

## “THE AGE” (MELBOURNE) 10 MARCH 1863 “A RIVAL TO CRICKET”

The following article was published in Melbourne in 1863, 13 years before it was introduced in Australia by Lambton Mount. What a wonderful expression of what our great game is, “The gift to the Creators”, in old world language.

When the English residents at Boulogne (Coastal city in the north of France) played a cricket match for the amusement of the Duchesse de Berry, that lady, after being spectator of some half a dozen innings with extreme ennui (Boredom), sent a gentleman of her retinue to the chief player to beg to know when the game was going to begin, as Madame la Duchesse was “Était terriblement ennuyée”! (The Duchesse was terribly bored!). The duchesse, good lady, had taken all the desperate fielding and batting of two mortal hours for mere preliminary sport — a prelude to a more exciting and violent competition.



**Caroline de Bourbon-Sicile, duchesse de Berry** (Maria Carolina Ferdinanda Luise; 5 November 1798 – 17 April 1870) was an Italian princess of the House of Bourbon who married into the French royal family. She married Charles Ferdinand, Duke of Berry, nephew of Louis XV11 in 1816.

The Duchess 'hit a blot' in our national game when she sent that annoying message! Cricket, like all other things, has its defects. In the first place, it does not give the player sufficient employment. There are long intervals when a man has nothing to do but stare at the grass, and hope that the ball will come his way. The worse player a cricketer is, the shorter are his innings, and the less he has to do in fielding. On a very cold or very hot day, an hour's fielding is dull work, especially to the men furthest from the wicket. Another drawback of cricket is, that the dress and implements grow daily more expensive; and the greatest disadvantage of all is, that it cannot be played in winter, which is just the time most adapted for running and violent exercise.

Now, lacrosse, the national game of Canada, has none of those defects. It can be played even on the snow, and as well in winter as in summer. It can be played by any number of persons. The ground needs no preparation. The materials for the game are cheap and simple. It employs nearly every player at once, and is capable of infinite varieties, while it furnishes opportunities for the greatest skill and agility.

Lacrosse is a game of extreme antiquity, and was borrowed from the American Indians

by the Canadians. It is mentioned by Charlevoix (1682-1761), that early French Jesuit priest, traveler and historian, who saw the Algonquins playing it on the shores of the St. Lawrence, somewhere between Quebec and The Three Rivers. It was at a great game of lacrosse, between three Indian tribes— the Shawnees, the Ottawas, and the Delawares — that an attempt was once made to surprise Fort Detroit. Catlin (French painter of Native Americans and traveller) describes thousands of men joining in the game. A few years ago, the young men of Montreal learned the game from the Iroquois of Caughnawag, and already the Beaver Club of Montreal boast of players who can beat the Indians who taught them.

Lacrosse is a game so wild and exciting, so varied, and so dramatic, that it interests the spectator as much as the player, and this cannot be so truly said of any other game. It is also a simple game, and one easily understood. Above all, in lacrosse the muscles of the body are brought into exertion equally and at the same time there is no danger of losing an eye or splitting a thumb. Unlike cricket, lacrosse is a game suited for girls, and might be introduced into girls' schools with great advantage, as the crosse bat is scarcely heavier than a battledore, and there is plenty of healthy running, without any danger of blows.

Lacrosse is generally played by twelve competitors on a side. The players wear flannel shirts and caps, belts or sashes, and light shoes or deer-skin moccasins, which leave the feet unconstrained and pliant. The crosse, or bat, requires careful description. It may be either of ash or hickory ; the former bends easier, the latter is stronger. It is generally about three feet long, but its size and weight may be proportioned to the height and strength of the player.

It is bent into the shape of an unbarbed fish-hook, or a bishop's crozier; a net of catgut, or strings of moose skin is then strained across the curve to the width of a racket bat. The netted surface is made rather baggy in the centre, in order to better catch the ball and carry it when required.

The ball used at lacrosse is of solid India rubber, as it can be thrown farther, and is harder to stop than the less elastic sponge ball. The ground needs no preparation, but is better when level, and where the grass is short and the stones are few.

The goals through which the ball has to be driven are generally about six feet high, and consist of poles bearing colored flags, placed about six feet apart. The rival goals should face each other, and be about half a mile apart. The game consists in a struggle of the one party to pass the ball through the goal of the other. The party that first drives the ball through the opposite goal is victorious.

