



The Little Brother of ~~War~~ Football?

Lacrosse at the MCG

By Trevor Ruddell

Australian lacrosse began with the epiphany of a man as he watched a football match in Yarra Park, just north of the MCG. A MCC member, Lambton Le Breton Mount, was one of around 10,000 spectators "jostling and crushing each other in their anxiety to gain a spot commanding a good view" of the field where Carlton played Melbourne for the premiership on September 25, 1875.¹ The Blues won the match when the only goal was kicked late in the game. The *Australasian's* football columnist described it as "the most exciting match ever played in the colony."² Mount was less impressed. He wrote, "... while witnessing the final match of the season between the Melbourne and Carlton football clubs, it occurred to me what a much superior game La Crosse was, and I then resolved to take steps to initiate it in Victoria."³

Mount was born in 1839 and arrived in gold rush Melbourne with his family in 1853. He had lived in Australia for 23 years but he retained a vivid memory of lacrosse in his birthplace, Montreal, Canada. He wrote, "I used to watch with rapturous excitement, the Red Indians, tribe against tribe, play the game of La Crosse, and always yearned impatiently for the time

when I should be big enough to play also... but migrating to this colony while yet a lad, the feverish scenes of the golden days completely banished it from my mind."⁸

Unlike the Mohawk game Mount viewed as a lad, the lacrosse of the mid-1870s was organised in the manner of English sports, with written rules and constituted clubs. To many Canadians lacrosse had evolved from a native curio into a national sport that would soon be patronised by non-other than Queen Victoria. She requested a demonstration at Windsor Castle on June 26, 1876, during a tour of the British Isles by an Indian team from Caughnawaga [Kahnawake] and a team of "Canadian gentlemen".⁹ Therefore, Mount imported a readymade and respectable recreation to Melbourne when he ordered, "40 La Crosse sticks, and the rules of the game" from Canada, and "called a meeting of my friends and acquaintances, and others anxious to initiate the game, at the Port Phillip Club Hotel on Wednesday, April 12 [1876], for the purpose of establishing the Melbourne La Crosse Club."¹⁰

Mount was a leading runner in Ballarat and Melbourne during the early 1860s, HCA Harrison described him as "my most formidable opponent,"¹¹ and his appeal attracted a number of prominent cricketers and footballers; such as Jack Conway, Thomas Kelly, Frank Allan, Jack Donovan and Harry Boyle. The nascent club purportedly had over 50 members by the end of April.¹² Its inaugural game was on June 17 at Albert Park but few if any of Australia's first lacrosseurs had more than a modicum of practical exposure to the sport. The *Australasian* noted that, "there was an amount of awkwardness exhibited by some of the players which will not be noticeable when further practice is indulged in."¹³ After three years of internal matches, three clubs budded off the Melbourne Lacrosse Club in 1879, to form the Victorian Lacrosse Association (VLA).

At the close of the first VLA season two combined teams, one comprising players from the South Melbourne and Carlton clubs, and the other drawn from Melbourne and Fitzroy, met in two exhibition games. The Melbourne/Fitzroy combine won the first game at Albert Park. The second match was played on October 4 at the MCG. The

The Origins of Modern Lacrosse

When Europeans colonised North America many versions of stick and ball field games were being played by Native Americans.⁴ Modern lacrosse was derived from the Mohawk (Iroquois nation) ballgame *tewaarathon*, particularly a version played on the Mohawk reservations of Akwesasne (Saint Regis), and Kahnawake (Caughnawaga) near Montreal. The earliest known lacrosse game between Indians and Montreal townfolk took place on August 29, 1844. Thereafter, games were played irregularly in the city until the Montreal Lacrosse Club was established in 1856.⁵ In 1858 and 1859 other middle class Anglophone athletic clubs formed teams, and during the early 1860s clubs were established outside Quebec in Ontario. Lacrosse's organization matured in 1867 when the sport was formally codified by the Montreal club and the National Lacrosse Association of Canada was established by 27 clubs at Kingston, Ontario.⁶ Lacrosse in this era, having already transcended its indigenous origins, transcended its middle class amateur filters too, finding enthusiasts within working class communities. The notoriously physical and ruthless Irish working class Montreal Shamrock Lacrosse Club, whose players often played for pay, was the "perennial champions between 1869 and 1884".⁷

Top: Victoria's Stuart Simson throws one of his six goals for Victoria against New South Wales at the MCG on July 22, 1899. The outer is sparsely populated suggesting a majority of the 4,000 in attendance watched from the northern side of the ground. Simson was one of the "young cricketers" introduced to the sport through the MCC Lacrosse Club in 1896. *Australasian*, July 29, 1899. (MCC Library collection)



