among the Seneca over twenty years, from 1825-1845, by Henry Lewis Morgan provided descriptions that can be applied generally to Iroquois tribes of the time period. His descriptions paint a game that involved much stick

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checking, scooping of ground balls, and carrying the ball as parallel to the ground as possible due to a lack of guard strings in the sticks’ pockets.  

One of the biggest objections to the Native American ball game from those who came into early contact with it and will be examined further in the third chapter, was related to the game’s physical dangers. “Tying up” was a defensive strategy that amounted to grabbing a player on offense from behind around the waist. This strategy often caused both players to drop their sticks and wrestle one another. Native American lacrosse featured wrestling and sometimes fist-fighting to settle disputes. Even during a modern anetso game, Zogry noted, “Oftentimes it seemed to me that some players were more interested in one-on-one wrestling matches with their individual opponents than chasing the ball. At one point, the group was near midfield, and suddenly a player burst from the scrum and raced away. As the rest of the players made chase, two players squared off and began grappling. Suddenly, one of the two players grabbed the other in a headlock, and in a swift motion bent the other player backwards and flipped him to the ground…the players continued to struggle for a minute or two until the player who had gained the advantage, confident that he had delayed his opponent long enough, released his hold. The players shoved each other as they were getting up from the ground, and then ran to rejoin the rest of the action.” This passage is evidence of the lack of penalties and rules in the Native American game, as well as the value the games to battle training.

Indian lacrosse rules regarding substitutions were not entirely similar throughout tribes, and substitution patterns varied widely, with some tribes using substitutes and others preferring to play everyone on the team at once. For the Iroquois, substitutions involved the mass exchange of sixty players every twenty minutes of play. Among southeastern tribes, and the Cherokee specifically, substitutions were discouraged. In a Cherokee game, to maintain equal numbers on each team, whenever a player retired from the game, his paired opponent was forced to do the same when there was no substitute available. If a Creek player withdrew from competition, the players threw their sticks down to recount and make sure the sides were the same.

As a rule, Native American players played barefoot and wore breechclouts or loincloths. This attire was almost universal among North American Indian lacrosse players until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Moccasins were said to have been worn by a Creek tribe in a game against Whites, but photographic documentation from the turn of the nineteenth century shows Creek players barefoot. In the 1950s Mexican Kickapoo players wore moccasins with specially reinforced soles, but that seems more particular to the challenge of dealing with a hard, rocky playing surface. While this may have been necessitated by the area’s natural features, it also depicts differences in dress among Native American players over time and geography. Additionally, Indians wore no protective gear until it became widely available, standard equipment in the twentieth century. It was not until Canadians began playing the game that advancements such as facemasks and padding were introduced to the lacrosse field. This fact is largely
responsible for W.G. Beers’ observation that “Indians never threw a hard ball at a goal when playing each other.”

Body paint was worn by many players, mostly for decorative purposes. Almost all sources prior to the nineteenth century state that players wore the breechclout held in place by deerskin belts. Any additional garments or equipment would hinder speed and agility. Among the Cherokee, charcoal was used either from the fire burned during the pre-game dance or, in what was considered particularly sacred, the burned wood of trees that had been struck, but not killed, by lightning. The charcoal was mixed with wood from honey-locust trees and used to mark the body with crosses over the heart and on each shoulder, making “the player swift like the lightning and invulnerable as the tree that defies the thunderbolt, and renders his flesh as hard and firm to the touch as the wood of the honey-locust.” In what was likely a result of the impact of ancient narratives featuring the ball game, lightning-struck charcoal was “regarded as a most powerful substance, since it represents non-lethal contact with the thunder spirits.”

Early lacrosse observer George Beers noted that “Though we would not advocate the nudity of the original players, we think the less and lighter the dress the better.” Lack of clothing and equipment also gave players’ opponents less to grab on to help defend. Cherokee players were known to rub eel skin, slippery elm, or sassafras on themselves to become more difficult to grab. The lack of uniforms contributed to goal scoring largely on account of chance—an individual, say, breaking free of the crowd by

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using individual skills, speed, and agility. With little or nothing in the way of uniforms, opposing teams were identified by differing colors of breechclout or feathers. Also, distinguishing clothing and decoration worn by various clans or tribes helped distinguish teams (the color of ashes or paints on the body for example). Certain tribes also wore accessories specific to their teams. For example, according to early sources, Choctaw players wore tails of animals as rear ornaments. Feathers and tails served a symbolic purpose and were worn to absorb particular traits associated with the animal from which they were taken. Creek players wore “tiger tails” because of their belief in the animals’ strength and courage. Creek players also wore bison tails, eagle feathers, and sparrow-hawk feathers, all of which were considered “masterful animals.”

An Ojibwe versus Ozaagii game at Fort Michilimackinac featured Ozaagii players with shaved heads except for a small tuft on top, where any feather attached to hair was dyed red. This was the only major distinction between players on the two teams. It was important for players to be able to spot teammates from a distance. The use of jerseys, and the designation of players’ identities via names and numbers on the backs of jerseys, was wholly a non-Native creation. “Such vanity,” according to Vennum, “is foreign to the traditional Indian World of lacrosse,” even though the game could be a showcase for individual talent and ability in many instances.

According to early sources, the Eastern Cherokee were among the first to start wearing trunks instead of wearing breechclout or using feathers in their hair. This change developed after the Cherokee began playing against teams of Whites who also wore

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34 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 170.
trunks. An 1888 Mooney photograph shows older players wearing breechclouts but younger players wearing white shorts with designs on them such as stars, crosses, and circles.\textsuperscript{36} These symbols were representative. Stars indicated a top-tier player and crosses represented talented players who had not yet achieved top-tier status. Trunks also featured emblems to designate team affiliations (BC for Big Cove for example). Iroquois players had embraced trunks by the latter half of the nineteenth century as well. A Caughnawaga lacrosse club photograph from 1867 depicts players dressed in regular clothes: hats, bowties, vests, etc.\textsuperscript{37} Clearly, many Indian teams embraced the style of dress they observed when competing against teams featuring white players. By the mid-nineteenth century, Fogelson considered bathing suit trunks or jean shorts that were decorated to be normal ball play attire.\textsuperscript{38}

The Cherokee had a special class of officials called “drivers” to call fouls. They carried switches that helped them break up wrestling matches that took too long or scrums of players. The one cardinal rule governing nearly all Indian lacrosse was that players could not touch the ball with their hands. In fact, the Cherokee term for foul, \textit{uaw’yi} translates to “with the hand”. However, there were some exceptions, such as the Eastern Cherokee, who used two sticks and permitted handling of the ball under certain circumstances. Moving the ball by hand to a teammate’s stick was permitted, for instance, although highly dangerous. A player in trouble could deliberately pick up the ball to stop the game, incurring a foul. Therefore, using one’s hands during the course of

\textsuperscript{36} As seen in Vennum, \textit{American Indian Lacrosse}, pg. 191.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, 173.
\textsuperscript{38} Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 134-135.
the game could be a matter of strategy. If a player picked the ball up off the ground with
his stick, he was allowed to carry the ball by hand. Similarly, in anetso players are
forbidden from picking the ball up off the ground with their hands, but can touch it once
the ball has been brought above a certain point. Southeastern games began with a toss-up
at midfield, where players used techniques similar to jump balls used to start basketball
games. According to Vennum, “Usually the centers held the two sticks together over the
right shoulder, like batters waiting for a pitch…While the ball is in mid-air, some jump
with both sticks together trying to bat it out of the cluster. Sometimes they try to snatch
the ball during its descent; some talented (usually taller) centers can do it.”

For players of the Native American ball game, training involved reducing diets to
cold foods and ceasing sexual activity, as well as abiding by strict sleeping schedules.
Food and drink as well as sleep were reduced beginning two days prior to Choctaw
contests. Although not much has been published pertaining to specific Indian training
methods, we know of one Ojibwe training method to strengthen leg muscles. Vennum
noted, “Players wore a thin bag containing lead buckshot around their ankles while at
their ordinary avocations. When they removed the bags, they claimed they got light-
footed.” Players in training took sweat baths and purged their bodies by drinking
certain liquids that made them vomit. This was done to remove impurities from their
bodies. Iroquois vomit-inducing beverages were made of bark from spotted alder and red
willow trees.

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40 *Ibid*, 186
To mentally prepare Native American lacrosse players, leaders or captains would give speeches. Typical Native American speeches played upon local pride and previous games to inspire players. Creek players had a pre-game habit of circling goalposts which continued into the 1980s. The tradition stemmed from the annual circling of ceremonial fires, while leaders let out high-pitched wails as a farewell to the fire. Prior to the game the ritual was performed to protect the goal and keep players mentally sharp. After a game they won, Creek teams would again circle the goal, likely symbolizing the safety of the goal after being “attacked”.

According to Vennum, “Scoring in the southeastern game is more a combination of luck and individual skill than or preplanned strategy.” 42 Southeastern Indian lacrosse was characterized by individualism rather than team play and strategy. For Eastern Cherokees, passing typically occurred out of necessity and the only designed plays were the use of powerful centers to set picks by holding two members of the opposing team while every other player on the team tried to do the same to their direct opponent, thereby allowing one player to run free. The Ojibwe in fact had rules against ‘hogging’ the ball. Vennum asserted that “If someone was carrying it and an opponent was dogging him directly from behind, he could yell ‘Apagidoon!’ (Throw it!) three times in a row, and if the ball carrier had not released the ball by then, his pursuer was free to crack him over the head with his stick.” 43 Thus we see that despite the emphasis placed on individualism among many tribes that played the Native American ball game, utilizing teammates and team play still held value.

42 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 121.
43 Ibid, 95.
By providing specific evidence of Native American rules, equipment, and methods of play we are able to study the progression of Indian lacrosse practices to their realization in the game today. The game of lacrosse has undoubtedly progressed in terms of safety, complexity, coaching and officiating, but the influence of the Native American ball game cannot be denied in comparing the game over centuries past to the modern version. It is important to acknowledge and illustrate the similarities between not only Native American lacrosse and the modern game in order to properly credit the game’s creators with their influence, but also to examine differences among various tribes in rules, equipment, and methodology used in ball games.

The Native American ball game was not as wild and uncontrolled as early documenters presented it. Equipment, team composition, field size, and other important facets of the game varied among tribes and communities, but players, spectators, and community members generally understood and adhered to specific customs and practices surrounding ball games. The purposes of Native American lacrosse have often been indicative of their significance to those participating in the ball game’s complex. Prior to first contact with non-Natives and through the mid-nineteenth century, many ball games were played for purposes serving the customs or interests of participating tribes, whether they were practical, celebratory, or part of a ceremonial complex.
CHAPTER TWO

THE BALL GAME AT EUROPEAN CONTACT: OUTSIDE THE FIELD OF PLAY

The Native American ball game often was interpreted as some variation of a surrogate of war but also served many ceremonial purposes for opposing tribes and communities. Research indicates that it was often used for ceremonial purposes in addition to practical or problem-solving ends. Games were sometimes played ad hoc or on account of a random challenge. Lacrosse had its origin in myth; the games were often part of religious holidays or timed to coincide with changes of season or position of heavenly bodies, just as many other Indian games were. Jesuit missionaries documented Huron medicine men playing the ball game in an attempt to cure disease and sickness. The Menominee played in the spring “before the first thunder” to cure illness. For all of the value the ball game had for those playing and watching on the field, it had just as much value off the field as an important part of tribal culture.