The excitement and fun consists in the alternate attack and defence. If there are twenty-four players present, twelve for each side, the two 'captains', or leading men, toss up for the first pick. They then choose their men, and post them over the field, selecting for each his place according to age, strength, skill, and peculiar faculty. The following rules are enforced - ' No swiping' allowed. No tripping or holding your adversary. No throwing the ball with the hand; though in a struggle, and when a player is surrounded it may be kicked with the foot. No picking up the ball with the hand, except in extreme cases, as when it gets into a pool, or in a sand- hole. After every game the players shall change sides. If a ball flung at the goal is caught by the crosse of the goal-keeper, but still breaks in or falls in, the game is still won by the attacking party. There are many ways of posting your men - .according as you are a cautious or an impetuous captain, more aggressive or more defensive: some leaders run their men in a straight wall across the goal; others cluster half their men round the flags, and send the rest afield! Others leave their men to take their own positions, and to trust to the instinct of the moment. The over-cautious captain, who hoards his men too fondly round the fortress of the goal, generally saves himself for a time, but makes little progress towards victory till he grows more adventurous. The over rash player, on the other hand,

who leaves his home scantily guarded, is always in danger even in moments of success, if the enemy break from him and make a dash on his home.

The twelve men of each side consist of six field men, ordinary field hands, and six more expert players, to whom the places of honor are reserved.

These six are thus subdivided: The goal-keeper, who stands cool and imperturbable, to ward off the ball from the little gateway between the flags.

Point, who should be a skilful checker in dangerous moments, stands twelve feet in front of him. Cover-point, who should be a very good player, should never leave his post except to cautiously push a palpable advantage.

The home-men, stand near the enemy's goal, to pass the ball quickly in when thrown up to them; they should be specially prompt, yet cool men. The facers are the two players who begin the game by standing in front of each other, half-way between the goals, and 'three' being counted, trying which by strength or art can obtain the ball. Sometimes it is thrown up and struck at. The 'dodges' at this moment are numerous. Some twist the ball between their legs and the man behind them; others press the ball away by main force. A common method is as 'three' is cried to suddenly turn your bank on your adversary, and giving your crosse a twist, to send the ball to your centre man.

The moment of- this duel is one of the most beautiful in the game. Every man is standing silent, ready and anxious, more like statues than men ; but the instant the ball starts in the air, there is a rush of athletic men, and a whirl of bats, which never ceases, but only grows wilder and fiercer, till the ball is passed between the flag- wands.

The ball in lacrosse should seldom be rudely struck, only thrown and tipped. The good player's object is to catch it as soon as possible in the bag of his net, and if he is fleet enough, or is a swift runner and dodger, to carry it at once through the goal; but as this is rather difficult with twelve opponents, checking him, crossing him, beating at his bat, and waiting to snap him at every wind and turn, the true play is to throw the ball on to the nearest or most accessible and least surrounded man of his party. As it is part of the game to strike the ball that an opponent is carrying to the goal out of his crosse, it requires great practice before you learn how to avoid these blows, and how to catch and carry the ball safest and in the quickest way between the flags. The skilful player can catch the ball at full flight, by holding his crosse almost perpendicular; then by a dip and rise again he turns the crosse to a horizontal position, and runs off with the ball towards the goal. When closely pursued by checkers, the good player throws the ball at once with care and good aim to the nearest or most accessible man of his party, who nurses it, passes it on, or runs with it, as the case may require.

The 'dodging' or avoiding the competitors who would stop you, or take the ball from you, and the 'checking' or stopping the dodger, are the two most subtle, varied, and amusing branches of the game. It is wonderful what room there is in lacrosse for invention, ingenuity, artifice, and dexterity. An Indian dodger will put up his crosse perpendicularly, and then, by a dip and horizontal turn, catch and run off with the swiftest ball; or he will bear the ball to the ground, and catch it after it bounces; or he will catch it between his feet, or under his arms, and toss it on to his crosse, and then run. If closely pursued, the good player throws the ball back over the checker's head to his nearest friend, or he will wave his crosse to and fro to escape the blow of his opponent, or keep whirling round ready for a bolt, or will pretend to fall, and then rise up and dart off on the checker's weakest side; or he keeps changing his crosse from hand to hand, and parrying his opponent's blows with the disengaged hand.