South/Carlton team won this first lacrosse match at the MCG three goals to two before an all but empty arena. An *Australasian* columnist wrote,

...it was expected that the game would attract a large number of spectators, but contrary to expectation, not more than 300 were present. The game does not seem to be nearly so popular with the general public as it is with the players themselves, who all appear to take the liveliest interest in it.¹⁴

Victorian lacrosse games of the era were not representative of the sport at its best or most intense. John MacDonald, a Melbourne footballer who had seen "fast, punishing" senior lacrosse matches in Montreal, referred to the Victorian version as "a slow game".¹⁵ The VLA was gentlemanly. It had about 120 players, the games had little fury, and negligible spectator appeal. Another field game dominated Melbourne's winters in the 1880s. The local football club was the outward athletic expression of entire towns and suburbs. Senior football matches drew passionate masses of all classes, ages, and both sexes, who in their thousands paid to enter enclosed grounds. This provided a major revenue source for cricket clubs. Therefore, throughout the 1880s the MCG was a football venue almost every Saturday and public holiday between May and August. The MCC was not hostile to lacrosse, in fact a MCC minute of June 6, 1888, recorded, "Lacrosse: Resolved that facilities be granted any day but Saturday free of charge".¹⁶ Yet, lacrosse would not reappear at the MCG until 1892.

In the late 1880s the VLA's membership dropped from a peak of 10 clubs fielding 13 teams in 1886 to just five teams in 1890. That year Cecil "Cis" Murray returned from his travels through England and North America and became, "instrumental in working up a revival in the game, which was at that time at a very low ebb."¹⁷ In 1891 the VLA reformed. Its rules were altered to make it more like the Canadian game, with each match starting with a "face off" rather than a "throw up", while teams were reduced from 13 to 12 players. A pennant for the premier club was also provided by "Cis" Murray, the VLA's new honorary secretary.



Above: In 1897 Cis Murray (right) posed for this photo dodging Collingwood's G Bachelor at the MCG. *Australasian*, May 22, 1897. p.1080. (MCC Library collection)

Murray was introduced to lacrosse as a youth in the mid-1880s by the University club. Besides University, he also played for a short-lived St Kilda club in 1887, represented Victoria in its first intercolonial match in 1888, and was a prominent player for Caulfield in the first half of the 1890s. A prolific goal thrower, within the decade Murray would be vital to the formation of the MCC Lacrosse Club and the staging of regular lacrosse matches at the MCG.

The first lacrosse match at the MCG in over a decade was a curtain-raiser to a Melbourne v Essendon football match on July 30, 1892. It was contested by two Victorian selections with, "a two fold object, viz., practice for the representative team, and to give the public an opportunity of witnessing a good exposition of the game of lacrosse... on one of the metropolitan cricket grounds."²² However, it was not the perfect promotion that lacrosse purists may have hoped for. "Centre", the lacrosse commentator for the *Sportsman* wrote,

As was to be expected in a team comprising players from different clubs, there was too much individual play, and not enough of that concerted play required to show the amount of skill that may be acquired in handling the ball in, or more correctly on, the crosse, and which is so essential in good matches.²³

A combined match at the MCG on Queen's Birthday 1893 was similarly reviewed by "Centre" who wrote, "...it must now be evident to the most ardent enthusiast that lacrosse will not be popularised by matches played between mixed teams."²⁴

On June 8, 1895, two of the VLA's leading clubs, Caulfield and South Melbourne, met in the first pennant match at the MCG.²⁵ With all funds going to charity, the MCG was granted free of charge and all other VLA matches were suspended in the hope that neutral lacrosse supporters would attend. The *South Melbourne Record's* "Facing Off"

Lacrosse Athletic Events at MCG

In the 1890s lacrosseurs showcased their skills at athletic meetings on the MCG. The VLA made enquiries with Melbourne Harriers and the Victorian Amateur Athletic Association (VAAA) "with a view of inducing new membership" in June 1892,¹⁸ and on July 11 the VLA appointed a delegate to the VAAA. The VAAA was established in 1891 and organised the first Australasian Championship Sports at the MCG in November 1893. Two lacrosse themed events were on the program. The "Lacrosse Handicap" on the first day was a quarter mile race in which each competitor "had to carry a crosse and ball, and negotiate his way with these *impedimenta* over hurdles: also to throw the ball over ropes stretched across the track and race home with the ball in the crosse."¹⁹ The following day "Throwing the Lacrosse Ball" was won by Cis Murray with a 149 yard throw.²⁰ The 1896 University Sports on June 25 at the MCG also included "Throwing Lacrosse Ball". Such events would be held at University athletic meetings into the twentieth century.²¹