Consider, for example, Vennum’s description of Ihonatria field in Canada, which he describes as “an ideal campground for visiting teams.” The respect among opposing teams that he describes does not fit with the notion of tribes participating in the “little brother of war”. In 1815, when a great Seneca prophet named Handsome Lake was near the end of his life, a ball game was played for him in what was an attempt to cheer him up, a deathbed request, or an effort to save his life. Games were played to honor

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Thunderers, to honor tribe members who had passed away, to cure sick tribe members, and to bring about fertile crops among other reasons. Reports exist from as early as 1759 of elders, as referees, reminding Choctaw that they were playing for sport and not for blood. Team managers were able to impose penalties on players whose aggressiveness became excessive, the penalties including reprimands or withdrawal from play. The particulars of the game among various tribes show a practical purpose for the game—the elements of competition, honor, courage, skill, and bravery do have some relationship to war—within the scope of a larger ceremonial purpose.

The Native American ball game was born of historical legends and served as a vehicle for interpreting and aiding larger concerns off of the field. The ball game served many social functions and had a high level of importance among those who played due largely to the cultural narratives and history behind it. Certain tribes acknowledged the game as a gift from spirit and believed their specific tribe to be among the first recipients. The most popular narrative of legendary origins involved a game between birds and animals. The Eastern Cherokee version of the story, which has also been adopted by the Mohawk, claims that the animals challenged the birds to a game. The animals included the bear, the deer, and the terrapin while the birds featured the eagle and the hawk. The story relates how two small creatures, after being laughed at by the animals, climbed up a tree and asked the leader of the birds to join the game on their side. The birds gave one creature wings from the leather of a drum, and it became the bat. The other animal was stretched out by two larger birds, developed wings, and became the flying squirrel.

47 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 232.
These two animals helped the birds emerge victorious—they kept the ball airborne for much of the game before the bat scored the winning goal.\footnote{Ibid, 301-2.} For this reason, Cherokee ball players tried to incorporate pieces of bat wings into their game by tying them either to sticks or to the frames on which sticks were hung.\footnote{James Mooney, “The Cherokee Ball Play,” American Anthropologist 3 (1890): 109.}

According to a similar version, the animals challenged the birds to a game and then prepared with dances the night before the contest. When the field mouse and squirrel were rejected from the animal team for being too small, they asked the eagle if they could join the bird team. The eagle permitted them to join but only after fashioning them with wings. The mouse’s wings, made from excess leather from a drumhead and stretched with cane transformed him into a bat. The squirrel had the skin between his fore and hind legs stretched and became the flying squirrel. These two animals played well the next day, with the bat scoring the winning point.\footnote{James Mooney, “Myths of the Cherokees,” Journal of American Folklore 1, no. 2 (1888): 286-7. The Creek version of the story pits animals with feathers against animals with teeth, but the bat was refused by the team with teeth since it could fly. The birds refused the bat since it had teeth, and the animals with teeth were forced to begrudgingly accept him. As the birds pulled ahead due to their ability to catch the ball, the bat ended up becoming the most effective player and, showing quick skill at darting, won the game for the animals with teeth.}

Some versions of the narrative do not mention the flying squirrel, but the narrative’s epilogue mentions a traditional victory dance following the birds’ victory.

This story has been passed down orally among Cherokee generations, and provided a link to tradition for the Cherokee people and a connection to their game of anetso. It has, Zogry points out, “cultural relevance for the lessons about inclusiveness, adaptability as proscription for social behavior, and boastful behavior it teaches,
particularly to young children.” Zogry makes an interesting comparison to the Bible in explaining this tradition. He writes “imagine an important biblical figure taking part in the [ball game]. For example, instead of Jacob wrestling with God, the two might play lacrosse...Now consider what significance this activity would have if people were still participating in it today, accompanied by other actions that both Cherokee people and non-Cherokee scholars have identified as ritual practices. This analogy begins to describe the enduring cultural significance of anetso.” This notion is useful in illuminating the cultural import those who played and watched placed upon the game.

According to one Ojibwe belief, the way of playing lacrosse came to a boy in a dream, where lacrosse sticks were held over smoking medicine to ensure success in the game. The game took place and the boy himself scored a goal. Upon waking up and relaying his dream to his tribal elders, the game of lacrosse began. Ojibwe believe that the Northern Lights (aurora borealis) are images of spirits in the village of departed souls, but the Abanaki believe it to be images of their ancestors playing lacrosse. The Menominee, close neighbors of the Ojibwe, believed lacrosse was created by Manabush, their mythical culture hero, to avenge his brother’s death, Wolf, by evil underground spirits. Manabush invited the Thunderers to play against the evil spirits, and the Golden Eagle ended up leading the Thunderers against the evil spirits-lead by chiefs in the guise of bears.

The moon has also played a mythic role in the Native American ball game. According to a native tale called “The Moon and the Thunderers,” the moon was stuck in

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51 Zogry, Anetso, 48.
52 Ibid, 34.
the sky as a result of a player in the ball game picking up the ball with his hand just as the other team was about to win. This belief stems from a similar story in which a young man, in the desperate last moments of a game his tribe was about to lose, attempted to cheat by throwing the ball into the sky, where it stuck and became the image of a full moon. The ball got stuck there and became the image of a full moon. This is why games are formally played during full moons. In the early nineteenth century, eastern Cherokee were said to have played lacrosse only during a full moon in which the moon presided over the game as a guide toward fair play. The full moon served to remind Indians that cheating and dishonesty were wrongful. In fact the Cherokee believed that when the moon became small and pale, it was because the ball has been handled unfairly during play. The emphasis placed on fair play and honor in this narrative helps explain why the Native Americans accepted defeat in ball games honorably and did not judge success solely on winning.

Incidentally, the importance of Thunderers engaging in the ball game among tribal narrative cannot be understated. For the Cherokee, for instance, “the Thunderers are the most powerful beings in the Cherokee pantheon.” Vennum cites the Cayuga Thunder Rite, in which, “seven men played on each side-one team made up of older men from one division of the tribe, the other of younger men from the opposite division. The

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seven players in each case represented the seven Thunder gods, and the game was
conceived of as being played by fathers against sons.”

For the Creek Indians, the game was born of three groups—the Chickasaw, Kasihta, and
Coweta—migrating eastward before the Coweta became separated from the group. Upon
rejoining, they were severely beaten by Kasihta warriors with switches. When the groups
reached the ocean, they settled their differences and joined forces, conquering local
inhabitants. With no more enemies left to fight, the Coweta challenged the Kasihta to a
game of lacrosse to avenge their earlier beating. Thus, the Creek practice of using “ball
contests” to settle disputes was born.

A narrative classified under Mooney’s category of “Wonder Stories” called
“Untsaiyi, the Gambler” describes the scrofulous son of a Thunderer who, seeking a cure,
sought out his father. On his journey he met Vtsayi, also referred to as “Brass,” who was
a great gambler. Vtsayi tempted him to play a stick and ball game but the son resisted,
found his father, and has his skin cleaned. The Thunderer then instructs his son to “play
a ball game with your two elder brothers,” a reference to the boy’s having to fight for his
life. The brothers are said to have been Thunder, and the son Lightning, with their fight
ending at the father’s behest when his son proved himself to be brave and strong. The
lightning boy then goes on to defeat Vtsayi in his gambling game; he and his brothers
chased, caught, and imprisoned Vtsayi after he had gambled away all of his
possessions. The values of teamwork, strength, bravery, and honor can be seen in this
narrative. Also present is the association of gambling with the ball game, a practice that

55 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 179.
56 Zogry, Anetso, 49.
continued into the twentieth century for Native Americans and will be further analyzed in the third chapter. In yet another tale, “The Man who Married the Thunderers’ Sister,” a man is required to play ball with his wife’s two brothers. The players rode snakes to a ball field where they used a human skull for a ball. The man overcomes his fears by thinking of his wife; he plays well, and becomes the third Thunderer. The outcome is not specifically mentioned, which illustrates the importance of courage rather than the importance of winning among the Cherokee.

These narratives all express trials that a specific individual must overcome in order to belong to a particular group or family. Overcoming hardship and struggle, which are a part of life, are prevalent themes, as is the ideal that the Cherokee person will survive and persevere either alone or with help from others. Zogry points out that “themes of coming of age (particularly young men becoming adults), agon and overcoming great odds to succeed all could be applied to these narratives. Other-than-human persons as well as humans participate in anetso in order to win bets, win for the sake of winning, compete against other communities for bragging rights, carry on a tradition, and represent their communities. There is a clear link between the relevant narratives and the physical activity of anetso.” Anthropologist Raymond Fogelson suggests that the ball game “can be conceptualized as a kind of ritual drama periodically performed as an enactment of premises implicit in the myth dream.”

57 Ibid, 52.
The narratives feature other-than-human characters, specifically Kanati and his sons, who hold a prominent place in Cherokee folklore. In “The Cherokee Ball Play” Mooney included an example of the invocation of supreme beings, noting that prior to a game an elderly man addressed two teams to tell them of “the Apportioner” (a reference to the sun) looking down upon them. The man also urged those playing to acquitted themselves in the game as their fathers had before them, and to keep their tempers. If these guidelines were followed, the players would be able to play without getting angry or fighting, and so after the game the players would be able to return to their lives peacefully.59 This is another excellent example of emphasis placed on participation and proper play rather than winning or losing.

Zogry’s study of the game begins with ritual or religious practices that were athletic in nature. He examines whether anetso ever served or still serves as a ritual and how often the game was played among the Cherokee. He defines ritual as “a defining religious activity,”60 and asserts after his first experience with the game that anetso did not wholly fit within the confines either of game or ritual. According to Emmet Starr, classifying the ball game proves difficult because “everybody seems to think that they know what a ritual is, but no one seems to be able to come up with a definition that satisfies anyone else.”61 He also asserts that the attributes “polysema, indeterminacy, and the characteristic of being at once the game as it has been, or is ‘supposed to be,’

59 Mooney, “The Cherokee Ball Play”, 130.
60 Zogry, Anetso, 7.
along with an active tradition of competitive reinterpretations—also are shared by ritual.”

The game and its surrounding complex’s classification pertaining to ceremony and ritual are important in understanding its significance among players and spectators. I contend that the Native American ball game was indeed ceremonial, but was not a ritual because it was not consistently performed with the same specific intention in mind. It served many purposes and was not played uniformly by tribes. It was part of a complex performed by Native Americans and served ceremonial, social, and tangible purposes for players, fans, and communities throughout history. That said, the pre- and post-game practices that took place in the complex around ball games can be considered rituals, since they were consistently performed with specific intentions. Because of this complex, ball games were consequential and influential to existential native concerns such as health, warfare, and military success.