The checker is, however, generally too much for the dodger, unless he has a swift pair of legs. The checker must never let the dodger pass him with the ball, but snatch it from him before he has time to throw, or at least before he has time to throw judiciously or

between the flags. He must learn all possible feints, and anticipate every movement of his antagonist. If the dodger has his back towards the checker, the latter must slip his crosse over the dodger's head, and strike the ball from him, or tip it, if possible, into his own crosse; or he can bear up his arm, or tip the end of his rival's bat, and then directly the ball falls, run and lift it off towards one of his own party, who, if unattacked, can bear it off between the flags.

The goal keeper must be specially quick of eye, serpentine in body, and cool of head, without which qualifications he will either lose the game for his side, or receive some injury from the ball. He must never think of special players, but keep his eye undeviatingly fixed on the ball. He must beware of the dodger throwing the ball between his legs. When he can get a good cut at the ball, he must learn to strike it with the wood-work of his crosse. He must always tip the ball away to the side of the goal, as otherwise the enemy in front might instantly drive it home by a return-blow. There are times when the ball is coming in, but far above the flags, when it is better to let it pass, as otherwise it might be caught and sent in by a straight throw of one of the enemy's advanced-guard.

The player who would excel at lacrosse must not mind an occasional blow on the head or fingers, and if he does, must wear cricket gloves and a thick cap. He must also constantly practice running and dodging. He should run on uneven and even ground, and up and down hill, especially the latter. He must learn to do the mile in as much less than ten minutes, and the six miles in as much less than the hour as possible. A quarter of a mile in a minute, or a mile in five minutes, is good running.

As a game, I rank lacrosse far above cricket or golf. It does not require attendants and special ground, like golf, and it boasts more un-intermittent amusement and more simultaneous competition than cricket. The materials, too, are cheaper, and you require no 'hog-in-armor' costume. It is more varied, more ingenious, more subtle than cricket, and, above all, it can be played in all seasons of the year without danger, expense or preparation. No marquees required, no grass rolling, no expensive bats or balls, no spiked shoes, and no padded leggings to preserve you from the cannon shots of fast bowlers, who seem determined to maim or lame somebody! Above all there is not that tiresome and wearisome waiting for the innings. The whole twenty-four men have their innings simultaneously, and have both an equal chance and unequal certainty of amusement and employment; while in cricket a beginner gets perhaps ten strokes at a ball, and that is all in the whole game. I admit the pleasure of the good swipe in cricket, the excitement of the runs, the delight of blocking a treacherous slow ball, the rapture of catching out a good player, and the feverish anxiety of a close-run game, but still I hold that cricket cannot hold a candle to lacrosse for variety, ingenuity, and interest.

The last time I saw it played was in a fine green meadow outside Montreal, not far from the Haunted House, at the foot of a hill from which a fine view is obtained. The shining and uncovered steeples were hid from sight; we were among trees slightly crimsoned with the October frosts. The young Beaver Club of Montreal was playing a party of Indians, who had just arrived by steamer from some river near the Rapids of the St. Lawrence. The Montreal striplings were dressed in flannel shirts and trousers, and had donned scarlet boating caps and belts. The Indians were dark skinned and older men, with broad chests, and thin, sinewy limbs.

They wore feather head-dresses and ornamented loin-clothes, and moved over the field with a restless panther-like freedom. They expressed little pleasure at their double victory, and their stolid stoical features were fixed like those of bronze statues. It was marvellous to see, as the ball for the first time flew up into the air, these statues spring into life instantly. The field was dotted with groups of struggling figures, now

running into jostling knots, now fanning out in swift lines like skirmishers before a grand army. Every now and then there would break away from the rest some sinewy subtle runner, who, winding and twisting like a serpent, would dash between the eager rallies of his rivals, avoiding every blow, now stooping, now leaping, now turning, quick as a greyhound, and artful as a fox; and then as the ball was shot between the crimson flags of the Montreal men, the Indians would give a war yell that echoed again.

I only trust that some English country gentleman, who is fond of field-sports, and has a wish to increase the honest and healthy out-door pleasures of his over-worked countrymen, only just awakening to a sense of the importance of gymnastic exercises, will introduce this delightful and exciting game into Great Britain, where it would soon become a formidable rival to cricket, which is itself only a parvenu (Social climber or upstart) of the last two hundred years. It could be played on any of our suburban commons, and the bat could easily be procured from Canada, or made here from a good model.

Chambers's Journal.

***Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*** was a weekly magazine started by William Chambers. in 1832. Topics included history, religion, language, and science.

In 1854 the title was changed to *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art*, and changed again to *Chambers's Journal* at the end of 1897. The journal ceased publication in 1956.