The MCC's 1898 VLA A Division premiers team. The front row includes Theo Handfield (far left), Dan White (holding a crosse) and Cis Murray (third from the left). MCC secretary Major Ben Wardill is in the top row centre. (MCC Museum collection M10)

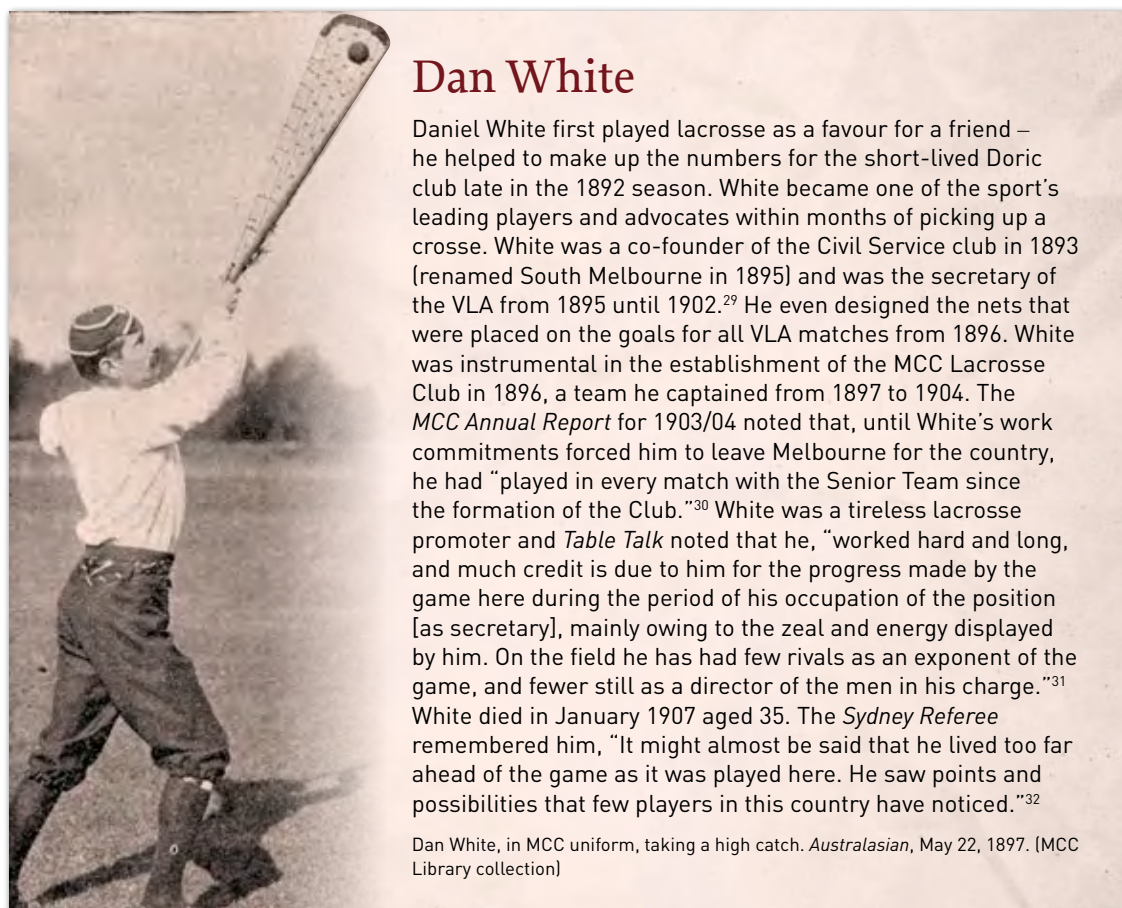
wrote, "on such a perfect day and an even turf good lacrosse was to be expected and good lacrosse was played for never of late years has there been a better exposition of the game." However, he prefaced the description,

... it is regretted that the charities will not be much benefited. Had the match been well advertised and longer notice given, the proceeds might have been larger. Even members of the various clubs were ignorant till [sic] late in the week where the match was to be played and that the proceeds were to be devoted to charity.²⁶

The gripping match, played before largely empty stands, was drawn, three goals apiece. Cis Murray equalised for Caulfield just three minutes from time. Caulfield, established in 1890, won the VLA's premiership from 1892 to 1894. Its backbone was formed by the Murray brothers, Cis, Basil, Hugh and Noel. However, in 1895 it finished fourth, University, Essendon and South having surpassed them. All four clubs with Collingwood and Hawthorn, contested the VLA's relatively new "annual tournament", a lightning premiership that was held at the MCG on July 13. The tournament was determined the following week at the MCG when Essendon defeated University in the curtain-raiser to the

Melbourne v Port Melbourne football match. University later won the 1895 VLA pennant, but in 1896 an upstart MCC Lacrosse Club would challenge all the established teams.