That tribal sporting events may have ritualistic tendencies is not exclusive to Native Americans. John Huizinga, the great Dutch historian, has noted that many of “the greatest competitions in archaic culture had always formed part of the sacred festivals and were indispensable as health and happiness-bringing activities.” Due to the pre-game and post-game events associated with the Native American lacrosse, many consider it to be a ritual. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued of the meaning of sports that the “dominant meaning, that is, the social meaning attached to it by its dominant social

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62 Ibid, 17.
users may change: indeed, it is frequent that at one and the same time—and this is true of a philosophical work too—a sport may be given two very different meanings.”64 The Native American ball game served multiple purposes for those who played and watched and though the accompanying cycles have changed, “a ritual history of anetso reveals that the activity itself, as well as several of the constituent activities of the complex, has shown remarkable persistence, disputing the trajectory of decline and degeneration plotted even in the recent past.”65 Zogry brings up a good point in the role fans had in differentiating Native American lacrosse as a game rather than a ritual. “Both rituals and games have spectators,” he writes, “but rituals do not have fans.”66

The term anetso translates to “they are playing it” or “that which they play, and the game is considered “a ceremonial complex (or cycle), because historically it has featured virtually every activity Cherokee people and non-Cherokee observers have identified as elemental of Cherokee ‘religion’ or ‘ritual’.”67 Defining anetso as a ceremony rather than a ritual is appropriate: ceremonial refers to a system of rites, whereas a ritual is a specific order in which rites are performed. Players of anetso relied upon religious specialists from the community to help the team via conjuring. Like many versions of lacrosse, anetso featured going to water both before and after games, as well as the consumption of medicine, dietary and physical restraint before the game (such as fasting and abstinence), and dancing. The anetso cycle also featured divination and scarification which has changed over time. Because anetso was played for centuries in

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64 Zogry, Anetso, 17.
65 Ibid, 3.
66 Ibid, 216.
67 Ibid, 1, 2.
front of visitors or outsiders, anetso can also be considered a symbol of Cherokee cultural identity.

Zogry asserts that “Indeterminacy remains about anetso’s meaning, not about the presence or absence of ritual elements. Ultimately, this aspect is what confounds scholarly analysis; if it had a clear “function,” the argument simply would be about categories or frames.” 68 The meaning of the game is difficult to determine because it was constantly being played for different reasons. This lack of consistency played a role in the eventual adaptation of the ball game by Anglo-Americans, but anetso continues to exist today. “Played in response to missionaries who forbade it, and used as part of a strategy of re-enfranchisement in negotiations with government agents, anetso was an expression of identity, a definitive statement of existence.” 69 Zogry’s claim that “anetso accommodates but does not demand interaction with other-than-human persons or agents,” 70 shows the progression of the game among Native Americans. The ball game was once played to honor Thunderers, in celebration of life, or in hopes of appeasing Gods. As it evolved, it also became a way for Native Americans to continue a tribal and communal tradition, to relate to their ancestors who played centuries before.

After the game, players from the winning team would immediately go to water and perform another rite to turn aside the vengeful prayers of the defeated team. 71 During the all-night ball dance, the players went in groups of seven, starting with the seven considered the strongest. Weaker players would go to water more frequently.

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68 Ibid, 205.
69 Ibid, 233.
70 Ibid, 234.
71 Mooney, “Myths,” 131.
going to water after games is one of the few Cherokee ceremonial activities done in public. Fogelson, who worked with residents of Big Cove, and Zogry and Mooney, who researched in Wolftown all found that the anetso ceremonial complex as a whole, and specifically the practice of going to water, was a cultural element that has endured in both towns.

Going to water refers to the Cherokee practice of ceremonially bathing or washing portions of the body or even objects in a running body of water. It is often considered the most sacred Cherokee ritual because it is also part of many other rites, not just anetso. In the weeks leading up to the ball game and throughout the night of the ball game dance, conjurers would take the team to a nearby river or stream. On the day of the game, teams went to water multiple times. At sunrise players marched to the field and stopped four times, each stop resulting in individual players going to water with the conjurer. This generally took quite some time, and since the games were held halfway between competing settlements, games typically did not start until early afternoon. Conjurers chose the spot to take players to water, and in the final instance before the game, they were sure to choose a river bend where the players could face both upstream and east. The players lined up "side by side looking down upon the water, with their ball sticks clasped upon their breasts."72 The conjurer stood behind the team, picking up red beads, which represented each player on his team, and black beads, which represented the opponents. Then, after reciting a formula, the conjurer would stomp into the ground a

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72 Mooney, “The Cherokee Ball Play,” 125.
black bead representative of a particularly feared opposing player; then, each player
dipped their stick in the water, brought it to his lips, hand, head, and breast.

According to Mooney, “formulas generally consist of four paragraphs,
corresponding to four steps in the medical ceremony.”\textsuperscript{73} Formulas exist for many aspects
of Cherokee life, but few have been published specifically for anetso, although Fogelson
included several in his work. There were different formulas for pre-game preparation and
for singing during a game. There were formulas for taking players to water, to improve
individual performance, to ensure victory, to cause defeat for opposing teams, and to
prepare sticks, among other purposes.

Another major ritual activity in the Cherokee anetso system was dancing, which
was also included in almost every ceremonial Cherokee occasion. Anetso utilized “an
all-night ball dance, preliminary dances, and a Victory dance.”\textsuperscript{74} One of the pre-game
dances featured attaching a tail pendant of feathers, symbolic of strength and speed, to the
back of a belt. The all-night ball dance prior to the game was the “climax of the pre-
game preparations.”\textsuperscript{75} It featured a call-and-response portion as well as simulated game
actions such as throwing and catching. Medicine was another. Cherokee ballplayers
washed themselves with special catgut concoctions prior to games in hopes of toughening
their muscles.\textsuperscript{76} They bathed themselves in these concoctions, the most popular of which
were catgut, crabapple, and ironwood trees. They also rubbed themselves with turtle legs

\textsuperscript{73} James Mooney and Frans M. Olbrechts, \textit{The Swimmer Manuscript: Cherokee Sacred Formulas and
Medicinal Prescriptions} (Smithsonian Institute: Washington, D.C., 1932), 348.
\textsuperscript{74} Zogry, \textit{Anetso}, 123.
\textsuperscript{75} Fogelson, “The Cherokee Ball Game Cycle,” 92.
\textsuperscript{76} Mooney, “Myths,” 425-426.
“to gain the stout legs of that animal.”

During games, some Cherokee players drank a “sour preparation made from green grapes and wild crabapples.” It seems as if the Cherokee had their own early version of Gatorade to replenish players during contests. Also, after being scratched for the first time, and in hopes of scaring opponents, some players ate rattlesnake specifically prepared by a conjurer. Many players chewed substances (typically roots) during scratching as well.

Cherokee believed scratching or scarification “to be a healthy practice, since it removes ‘bad blood’ from the system.” Among tribes in the Southeast, scratching served many purposes outside the game, including punishment, treating rheumatism, and increasing stamina when running. Scratching was performed by a specialist who recited ceremonial prayers. The typical Cherokee scratching of ball players took place in this manner: “to draw the scratcher four times down the upper part of each arm, thus making twenty-eight scratches each about 6 inches in length, repeating the operation on each arm below the elbow and on each leg above and below the knee. Finally, the instrument is drawn across the breast from the two shoulders so as to form a cross; another curving stroke is made to connect the two upper ends of the cross and the same pattern is repeated on the back, so that the body is thus gashed in nearly three hundred places. Although very painful for a while, as may well be supposed, the scratches do not penetrate deep enough to result [in serious injury.]” If players stepped away from the procedure while being scratched, they were not allowed to play, and at times players were scratched as

77 Zogry, Anetso, 125.
78 Mooney, “Cherokee Ball Play,” 131.
80 Mooney, Sacred Formulas, 334-35.
needed during practices prior to particular contests. Big Cove players had to stand on a specific rock in a stream and face east, which was the direction associated with the color red and with success.\textsuperscript{81}

The use of conjurers perhaps best indicates the spirituality associated with the ball game. Each team typically hired at least one conjurer, whose duties included dictating performance of those participating, attempting to manipulate events and players’ actions during the game, and protecting teams from their opponents. Some conjurers served as an early prototype of scouts, evaluating players’ talent and learning opponents’ strategies to help dictate the outcome of games. Many players and spectators believed that the outcome of games was not determined by players as much as conjurers. It is also important to note that most, if not all the information related to conjuring activities was closely guarded by Cherokee peoples and continues to be secret today. However, an 1855 published account described a game from earlier times between the towns of Chattooga and Chicamauga featuring “teams of fifty players with faces painted in a fantastical manner,”\textsuperscript{82} and interaction with conjurers, showing the great disparity that existed among tribes playing their versions of lacrosse. Many conjurers served as doctors as well. However, Zogry asserts that, “it would be incorrect to characterize the Cherokee religious system as dominated by or obsessed with the malevolent side of conjuring.” To do so would be “akin to characterizing Christianity as being preoccupied with Satan and demons.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 62.
\textsuperscript{82} Rev. George White, \textit{Historical Collections of Georgia} (New York: Pudney and Russell, 1854), 670.
\textsuperscript{83} Zogry, \textit{Anetso}, 115.
There is no comprehensive treatment of the Cherokee religious system. However, several key elements are present in anetso. It is important to note that matches and exhibitions carried different connotations among the Cherokee. Matches were more formal contests between two teams generally from different townships, settlements, or nations. Managers were appointed, and pregame rituals began in the weeks prior to the contest. Postgame rituals continued for a week following the game. These included public and private dances. Catlin also described the pre-game ball dances, which took place the night prior to the game and further illustrated the role that those in the community played in the ball game complex if not in the game itself. According to Catlin the dances lasted all night and the players were awake all night until the game began at nine o’clock the next morning.\textsuperscript{84}

Upon first non-Native contact with the game it was a combination of ceremony, game, and event. Native Americans would employ the ball game for more than common ceremonial purposes. The dichotomy of the dual meanings of the ball game—on and off the field—is better determined when sketching the history of Native American lacrosse. The ball game was used at times to solve disputes between tribes and as a method of warfare against tribal enemies. However, during the eighteenth and first half of nineteenth centuries, the game almost always served a purpose for those participating, either through playing or watching.

In fact, the first documented mention of Cherokee lacrosse comes from a May 4, 1714 entry published in the \textit{Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade} of South

\textsuperscript{84} Catlin, \textit{Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians}, Vol 2, 125.
Carolina. A witness present at a hearing stated that the Cherokee invited the Yuchi to a game with the intention of attacking them. The challenge may even have been an informal declaration of war. Specifically, according to testimony, “ye Chereikes designed to invite the Euchees to a ball play in order to cut them off.” Zogry provides a detailed account of the incident, in which a trader named Alexander Longe was accused of inciting Cherokee to attack the Yuchi and capture its people for slaves. Longe and his accomplice, Eleazer Wiggan had induced a debt among the Yuchi town that the town was unable to repay; the two men were able to convince the Cherokee, enemies of the Yuchi, to ambush them. The pretext of the attack was the game, and when all was said and done, only six Yuchi remained alive.

As has been stated, the ball game served not only ceremonial purposes reflecting Native Americans’ spirituality and cultural beliefs, but also practical and social purposes. Indian lacrosse generally served positive traditional roles as a healing practice and as an outlet used to funnel group aggression into peaceable rivalry among Native Americans. Daniel Butrick first arrived in Cherokee territory in 1818 with Congregationalist missionaries and remained through the Cherokees’ forced removal along the Trail of Tears. In his first account of the ball game he said, “Akin to war was the ball play, that is, the ball play was called the friend or companion of the battle…Anciently ball players must be men of good character, who would play honorably, without fraud or deception. They were famous,—men of renown.”

85 Zogry, Anetso, 27.
86 Ibid, 100.
Still, aspects of Native American lacrosse provide evidence that it did, at times, serve as a surrogate to warfare which provided it with increased significance among Native Americans. It contained many similar elements and actions as warfare, all of which helped provide the game with specific meaning and purpose to the Native American tribes that practiced them. For instance, in winning a game, a team was “symbolically to ‘kill’ one’s opponent.” The parallels to warfare are all too evident, and in some cases there was even post-game violence. For this reason, the Oklahoma Choctaw deliberately left weapons in their village when playing games to avoid violence after games.

Though the name of lacrosse derived from the French, the name of the game among many southeastern tribes’ native languages translates to “brother of war” or “little brother of war.” Many ties can be made between the ball game and Native American warfare including the training prior to games, the role of conjurers, the protection afforded to players prior to games, and the ceremonial practices before and after games that were similar to those undertaken prior to and following a war campaign. The violence present in early Native American lacrosse also lent the sport a warlike quality. Many of the best Indian lacrosse players were also excellent warriors, which illustrates why many believe the game served as a method for warriors to stay in shape or prepare for battle. The same qualities were praised in both Native American lacrosse and warfare—honor, courage, and strength—and both served as showcases for individual performance. It was not uncommon for individual fights or group skirmishes to erupt on

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the field of play. In times of peace, animosity still existed between tribes that had previously engaged in warfare and ball games therefore served as a perfect outlet of aggression for players. Some ball games resulted in deaths that occurred outside the context of the game, as happened after a 1790 game between the Creek and Choctaw that was played to determine tribal rights to a beaver pond. After being declared the winners, the Creek were attacked by the Choctaw with weapons, which resulted in the death of some five hundred players and warriors. 88

The Cayuga lacrosse stick used circa 1845 was considered “an icon of war” and “as much a weapon of combat as a tool of play.” 89 There was a human hand carved into the stick, seemingly ready to release the ball as an implement of battle. Beneath the hand was an image of a handshake—not in promotion of good sportsmanship but rather as a depiction of a type of war dance the players and warriors engaged in as part of a male bonding activity to protect themselves prior to going on the field or warpath. In many Iroquois legends, flying heads are equated with airborne balls, a point in which the emphasis leans more toward lacrosse as a “little brother of war” exercise than as ceremonial. Production of the sticks is said to have come from a Menominee legend in which a Thunderer relays to a member of the tribe that he will strike a tree with a lightning bolt, leaving behind marks to show where the wood should be cut to make lacrosse sticks. The Creek, whose name for the game translated to “younger brother of war,” engaged in practices symbolic of warfare prior to lacrosse games by tying the ball

88 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 115.
89 Ibid, xiii.
they would be playing with to a stick and inserting it in the ground, directed at the other team as if it were a cannon aimed at an enemy. ⁹₀

Author and researcher William H. Gilbert Junior divides the Cherokee war complex into three phases: preparation, the campaign, and the return. In preparation before battle, players would chew a root while going to water, spitting the juice on their bodies to bestow themselves with imperviousness to their enemy’s attacks. This was also performed prior to ballgames with the goal of eluding opponents’ grasps. In the actual campaign, both warriors and players wore bird feathers that had been dyed, and were both considered to be in a state susceptible to danger and death until exiting their stage through a ceremony following the battle or game. Chronologically, the final element of the anetso complex was the Victory dance, which was “unquestionably a vestige of the Scalp Dance of former times.” ⁹¹ War, the ball game, and hunting were similar in that the results were believed to be determined by different forms of divination. Like warfare and the ball game, hunting required ritual purification before and afterwards.

Consider that the use of the color red, which many Indian tribes connected symbolically with warfare, was also prominently featured in Native American lacrosse. Red was associated with blood and considered the life-sustaining element by many tribes. The Cherokee tribe utilized the Red Hawk and Red Rattlesnake as spirit helpers and applied red pigmentation to the equipment of those about to enter battle and those about to participate in a ball game. Cherokee warriors and ball players were considered to be in a “red condition” during their activities, meaning they had increased susceptibility to

⁹₀ Ibid, 218.
⁹¹ Ibid, 216.
danger, injury, and death. Immediately following both finished competitions and completed war campaigns, the participants were isolated from other tribe members. Ball games were even used by Native Americans as a means for an ambush—against other tribes and against outsiders—and the term “play ball against them” or “play ball” was often slang for any competition among Native Americans, especially battles.

After players entered into a “red condition” they had to be “released” from it through a ceremony involving ritual purification led by a conjurer. The two Cherokee purifications were nearly identical for players following a lacrosse game and for members of a returning war party who had been in direct contact with death, spilled blood, and returned with scalps. Both were considered to be in an unclean state and therefore required purification. The night before a game, Yuchi lacrosse sticks were painted red, indicative of their function as tools in battle. The Yuchi ball contained a small red cloth inside of deerskin. Players also wore red during lacrosse games, whether through paint on their bodies or feathers in their hair. Cherokee conjurers would paint players’ faces red and the feathers worn had to be prepared specially. At times, it was complex pairing off Creek towns in joint play. When Creek towns were identified as Red or White, they typically avoided each other (Red towns carried out warfare while White towns embraced peace). The two types of towns contacted most frequently through lacrosse games, seemingly avoiding each other in other circumstances.

Temporary sexual abstinence for both Cherokee lacrosse players and warriors was also practiced. For three days prior and three days following battle, warriors were to

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92 Zogry, *Anetso*, 133.
abstain from sexual contact and lacrosse players observed similar restrictions. Immediately following battle and competition, warriors and players were both isolated from other tribal members as well. Players were forbidden from contact with women for up to twenty-eight days prior to an anetso match in some cases, as well as for seven days following a contest. If a woman touched a stick on the eve of a game it was considered unfit for use, and players whose wives were pregnant were forbidden to play due to the belief that they player’s strength had transferred to the child. The player was considered “heavy and sluggish in his movements.”\textsuperscript{93} However, an expectant father could play after undergoing a special ceremonial preparation prior to the game, though he likely would not get much playing time. Sexual intercourse was forbidden for at least seven days prior to a ballgame, and for four or seven days following the game, depending on the date of the victory celebration.\textsuperscript{94} An old Cherokee cultural narrative, *Nvyanvwi* (also known as Stone Coat), was responsible for the Cherokee belief that menstrual blood was dangerous and debilitating. Apparently, this belief either only extended toward Native American women, or died out, as players had no issue shaking Zogry’s wife’s hand prior to a game in 2000.\textsuperscript{95} Also, players were to avoid contact with infants and consuming young birds or animals in order to avoid early injuries.

Leading up to a contest players were forbidden from eating rabbits due to the animal’s nature of being “easily alarmed and liable to lose its wits when pursued by a hunter.”\textsuperscript{96} Salt and hot foods were also forbidden, as were the fish known as the

\textsuperscript{93} Mooney, “Cherokee Ball Play,” 110.  
\textsuperscript{94} Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 58–60.  
\textsuperscript{95} Zogry, *Anetso*, 131.  
\textsuperscript{96} Mooney, “Cherokee Ball Play,” 110.
hogsucker (it was considered sluggish) and lamb’s quarter (because its stalks were easily broken). Among the Cherokee, saliva was considered a fluid as essential as blood, and therefore if it were to end up on the hands of an opposing conjurer, players could be rendered helpless during a game. Smoking, chewing tobacco, and dipping were forbidden in the days leading up to a contest, and players were actually cautioned to be careful of where they spit. Interestingly, despite the prevalence of alcohol consumption among spectators prior to and during ball games, alcohol was prohibited during player training and anyone caught violating this practice was automatically disqualified. Players also generally attempted to fast from the night before the all-night ball play dance up until the morning of the game, when they would eat cold corn bread. This fits with the notion that “corn meal was the standard ration of the Cherokee war party during the eighteenth century.”

Interestingly, Cherokee women who participated in the all-night dance also tended to fast. Although these practices were observed less stringently in the twentieth century among the Cherokee, the intense preparations undertaken prior to a ballgame demonstrate the importance anetso had in Cherokee society and other versions of the ball game had in their respective tribes.

Warlike similarities existed not only prior to and during the ball game but afterwards. The Victory Dance was the final part of the Cherokee game cycle. In the late eighteenth century, similar dances were performed following victorious battles. The Victory Dance was the final step in the Cherokee purification of players who had been successful and almost identically resembled the Cherokee scalp dance of times prior to

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97 Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 58.
nineteenth century Indian lacrosse. (Cherokee fighting became nearly extinct following the Revolutionary War. Relocation of the Cherokee to Oklahoma Indian Territory greatly disrupted their society, which left their customs to be revived under different circumstances.) A Victory Dance following battle ended with a collection of scalps and a distribution of goods to the poor. Following a successful lacrosse performance, the Victory Dance ended with the collection of feather wands and the rewarding of the people who played a role in the game. Players gave out food, goods, and money to drivers, managers, singers, and conjurers as tokens of gratitude.

Pre-game dances prior to Indian lacrosse closely resembled those which took place prior to engaging in warfare. One such example featured a “selection of nineteen people, including a conjurer, to perform various functions at a dance begun the night the town accepted the ball play challenge. This dance took place every night for seven nights before the day of the challenge. A list of seven ‘rules of the play’ included abstinence from sexual activity, seclusion from women, scarification for some players, and dietary prohibitions. All being ready, the players marched to the center of the ball ground and faced their ‘antagonists,’ each showing what he had to bet personally on the outcome.”98 The conjurers served to ensure victory by performing spells to make opponents weak and their own team strong. These ceremonial practices were part of going to war.

War whoops were heard throughout lacrosse games among many tribes. The Yuchi tribe originally created their “whoop,” which was supposed to be an imitation of a wolf, as a celebration when a warrior took an enemy’s scalp. The same sound was used

by players celebrating a point scored. Francis B. Mayer, a witness to a Dakota game in 1851, noted that the teams marched to the field “shouting loud whoops of defiance to their opponents,”99 while being led by chiefs, a practice similar to Cherokee entrances. Other pre-game traditions also simulated Indian military practices from prior times. A conjurer plotted the route teams took to get to the field, scouts were sent ahead to make sure the paths were clear, and stops were made at pre-planned locations for water. Players marched in single file lines and if they stepped on a twig, they were required to take it with them to the ball field.100 Prayers were also recited to during body painting prior to lacrosse games and war. 

Prior to the start of a game two teams would march toward the center of the field from opposing ends, taking turns having one designated player from each calling out and his teammates responding in unison as they moved forward. Upon meeting in the center, standing in two lines facing one another, the players laid their sticks down on the ground in front of them and pointed at the other team.101 This is not all that different from the pre-game practice in the game today of having players line up across from one another prior to the game to receive the official’s instructions, before shaking hands with the player(s) across from them and heading to their designated position on the field. After Creek games, teams celebrated as if they had won a battle--by racing around their goal while letting out war whoops and yells. This took place while the scorekeeper

100 Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 127.
101 Ibid, 12.
yelled “Ilatto’ to’ to,” which translates to “He is dead, dead, dead, dead.”\textsuperscript{102} Former Creek player James Hill recounted the story of Okchai community, which, tired of being beaten in lacrosse by the Hilabi community “wanted to quit fighting, so they agreed to be ‘friends’ with Hilabi,”\textsuperscript{103} Such a practice is similar to a village or community signing a truce after fighting.

Additionally, the value placed on individualism was a common feature of both warfare and the Native American ball game. War chiefs led by example just as center fighters or captains aimed to motivate teammates rather than orchestrate game plans. The individualistic nature of combat in Cherokee warfare has been stressed in historical works. It was characterized by small group skirmishes fought to avenge the wrong done by one tribe member against another. This tendency carried over to lacrosse, where Cherokee were free to engage in individual scrums within the larger scale of the game. Vennum, for example, notes that “On the surface, the game might appear to be a contest between teams, but in actuality it is an outlet for individual performance.”\textsuperscript{104} Cherokee lacrosse featured very little in the way of both rules and team coordination. Players were able to remove themselves from the game, similar to how Cherokee war party membership was voluntary and warriors were allowed to return home any time they desired.

Into the nineteenth century, opportunities for actual warfare among Native Americans became increasingly rare. Fogelson asserts that following the stoppage of

\textsuperscript{102} Vennum, \textit{American Indian Lacrosse}, 214.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid}, 214.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid}, 220.
warfare at the end of the eighteenth century for the Cherokee people, lacrosse took on more attributes of actual warfare. “Games were probably fought with more deadly earnestness,” he writes, “since the ball play served as, perhaps, the only activity by which young men could earn the sort of prestige and status formerly acquired on the war path.”¹⁰⁵ Zogry declares, “In the aftermath of the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, warfare between the Cherokee and other groups essentially halted. Thus meanings of the ball game bound up with actual warfare receded, and other valences became more pronounced.”¹⁰⁶ Among the Choctaw people moved west, the games, “consequently had become more seasonal amusements, without regard to clan affiliation, marital status, and the other matters that formerly had controlled the selection of teams.”¹⁰⁷ Random player participation added to the likelihood of outright violence in ball games.

The Cherokee have been mentioned often in the thesis, as they were the group most often mentioned in the sources used. But, the ball game possessed similarities to warfare in most all tribes that participated in the sport. For the tribes of the Great Lakes, the similarity to warfare can be seen in the association of lacrosse with Thunder spirits, such as Thunderbirds and Thunderers. Menominee lacrosse was thought of as mimed warfare, the game being the property of Thunder spirits and given to the Indians. Games were ordered by a man whose guardian spirit was the Thunderbird and thus, were played to honor him. Thunderers gave the Menominee their first war bundle, and a typical Menominee Thunderbird bundle contained a miniature war club, lacrosse ball, and

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¹⁰⁶ Zogry, Anetso, 27.
¹⁰⁷ Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 138.
lacrosse stick. The stick was also modeled after the weapon. Iroquois lacrosse also contained war symbolism. When played as a religious rite, the games featured seven men per team, emblematic of the seven Thunder gods. The Iroquois believed that gods in the thunderhead played lacrosse and that the lightning bolt represented their ball.

While not occurring nearly as frequently as it did in warfare, death did occur over the course of Indian lacrosse games, although this aspect of the game was exaggerated in reports from non-Natives to reinforce the stereotype of Native Americans as savage. More frequent in lacrosse than deaths were injuries. In cases of deliberate injuries, games could be suspended and ill will among the players and tribes was quite frequent. A 1794 game between the Seneca and the Mohawk nearly led to war. Thus we see Indian lacrosse was not just as a ceremonial celebration or a method of solving disputes between tribes, but could prompt hostility rather than solving it. Players and teams also tried to injure one another through mysticism. Vennum notes that “W. David Owl, an Eastern Cherokee, told how a bucket of liquid brewed from the hind leg of a rabbit could be sprinkled on the path that opponents would take to the ball game. If a player stepped on it unknowingly, he would get leg cramps when he was about to score.” This practice stemmed from the well-known legend in which a rabbit’s left hind leg was injured in a game played between birds and animals. Cherokee believed the rabbit has been unable to use that leg since the game, which is why it leaves only three tracks as footprints.

Some teams had reputations as dirty, and run-ins during games could provoke fights. Catlin described one such occurrence: “Their sticks are dropped, and the parties

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108 Ibid, 228.
are unmolested, whilst they are settling it between themselves.”\textsuperscript{109} Free-for-alls between teams were not unheard of, and sometimes these occurrences were useful in ending games that had taken a long time to complete. Individual scraps in lacrosse games among Indians could usually be attributed to personal grudges on either the personal or tribal level. Many were results of familial or clan conflicts, but some were purely accidental. Fogelson contends that “the intensity of the ritualism and actual events reveal the fact that the ball players sometimes entered the game with deliberate intentions to maim, or even kill, members of the opposing team…these grudges, many of which were originally engendered in game situations, sometimes extended beyond the playing field and resulted in sorcery, fights, and even homicide.”\textsuperscript{110} Again, as actual warfare decreased among Native American tribes, the ballgame took on more and more the attributes of actual warfare. This seems to have held true even in the twentieth century. Following World War II, interest in the game again intensified due to the participation of veterans who might have been seeking a surrogate for warfare.\textsuperscript{111}

Yet to focus solely on the ball game as a surrogate to or a preparation for war it to miss the social functions it served outside the field of play. Both male and female community members participated in aspects of Native American lacrosse. Games served as social functions for non-Natives as well. The ball game was communal in that it involved many players over a large playing area which attracted and accommodated many spectators. Games were typically announced well enough in advance to let

\textsuperscript{109} Catlin, \textit{Letters and Notes}, 86.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 231.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 232-233.
excitement mount. Females were able to participate in some aspects of the complex and the game. Choctaw women were not allowed on the field to ensure they did not violate the taboo of touching sticks. However, they served refreshments to players on the sidelines and some were quick to whip players they deemed not playing hard enough.

The Dakota featured games pitting males against females, where the women outnumbered men by up to five-to-one, as well as games featuring males and females on the same teams. Shawnee lacrosse allowed women to use their hands while men were required to play with sticks.

The biggest way that the Native American ball game involved the community was through gambling. This practice was a major part of many native North American games. Indian spiritual leaders accepted wagering on games as a natural part of Indian life. Vennum notes that “Universally in native North America of the past, much leisure time was devoted to games, and nearly all of them were wagered on by players and spectators alike. The earliest Europeans in North America made particular note of the high amounts wagered but stressed the dispassion of the losers.”

Pierre de Charlevoix, in a publication from 1761, was quoted as saying that Huron would raise the stakes, “till they have stript themselves stark naked and lost all their moveables in their cabins, some have even been known to stake their liberty for a certain time.” This practice continued habitually throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.

When considering the betting that took place on games, an interesting dichotomy of the Native American ball game is presented. On one hand, gambling was a part of the

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complex surrounding the game and served as a way to include observers and community members in aspects of the game. Additionally, when functioning as a “little brother of war” or problem-solving method, great stakes would be on the line for a ball game. On the other hand, ancient Native American narratives emphasized the honor, strength, courage, and effort that were present during ball games among the participants. Gambling shifted that emphasis to material gain, despite the graciousness with which many accepted losing bets and goods. Another interesting facet of gambling may be its effect on the evolution of lacrosse into its modern form. The wagers placed on ball games went hand-in-hand with alcohol consumption and rowdiness among observers, which helped contribute to the game’s downfall in popularity and frequency among Native Americans. However, by removing gambling from the complex surrounding ball games (such as when they were played as part of travelling exhibitions), the game became more appealing to many non-Natives.

Indian gambling was different than European-American gambling in that Indians who lost bets more often showed great composure. Although players attested to trying “that much harder,” when heavy wagers were placed on teams by observers, most gamblers among the Choctaw, for instance, attached little importance to personal gain or loss. Each bet added up to a collective one in which the winners took all. There were no point spreads or odds as many non-Natives became accustomed to, though that did not stop them from betting on games. Rematches were common in part because they served as an outlet both for any lingering negative feelings and for gamblers to recoup losses. Rarely did players or fans leave angry. Huron men and women were known to lose the
game and every possession, yet still depart cheerfully, naked, and singing. However, European-American gambling on Mississippi Choctaw lacrosse has been cited as a major factor in the decline of lacrosse among the tribe. As more non-Natives began attending games, they began gambling on them but also valued the stakes. When combined with heavy amounts of alcohol, high stakes caused unruly behavior among spectators and violence.

To Native Americas, gambling was more important in itself than in the value of goods being traded. Many Indians would rather have bet something of higher value against something of much lesser value rather than not betting at all. Vennum quotes an anonymous French memoir as saying, “They wager a new gun against an old one which is not worth anything, as readily as if it were good, and they give as a reason that if they are going to win they will win as well against a bad article as a good one.” As the importance or scale of a game increased, the betting tended to do the same. Some games lasted as long as there was something to be bet, taking days to complete.

Collective betting on Native American ball games added to the sense of community. The Cherokee “had specially designated ‘stickmen’; should players wrestling continue for too long with no clear winner in sight, these game officials had a long hickory switch with which to beat the contenders back into the game.” Villages that lost heavily on their team sometimes had to cope with short-term shortages of food.

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114 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 109. Not only were bets won by players, but among western Great Lakes tribes prizes were awarded as well, usually goods to players on both sides. This is similar to modern day awards given out such as Most Valuable Player, which in college lacrosse is called the Tewaarton Award, given annually to both the men’s and women’s player of the year. Ironically, “tewaaraton” is what the Mohawks called their version of the game, a progenitor of present day lacrosse.

115 Ibid, 155.
clothing, and livestock. However, rematches allowed the people to recover. Rarely, in fact, was a single team able to dominate other communities to build great wealth at their expense.

Native American tribes participated in the ball game for a variety of reasons and employed different methods of game play specific to individual tribes. The game was not uniform in how it was played among various tribes and as such there were differences in fields, goals, balls, sticks, attire, rules, enforcement, and methodology. Despite the variations among tribes, there were also consistencies in game play no matter location or purpose of the ball game. For those participating in the ball game and its ceremonial complex up until the mid-nineteenth century, the game often carried an import greater than winning or losing on the field. It served as an opportunity to honor ancestors, Thunderers, and tribal culture. However, when the game was removed from its surrounding complex, it became easier for non-Natives to alter, leading to the inception of the modern game.
CHAPTER THREE

FOOLLOWING EUROPEAN CONTACT: NEW DIRECTIONS OF PLAY

Prior to 1763, the Ojibwe and their chief, “Little Bear,” also known as Makoons, had coexisted with the French near La Pointe in Michigan. However, once the English took over the area, the French paid the Makoons handsomely to help disguise the locations of local copper mines so that they would not fall into English hands. When the English entered the area they demanded that Indians change their trading patterns and set the price of skins at half of what the Ojibwe had been selling. When Ojibwe Chief White Bird protested, he was replaced by the English. Using a lacrosse exhibition as strategy to attack the English, the Odaawaa, Ozaagii, Odagaamii, Ojibwe, and Boodewaadamii united to plan a battle against the English. The Odaawaa were not to be informed of the entire plan, so they would not be able to partake in post-game plunder. The tribes agreed to throw the game, which would be played to four. It is important to note that control of Fort Michilmackinac near La Pointe had much strategic importance due to its location. All goods needed to supply English traders and the military inland came through Fort Michilmackinac. Makoons knew it would be important to gain as many English spectators as possible for the game to weaken their protection of the fort. He organized daily scrimmages prior to the game to build up interest and Indians’ skill impressed their English onlookers.

The game featured thirty players on each side, primarily the Ojibwe against the Ozaagii, plus two goaltenders (one on each team). These numbers helped to keep the
Englishmen’s attention away from the gate of the fort where the attack was to begin.\textsuperscript{116} Ten on each side played midfield, and the remaining players were clustered at centerfield, which was many more than would typically play the area. The roughest play was planned to take place along the southern wall of the fort, freeing up the rest of the field to the east and west for individuals to break free. The timing of the attack masqueraded as a game was to coincide with the King’s birthday because many soldiers were off duty and there was a generally relaxed atmosphere among the English. The Indians partook in increased and visible wagering on the game, which was designed to elicit greater interest from the English. The English were particularly curious since at this point in time, most Europeans viewed sports as individual competitions (boxing, horse racing, fencing, golf, or tennis); team sports were a novelty. By the time the score was 2-2, Indians counted no fewer than 18 soldiers and officers among the spectators, and some twenty civilians who were inhabitants of the fort. At 3-3, the referee (a respected elder) called for a break for water, which served an opportunity for last-minute bets among the English and an opportunity for the Indians to determine the exact location of the soldiers who were outside of the fort.\textsuperscript{117} The ball was thrown directly into the English fort, chased by the players, at which point attack began against the English. It caught them completely off-guard and the Indians successfully achieved their revenge.

This narrative depicts one of several purposes that the Native American ball game served among various Indian tribes. Eventually, ball games would be largely severed from the cultural contexts surrounding Native American lacrosse. There was continuity

\textsuperscript{116} The incident is described in Vennum, \textit{American Indian Lacrosse}, 83-102.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid}, 99.
in the values places on honor, bravery, courage, and individuality for players, but the ball game’s surrounding complex was not present when played as an exhibition. In these exhibitions, the ball game was presented as sport, not ceremony, which made the game more appealing to non-Natives and provided them with inspiration to adapt and modify the ball game.

Native American ball games were often designed to promote fan interest and participation. Often at game time business was suspended not only by Indians, but by non-Natives. On reservations, where two villages played one another people from all over the reservation would attend. When two nations played each other audiences increased. Lacrosse served as both a social and sporting event. It allowed those in attendance to show their social alliances at various levels: kinship, village, reservation, and national. Many early lacrosse fields were laid out in small valleys, surrounded by naturally elevated land so that spectators could see all the action easily. Some fields had lines drawn around them to limit how close spectators could get. Generally, restriction between fans and players during action was limited. Fans generally showed composure and restraint on the sidelines, until non-Natives began observing. In his Ethnology of the Yuchi Indian, Frank Speck noted, “through all of it the crowd remains silent-unless there are white spectators. The Indian enjoys watching the game immensely. That can be seen by the intent way in which his eyes follow every move. But rarely does he utter a sound. There are no bursts of cheering, no frantic ‘Attaboys!’…Even when the game ends there
is no cheering. The victorious team struts off with something of an air of triumph, perhaps, but they don’t make any noise about it.”

Choctaw lacrosse, up until the 1970s, featured competing kin groups and was characterized by a stronger investment among community members than other tribes. “Many Choctaws openly admit that the obligation which they have to their respective teams is more binding than that which they feel towards their jobs. One can be late to work or simply fail to report without violating any familial responsibilities. Such is not the case with a ball game.”

The intensity with which the Cherokee approached the ball game, as well as the many purposes it served and continues to serve tribal members in modern times helps explain why the game is still played today. However, among other tribes, specifically those located in the Upper Mississippi Valley, the game has completely died out. This has occurred despite evidence that suggests lacrosse served a similar function among these tribes. “Mohawk researchers…consider a decline in the number playing the game to reflect social changes as well as evolving game tactics.”

Numbers playing decreased due to population reductions, wars with Europeans, and divisions among tribes into different settlements and reservations. Faced with the reality of fewer players, Mohawks began training some players to specialize in blocking opponents’ shots, which was the birth of the goaltender. This was a development in the game that non-Natives embraced.

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121 *Tewaarathon (Lacrosse)*, 37.
It was not surprising then that during the nineteenth century the Native American ball game increasingly appeared as a more standardized sport in travelling exhibitions around North American and Europe. Dating back to the eighteenth century, many Native American ball games served as exhibitions for Europeans and non-Natives. They were played for many important visitors including the Duke of Orleans, later King Louis-Philippe of France, who commented on the alcohol consumption of the players. He also noted their religious practices. “None of these Indians profess any formal religious creed…they are too lazy to pursue [the belief that there is The Great Man Above] further and too refractory to be strict about ceremonies or religious beliefs.”122 Nonetheless he was excited to attend a ball game, and commented on the pre-game rituals, gambling, uniforms and equipment that accompanied the game. Indian lacrosse teams began frequent touring throughout the second half of the nineteenth century because to the game’s white aficionados desired to spark interest in the sport and to see it taken up by non-Natives. Additionally, Indians were an attraction in themselves. They were a curiosity among many Europeans. Lacrosse and the exhibitions “drew large crowds and inspired sensational newspaper reports.”123

Although exhibitions for visitors had been ongoing since the eighteenth century, William Holland Thomas, an Anglo-American Senator who represented the Cherokee people of North Carolina in Washington D.C., was one of the first to pay Native Americans for their participation. Thomas was a proponent of the Cherokee ball games,

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and, according to some sources, even participated in a few. However, he more often staged a ballplay as entertainment for some visiting dignitary. He also used games to further his political career by scheduling ballplays in conjunction with his own speeches and rallies to help ensure large crowds. In an entry in a daybook dated August 23, 1859 Thomas wrote that he “paid Indian ball players (cash)—$15.00.” His actions show that some of the ball games at this time were tourist events and served entertainment purposes, a shift partially responsible for non-Natives adapting the ball game to their own version of lacrosse. Ball games played without spiritual or cultural significance opened the game up to seizure and regulation by Whites. As Sarah H. Hill observes, “the efforts to preserve native customs in order to educate white audiences thus slid hopelessly and inevitably into an endeavor to entertain.” As evidence of this, she cites the desire of a Cherokee superintendent in the late 1930s to confine anetso games to reservations in hopes that this would result in “the increased financial returns to the Indians.” For the Cherokee, payment for ball game participation altered the meaning of the game and was indicative of the transformation. Further, being paid caused Indian players to be disqualified from the emerging popular version of lacrosse.

By the time George Beers had drafted the rules of what would become Canada’s national game in 1867, Indian teams had been participating in lacrosse exhibitions in addition to their ceremonial games. Venum points out that, “Ironically, on the very day

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127 Ibid, 295.
of Canada’s creation, the Dominion lacrosse title—at that time the equivalent of world championship—was taken by Caughnawaga, who defeated the Montreal Lacrosse Club 3-2.”

Later that year, in an example of increased non-Native interest in the newly modified sport, a Six Nations team defeated Toronto at the Toronto Cricket Club before a crowd of four thousand. The game “sparked a lacrosse boom in that city,” with thirteen new lacrosse clubs being formed by over six hundred members. So popular were these exhibitions featuring Native Americans that one of Beers’ co-creators led a Mohawk team on a European tour, which helped spur the creation of the English Lacrosse Association in 1868.

Indian lacrosse teams were touring throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century because they were the most skilled players to demonstrate the game. Games were played in the Crystal Palace for Queen Victoria and across the United States, Canada, and Europe. While Native Americans were content to share their skills for profit, the change in purpose of these exhibitions was undeniable. The audiences attending games once composed of fellow tribal members were replaced by non-Natives curious about a new sport and travelling attraction. In what perhaps best illustrates the change in the ball game from part of a ceremonial complex to pure sport, Vennum cites an 1876 game played “before Queen Victoria…on turf next to the walls of the Italian garden. The Indian captain, Big John Baptiste, in ceremonial Iroquois dress, placed his

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128 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 265.
129 Ibid, 266.
tomahawk at the queen’s feet and gave a long address in Mohawk, referring to the monarch as ‘Our Great and Good Mother.’”

Many non-Natives still considered Indians savages in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Ironically, this popular attitude entitled many Indian players to capitalize on the showpiece aspect of their touring lacrosse games. Additionally, the difference between the Indian version of lacrosse and the altered version popularized the belief that the Indian game was similar to warfare and full of primitive violence; excitement and large crowds were the result. Exhibition tour promoters frequently saw that Indian players wore “feathered headdresses, moccasins, and other stereotypical costuming for the game,” according to Venum, with players also having to “perform double duty by concluding their entertainment with a ‘war dance.’” Though some exhibitions featured ceremonial elements of the tribal ball games, the differences in reasons behind their performance signified the changes the game was undergoing.

Beers also played on Darwin’s theory of evolution and this aroused the curiosity of crowds who wanted to see lacrosse in the primitive or barbarous stage, the way it was played prior to becoming a “civilized” Canadian game. These exhibitions worked against Indian players, however, because they were paid for their performance—which excluded them from the amateur status associated with the overwhelming majority of white players.

This exclusion was used to eliminate Indians from the lacrosse world. Indians did this from necessity—they had to charge fees to deal with the poverty and unemployment

130 Ibid, 267.
131 Ibid, 268.
they faced on the reservations. But it cost them their amateur status. “In 1880 the National Lacrosse Association of Canada ruled that only amateurs could play, effectively barring Indian teams from further competition in national championships, which they had been winning consistently.” Consequently the Indians formed their own World Championship, since they were essentially consigned to playing at the inter- and intratribal levels. These competitions were mostly between Saint Regis and Caughnawaga.  

With Native Americans essentially barred from playing in the Lacrosse Association of Canada, many were hired as “ringers” on teams in smaller towns to beat clubs from larger cities. The town of Cornwall won consecutive Canadian championships from 1887 to 1891, beating bigger teams from Montreal and Toronto in this way. Although nothing official was documented, it is suspected that the Cornwall team illegally recruited Native Americans from a nearby reservation to play, specifically those who were able to speak English (which was rare during this time period) and who possessed non-Indian facial features (players were encouraged to grow mustaches). Attempting to expose suspected ringers, opposing teams would hire a Native American “snitch” to speak Mohawk in the locker room and any player who showed signs of understanding or responded in Mohawk was removed from the roster. Fans of the Cornwall team enjoyed their club’s success and thus kept quiet about the presence of Indians on their team. Historians researching Mohawk lacrosse have found players with

132 Ibid, 272.  
133 Tewaarathon (Lacrosse): Akwesasne’s Story Of Our National Game (North American Indian Travelling College), 1978, 47.
French surnames from the period such as Papineau, Beauvais (Bova), and Beroux (Bero)—which are more than likely cover names for Mohawk ringers.¹³⁴

The ball game in the twentieth century was played largely for exhibition purposes by Native Americans. The number of travelling anetso teams increased from the start of the twentieth century up until the 1930s before slipping into an irregular pattern of less frequent touring. These exhibitions took place in addition to the “real” games that still went on between teams in the same decade and were promoted in the print media and by Cherokee Agency superintendents. The increase in exhibitions and resulting loss of “regular season” games caused a change in the game’s purpose among the Cherokee, while the emergence of local Indian tourist industries other than the ball game led to its eventual demise.¹³⁵ Increased non-Native interest in the game, though, can be seen in featured promotions of anetso from print media and Cherokee Agency superintendents. A 1951 film designed to promote tourism in the area featured the game and made it seem exotic, with the narrator indicating an inability to decipher what was taking place and the winner of the game.

As Zogry argues, “historically Cherokee people have employed anetso in service of several cultural meanings; or to put it another way, there are several possible functions that one might suggest it has performed.”¹³⁶ These functions have developed over time but were generally tied to emulating warfare, gathering tribal members, or performing for an audience in the nineteenth century. Because the Indian version was so rough, upon

¹³⁴ Ibid, 50.
¹³⁵ Hill, Weaving New Worlds: Southeastern Cherokee Women and Their Basketry, 152.
¹³⁶ Zogry, Anetso, 26.
standardizing it, Whites attempted to make the game safer. Lacrosse was not related to warfare for them; it was merely a sport.

While non-Natives increased their control over Native Americans throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the ball game still remained an important part of Indian culture. However, as non-Natives took an interest in the game, their increased power and financial supremacy caused Native Americans to begin playing their version of lacrosse for their own financial gain and for the entertainment of non-Natives. Certain components of the ball game complex, much like other aspects of Native American life, remained hidden from the view of non-Natives. This was typical of various Indian tribes including the Cherokee who, according to Zogry, had begun hiding elements from non-Natives as early as the turn of the nineteenth century. “By 1797, and likely much earlier,” he writes, “the Cherokee people were adept at negotiating the presentation of their culture.”\textsuperscript{137} Despite not allowing non-Natives to learn every aspect of their game, removing or hiding these aspects of the game changed its nature. When ball games began being played for the entertainment of outsiders, the spiritual and cultural meaning of the game among Native American societies was altered thanks to the absence of its surrounding complex. It can be argued that the non-Native alteration of the Native American ball game began in earnest when the first games were played for non-traditional purposes.

At first contact with the Native American ball game, non-Natives did not express interest in adopting the game or modifying it to their liking. At the time the concept of

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid}, 160.
team sports was unfamiliar to Europeans. Individual sports such as boxing, tennis, and wrestling were popular in Europe during the eighteenth century but group sports were not. Some early reports, for instance, attempted to compare Native American lacrosse to stickball. The lack of familiarity with team sports combined with the complex surrounding the Native American ball game sufficiently prevented non-Natives from playing the game immediately following first contact. However, as the fascination with both the ball game and Native Americans as a people increased during the nineteenth century, lacrosse exhibitions were increasingly put on display for non-Natives on both sides of the Atlantic. Though the game was severed from its surrounding complex, Native American players profited financially from their performances.

When the ball game was increasingly played as an exhibition and separated from its surrounding ceremonial practices and social functions, non-Natives were able to transform the ball game into a different sport that they considered an improvement over the Native American version of the game. Beers captured this notion in his sentiment that, “to improve Lacrosse, and not detract from its native merits, we must agree to the systematic conformity, intended in the regulation which guide the game.”

They latched onto these exhibitions while Native Americans continued playing ceremonial games with cultural meaning to less fanfare. As interaction with Whites increased, the purposes of the game began to shift. A change in purpose in Native American ball games made the regulation of the game by outsiders easier, which is what eventually occurred.

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The changes over time in the Native American ball game spawned a new game, leaving the original versions of lacrosse as oft-forgotten.

The problems that non-Natives in general had with the ball game impacted the changes which Canadians and Americans in particular began making to it. Many of these problems, namely the heathen religious practices, alcohol consumption, and in-game violence did not occur as frequently when the game was played as an exhibition, which, incidentally, decreased missionary objections and helped promote the game for adaptation by non-Natives. In developing rules to standardize lacrosse, Beers claimed, “The present game, improved and reduced to rule by the whites, employs the greatest combination of physical and mental activity white men can sustain in recreation. And is as much superior to the original as civilization is to barbarism, base ball is to its old parent of rounders, or a pretty Canadian girl to any uncultivated squaw.”

To understand the transformation that the ball game experienced at the hands of non-Natives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is important to understand the problems that many had with the ceremonial complex and practices surrounding the ball game. Once these missionary-perceived ills, objections to the sport itself decreased.

An August 1837 edition of the Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette claimed that the Cherokee “had several Dances and Ball Plays recently, which the White amongst them consider as indications of contemplated hostilities.” Such commentary lends credence to the idea that non-Natives thought the ball game was too violent.

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139 Beers, Lacrosse, 32-33.
Disapproval of the game among non-Natives stemmed from a variety of reasons—safety concerns, its retention of Indian culture, and its evident heathenism. Playing or attending ball games was punishable by expulsion from Christian schools, censuring, or excommunication. Censure of anetso actually led many Cherokee to further embrace the game, in order to assert “their identity as Cherokee people, or rather as men instead of boys, or both.”\textsuperscript{141} Zogry references Jon Sensbach’s sentiment that, “repudiating Christianity could be as powerful an assertion of identity as embracing it.”\textsuperscript{142} Initially though, the ball game was not a movement against Christianity as much as a manifestation of perseverance among Native Americans.

Non-Natives also sought to address player safety, or the lack of it, that they perceived in Native American lacrosse. Consider that until fairly recently, Indian lacrosse players wore no protective gear associated with today’s game. This made them especially susceptible to more minor injuries such as bruises and dislocations. Additionally, tackling, wrestling, tripping, charging, ramming, and slashing, all of which are penalties in today’s game, were permitted in Indian lacrosse. For example, a Cayuga player could use his stick to lift an opponent off the group and dump him, which resulted in many broken collar bones. Additionally, Cayuga players were free to slash opposing players with their sticks as long as they kept both hands on their sticks. Among Native Americans, these practices were not necessarily viewed as dangerous or dirty, but as natural parts of the competition. The non-Native public’s attitude toward the nature of

\textsuperscript{141} Zogry, Anetso, 68, 73.

the game was different, as seen that in 1946, when *Life* called the sport, “the world’s roughest ball game.”143 *Time Magazine* even entitled an article about lacrosse as, “Homicide: a sport.”144 Although non-Natives drafted an official set of rules some eighty years prior, these articles still focused on the violence of the Native American ball game and made the sport seem particularly exotic to many readers unfamiliar with the game.

Non-Natives changed methods of play in the manner they did due to specific problems they perceived with injury and player safety. In his *Lacrosse*, George Beers criticizes Canadians’ for their reckless play upon initially picking up the game. “The following pages are designed to extend knowledge of the game of Lacrosse,” Beers wrote in his preface, to systematize its principles and practice, and to perpetuate it as the National game of Canada. Until the appearance of my *brochure*, published in 1860, there had never been any attempt made to reduce the game to rule. It was barren of laws, and goal-keeper was the only player with a definite name and position.”145 Indeed Beers wanted to ride early Canadian lacrosse of its injury inflicting aspects and techniques, namely slashing, swiping, and the use of spiked shoes. There was some effort to improve player safety among some Native American tribes as well, such as in the mid-nineteenth century when the Choctaw expressively forbade head-butting, the penalty of such action resulting in a five-goal penalty for the team of the offending player. At that point there were also rules concerning holding, tripping, throwing, and pushing, with such infractions stopping play at the spot of the violation. (Today, modern anetso features an

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official appointed to oversee the game who matches players from one team against players of similar ability, size, and experience on the other.) But, from the non-Native perspective, the game was still seen as largely devoid of rules.

This does not mean that the violence of the Native game was intentional. It seems intentional violence was more of a late development in the Indian game, and Vennum asserts that it can be attributed to “increasing encroachment of whites on Indian territories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”146 Also, Fogelson notes that “The Eastern Cherokee, instead of fostering national unity to confront this assault, simply intensified competition between their various towns, one of the principal outlets for which was the ball game, which invariably set off a chain of violence.”147

Almost all early European writers noted the stoicism of Indian players. Displaying an even temper during the game reflected bravery among Indian cultures. The Iroquois used the game to teach youth lessons about discipline and composure when faced with difficulty. Journalist Anne D. Bryson, who witnessed a game of anetso, wrote in 1927 that “The only real game I ever saw was played at Birtdtown several years ago and the winner broke the collar bone of his opponent. The man continued playing for at least ten minutes after it was broken, before he would accept defeat.”148 To evade serious injuries to the head or arm, Cherokee players held their head to one side and extended their arms horizontally as they fell. However, this left their collar bones more susceptible to injury. Native doctors were typically present on each team’s sideline to apply herbal

147 Fogelson, “Cherokee Ball Game,” 231.
148 Anne D. Bryson, “Last Cherokees Of East Cling to Savage Beliefs In Spite of Education: Medicine Man Still Invokes Spirits in Great Smokies and Colors Have Deep Meaning; Language in Spoken ‘Shorthand,’” *Asheville (N.C.) Sunday Citizen*, Sunday Morning April 10, 1927, p. 6, section B.
remedies to injuries sustained during the game. Huron players could remove themselves from games due to injury or fatigue and have substitutes enter, but the maximum number of players on a team was never increased. Eventually, efforts were made to reduce the amount of violence in Indian lacrosse.

The influence of non-Natives over the ball game can be seen in journalist Charles Lanman’s 1848 description of anetso and its accompanying ceremonies. He reported that gambling was not allowed, save for handkerchiefs or belts, and that players were prohibited from engaging in particularly violent behavior such as choking each other.¹⁴⁹ The game Lanman witnessed was missing several key elements typical of Native American ball games, and the impact of non-Natives on the game is evident in the limited gambling. On July 1, 1867 the Dominion of Canada came into being; on the same day the sport of lacrosse was proclaimed Canada’s national game. The book Laws of Lacrosse by Bob Scott was published in 1869 and from then on Indian teams were required to play by Canadian rules when facing Canadian teams. George Beers and his peers found the game “irrational, unscientific, impromptu, or otherwise lacking in organization.”¹⁵⁰ The Canadians yearned to turn the game into a passing and dodging game rather than a showcase of individual speed, talent, and dexterity in a team game.

Vennen notes a conversation between Beers, credited with the development of the game and implementation of modern rules in Canada, and one of his fellow club team players in Montreal in 1866. In this conversation, Beers emphasized concepts such as side throwing and overhand shots which he learned from the Indians. Canadians

¹⁵⁰ Vennen, American Indian Lacrosse, 270.
transformed lacrosse from a carrying to a passing game, stressing team play over individualism.

Canadian lacrosse pioneers also believed equipment changes were necessary, since the Indian stick seemed to encourage players’ hogging the ball and running the length of the field without passing to score. The Native American ball game was also considered dangerous due to methods of play. One infamous story among Iroquois players is that of Angus Thomas, a Saint Regis Mohawk defenseman who played box and field lacrosse in the late nineteenth century. He had a shot so hard that it was rumored it could push goalies into the goal. However, he once accidentally killed another player with his shot, a death which led Thomas to retire from lacrosse for some time. After his return, he severely injured goalie Oren Lyons, an Iroquois from an Onondaga reservation in upstate New York who played at Syracuse University in the 1950s; one of Thomas’ vaunted underhanded shots during the closing minutes of an indoor game smashed into Lyons and broke three of his ribs.\textsuperscript{151} These types of injuries and deaths can largely be attributed to the lack of equipment, especially in comparison to the later advancement of the game. Improved shooting techniques, practice methods, and equipment resulted in harder and faster shots. Despite the accidents, injuries, and some deaths, Indians typically showed restraint while playing and that the game did have rules against violence. This is evident in the role of referees-usually respected tribal chiefs or elders-pacifying disputes and diffusing potential violence.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 228.
The game the Canadians envisioned involved teamwork and accurate passing. Thus sticks needed to become longer, heavier, and have more tightly woven pockets to accommodate for more passing and catching. Canadians also brought forth faster, harder shots. As shooting became more accurate and faster, the size of the goal was reduced from seven feet to six feet in fairness to the goalie.

To Beers and his comrades, the Indians would have to conform to the new game if they wished to play on a large scale, which is what occurred. The first Canadian national tournament was held in 1868 and Beers officiated every game. The Indian team from the Saint Regis reservation won the initial tournament, but the following year’s title went to the Montreal Lacrosse Club after the St. Regis team refused to play through a 2-2 tie. Soon after being adopted, the impact the “new” rules of lacrosse had on participating Native Americans was evident.

As the twentieth century continued, many elements of the Native American ball game began dying off. Fogelson, writing in 1962, believed that “The fact that the ball game is a salable tourist amusement should assure its continuance for some time…The future persistence of the non-public ritualism is less assured.”¹⁵² The more modern research by Zogry is set in Cherokee, North Carolina which is the seat of government for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (ECBI) and home to about 13,000 members of the Eastern Band. The boundary is divided into five communities which are located in the same town and provide an opportunity for different teams to square off against one another, as they do annually during the Cherokee Indian Fair. Proximity to opponents

and weather have always played a role in scheduling and playing games and continue to impact the Native American game.

Today, lacrosse is the fastest growing sport in the country, with participation among youths increasing by 218.1 percent since 2001. Four professional lacrosse leagues presently exist, three of which are indoor leagues. There are currently sixty-one Division One NCAA lacrosse teams (nine conferences), forty-six Division Two teams (five conferences), and one hundred-eighty nine Division Three teams (twenty-one conferences). Additionally, high schools in forty-three states across the country have some form of sanctioned lacrosse, and there are countless youth leagues, travel teams, camps and clinics. The game is becoming increasingly mainstream, though a “grassroots” element of the game has been present for years and continues to exist. Still, the history of the game is not as well-known as other sports, likely because it cannot be credited as a creation of a single person the way basketball can be attributed to James Naismith or baseball, (mistakenly) to Abner Doubleday. Many players and fans are unaware of the Native American roots of the game or that they are participating in the living legacy of an ancient Indian practice.

Vennum contends that “Indian kids grow up playing lacrosse as naturally as inner-city youth grow up playing basketball.” While this may be the case among some reservations and tribes, such as the Cherokee where anetso is still played (though not particularly often) the overwhelming majority of those playing at the game’s highest

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154 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 295.
levels—collegiately and professionally—are Anglo-American. Though this is expected when the racial breakdown of North America is considered, it also begs the question as to why more Native American youths are not excelling at a game which their ancestors created and played regularly. One explanation is that the modern game requires expensive equipment at every level. Additionally, participation on travel or club lacrosse teams adds greatly to the cost of playing. Simply put: many Native Americans struggling financially on reservations are unable to afford these costs. They do not have access to the valuable coaching and experience that the numerous non-Natives playing the game do.

The difficulty of Native Americans assimilating to the non-Native game is still evident today, as the Iroquois National team was unable to participate in 2010’s Lacrosse World Championships in England thanks to passport issues. Federal law does not allow tribal documents to be used in lieu of United States passports for international travel; tribal documents are partly handwritten and do not include any security features present on United States passports. After presenting letters to the British consulate that the consulate found insufficient, the U.S. State Department offered the Iroquois team and its 20-person entourage expedited passports. However, “the Iroquois refused to accept them, saying that travelling to an international competition on what they consider to be a foreign nation’s passport would be an affront to their sovereignty.”\(^{155}\)

More than a century after George Beers helped lead the movement to standardize and regulate the game of lacrosse, and Native Americans being excluded from the official game because

they lacked amateur status, they still struggled to assimilate to international travel regulations required of teams participating in the Lacrosse World Championships.

The game of lacrosse today has evolved from an expression of Native American culture into “the fastest game on two feet” and also one of the fastest growing sports among non-Native American youth.\textsuperscript{156} Many aspects of modern lacrosse are similar to the Native American game. For example, in the modern game players must be offensively ambidextrous on the field to be most effective. Being able to cradle, shoot, and pass with both hands is an essential skill for offensive players, as are quickness and agility, and these skills have been since the days of the Native American ballgame. British lieutenant Henry Timberlake commented in his memoirs on the “great dexterity” he saw displayed in ball games.\textsuperscript{157} Players’ appreciation for their equipment is a facet of the modern game that has existed since the Native American ball game. Players today are encouraged to own and bring with them more than one stick to their games in case one were to break, just as Indians players did. Indian players were charged with making “their own sticks to their liking,”\textsuperscript{158} and there were also different types of sticks used in ball games, as there are today. Native American ball games featured officials, goal-scoring, and pre-game practices, which is also true of the game today.

Despite lacrosse’s Indian origins and the influence the Native American has had on the game today, many players and fans are unaware of the game’s history. Those who understand the evolution of lacrosse can take pride in the fact that they are participating

\textsuperscript{156} Krumboltz, “Lacrosse is the Fastest Growing Sport in the US.”
\textsuperscript{157} Henry Timberlake, \textit{Lieutenant Henry Timberlake’s Memoirs, 1756-1765} (Johnson City, Tenn.: n.p., 1927), 102.
\textsuperscript{158} Vennum, \textit{American Indian Lacrosse}, 127.
in a sport that has existed on this continent longer than any other, since before European contact. Among Native Americans, the game is played as a reclaiming of identity. Notwithstanding its vastly different social function, modern Cherokee anetso exhibitions at Indian Fairs serve as a reminder to observers and participants of the origins of lacrosse. Additionally, despite the 2010 Iroquois National Team’s difficulty in participating in the 2010 Lacrosse World Championships, Native Americans still have a strong presence on the world stage. In 2012 the Iroquois Nationals defeated the United States in the Federation of International Lacrosse Under-19 World Championships in Finland by a score of 15-13. This marked the first time an Iroquois team had defeated a team from the United States, and also first loss for a United States National Team to any team besides Canada in the outdoor field game. Still, despite also losing to Canada in pool play, the United States men’s national team went on to win the tournament, as they have done since the tournament began in 1988, defeating Canada in the finals. The Iroquois team placed third.

As a facet of Native American culture, “lacrosse was the perfect example of the Indians’ loss of recognition for something that had once been solely theirs—a contribution to the sports world not overlooked but instead usurped by non-Indians.” While usurped is perhaps too strong a word, lacrosse is assuredly no longer solely native. European-Americans and Canadians essentially learned the game from the Mohawk, added their own rules and regulations, and then excluded Indians from playing it,

160 Vennum, American Indian Lacrosse, 295.
confiscating the game and features of the game for themselves. For some time after whites adapted the game, Indians could still lay claim to activities involved with the game such as stick making. However, over the twentieth century this too would become dominated by whites. When W.H. Brine Company of Boston began manufacturing plastic stick heads, the wooden stick became endangered; fairly soon it was little more than an archaic antique of what lacrosse once looked like.

Today, while lacrosse grows ever more popular in North America, its Indian origins need to be rediscovered and appreciated. So does the process by which it became a sport, rather than what it was before and immediately after first contact—an integral part of Native cultural complexes. Many missionaries and government officials throughout its history censured the game after contact, but it continued to exist because the sport of it was separated from the surrounding complex that accompanied it. Among Native Americans, the ball game was situated firmly as part of a broader cultural context of practices and traditions relevant to various tribes. For non-Natives, it developed into a generic sport and part of mainstream culture.
Appendix A

The Images of the Native American Ball Game
Figure 1 - A pre-1845 Cayuga lacrosse stick that belonged to the grandfather of Alexander T. General of Six Nations Reserve, Ontario.

161 Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse*, x. Photograph courtesy of University Museum, University of...
Pennsylvania.

162 Ibid., 11. Figure 2a and 2d: Photographs courtesy of University Museum, University of Pennsylvania. Figure 2b: Photograph by Thomas Vennum Jr., courtesy of Charles Trudell, Spooner, Wisconsin. Figure 2c: Photograph courtesy of Anthropology Department, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.
Figure 5: Bossy Bucktooth about to scoop a ground ball in a 1971 pickup game on the Onondaga reservation. Players are, left to right, Joe Johnson, Mitch Farmer, Omar Gibson, Freeman Gibson, Fab Shenandoah, Dave Waterman, Bossy Bucktooth, Kevin Bucktooth (his brother), "Big Man" Gibson.

163 Ibid, 6. Photograph by David G. Noble, courtesy of David G. Noble.
Figure 11 • Eastern Cherokee players immerse their sticks in the Oconaluftee (?) River before a game in the fall of 1946. Their ball game conjurer stands behind them and appears to be divining their success with the beads in his hands. The secondary feathers of the wild turkey tied to the hair of two players are meant to give them the bird’s speed and long-windedness in the game.

164 Ibid, 40. Photograph by Dean Loomis, courtesy of Life Magazine, Copyright Time Warner Inc.
Figure 16: Eastern Cherokee ball player Jim Johnson of Wolf Town being scratched in 1888 by Standing Water, a ball game conjurer. Johnson wears a bandanna for a breech-clout. Scratches already made are visible on his chest.

165 Ibid, 50. Photograph by James Mooney, courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian
Institution.

166 Ibid, 75. Photograph by Franco Zaina, courtesy of Laboratorio de Ricerca e di Documentazione Antropologica, Bergamo, Italy.
Figure 22 • Bird’s-eye view of Fort Michilimackinac in 1763, showing the layout of the Indian ball field.

Figure 25 - Pileup of young Eastern Cherokee as they fight for a ground ball. Player at far left restrains his opponent from joining the fray.

Figure 29 - Oil painting by Charles Deas (about 1850) of Dakota lacrosse game. Player on the left attempts to scoop a ground ball, while player on the right tries to block his stick. Note the variety of designs in body paint, the feather tailpiece, and the mocassins worn by some of the players.

Figure 31. Two Onondaga players about 1910. From left: Howard Hill (?), unidentified woman and child, John Isaacs. Note gut-wall on sticks, triangular and rounded crooks, flattened considerably from the earlier stick to improve scooping capacity. Also note the short handle, less than a third the length of the stick. Isaacs’s stick is right-handed, the other is left-handed. The commercially manufactured rubber ball approximates regulation ball of the early 1990s in size.

170 Ibid, 130. Photograph by Fred R. Wolcott, courtesy of Onondaga County Parks, Office of Museums.
Photograph depicts individual scrum painted by Catlin in an 1834 Choctaw game. Photograph by Victor Krantz, courtesy of National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.

Ibid, 154.
Ibid, 155. Image depicts Cherokee stickmen ready to break-up a scrum between two players. Originally taken by James Mooney, courtesy of National Anthropological Archives.
173 Ibid, 157 Figure 36a: Photograph by Victor Krantz, courtesy of National Museum of Natural History,
Smithsonian Institution. Figure 36b: Photograph by James Mooney, courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
Ibid, 163. Figure 37a: Photograph by Edward John, courtesy of Kendall Blanchard. Figures 37b and 37c: Photographs courtesy of National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution. 

Ibid, 164. Photograph courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
Figure 38b • Frank Mayer’s 2 July 1851 drawing of Makah man Otton mahnee (The Sounding Earth That Walked), a Dakota lacrosse player at Traverse des Sioux during treaty negotiations.

176 Ibid., 165. Photograph courtesy of Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.
Figure 42 • Onondaga team photograph. Front row, from left: Joshua Scanandoah, Ike Lyons, Emmett Lyons, Adam Jones. Seated: (unknown), (unknown), Eli Scanandoah, Mose Logan (manager), Sidney Isaac. Standing: (unknown), Adam Thomas, (unknown), (unknown), Jesse Lyons, (unknown), Bill Beckman, (unknown).

Figure 43 • Allegany Seneca goalie Clarence Watt defends the nets in a game at Allegany State Park, New York. Protective gear is borrowed from other sports of the period, mostly baseball. The date of the photograph is unknown, but the padded body protector and catcher’s leg guards suggest the early 1920s. The gloves may be those worn for hockey.

Ibid, 174. Photograph by Fred R. Wolcott, courtesy of Onondaga County Parks, Office of Museums.
Ibid., 176. Photograph by Martin G. Schneckenberger courtesy of Buffalo Museum of Science.

Ibid., 194. Photograph by James Mooney, courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Ibid, 249. Figures 67a, b: Photographs by Eugene Heflin, courtesy of National Anthropological...
Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Figure 71 • The Iroquois Nationals in Los Angeles for the Jim Thorpe Memorial Games, a special event preceding the 1984 Summer Olympics. In front, from left: Sid Hill (Onondaga), flag bearer; Dave Bray (Seneca), in jersey; Lee Lyons (Onondaga), in traditional dress; Greg Tarbell (Mohawk), in jersey; Coach Oren Lyons (Onondaga), in vest. Lee Lyons holds an Iroquois headdress that the team donated to the International Lacrosse Federation.

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