The advent of MCC lacrosse was apparently driven by "two or three of the more enthusiastic" MCC members.²⁷ Dan White, the club's inaugural secretary and the MCC's captain from 1897 to 1904, wrote that he, Cis Murray and Theo. Handfield were the "backbone of the new club", all three having, "played prominent parts for other teams prior to undertaking the establishment of the game amongst the young cricketers."²⁸ Only five of the 1896



Dan White

Daniel White first played lacrosse as a favour for a friend – he helped to make up the numbers for the short-lived Doric club late in the 1892 season. White became one of the sport's leading players and advocates within months of picking up a crosse. White was a co-founder of the Civil Service club in 1893 (renamed South Melbourne in 1895) and was the secretary of the VLA from 1895 until 1902.²⁹ He even designed the nets that were placed on the goals for all VLA matches from 1896. White was instrumental in the establishment of the MCC Lacrosse Club in 1896, a team he captained from 1897 to 1904. The *MCC Annual Report* for 1903/04 noted that, until White's work commitments forced him to leave Melbourne for the country, he had "played in every match with the Senior Team since the formation of the Club."³⁰ White was a tireless lacrosse promoter and *Table Talk* noted that he, "worked hard and long, and much credit is due to him for the progress made by the game here during the period of his occupation of the position [as secretary], mainly owing to the zeal and energy displayed by him. On the field he has had few rivals as an exponent of the game, and fewer still as a director of the men in his charge."³¹ White died in January 1907 aged 35. The *Sydney Referee* remembered him, "It might almost be said that he lived too far ahead of the game as it was played here. He saw points and possibilities that few players in this country have noticed."³²

Dan White, in MCC uniform, taking a high catch. *Australasian*, May 22, 1897. (MCC Library collection)



MCC lacrosse team were regular players in 1895 and, with the exception of another one or two, the rest were novices.³³

The new club also opened Melbourne's famous arena to lacrosseurs on a regular basis. The MCC played six VLA matches at the MCG in 1896. Four of them were football curtain-raisers, but from 1897 to 1910 lacrosse matches were generally played at the MCG on Saturdays when the ground was not being used for football.

The MCC's debut lacrosse match was at the MCG against Essendon on May 2, 1896. It was a curtain-raiser for the Melbourne v Essendon football match and therefore would, "probably be viewed by a much larger gathering of spectators than all the others [lacrosse games] put together."³⁴ The MCC was given little chance against one of the VLA's powerhouses, owing that much of the team comprised "men who had not previously banded a crosse."³⁵ However, their one-all draw presaged a new lacrosse power in Victoria.

Under the captaincy of Cis Murray, the MCC finished its first season as runners-up to Essendon. The club was soon

blessed with an oversupply of lacrosseurs, and in 1897 it established a B Division team that played primarily at the Warehouseman's Cricket Ground (renamed the Albert Ground in 1908) adjoining Albert Park. The Murray brothers also reunited at the MCC that year, Caulfield having disbanded after the 1896 season. The MCC, runners-up to University in 1897, won their first VLA A Division pennant in 1898.³⁶ It also won premierships in 1901 and 1902, the latter decided by a play-off against University at the MCG.

Although the play-off was the most anticipated club game of the season, the crowd was small. "The spectators were not as numerous as they might have been," the *Sportsman's* lacrosse columnist reported, "but what they lacked in numbers they made up in enthusiasm and every point in the game was loudly applauded."³⁷ The largest lacrosse attendances of this era were drawn to representative matches, not VLA games.

One year after the establishment of the MCC Lacrosse Club, the MCG was hosting intercolonial matches. However, representative lacrosse was not new to Victoria. Intercolonial games had been played in Melbourne since Saturday

September 1, 1888, when Victoria met South Australia on the East Melbourne Cricket Ground, the MCG being unavailable. In July 1897 the MCG hosted its first intercolonials when South Australia and New South Wales toured Victoria for the "great Australian lacrosse rally".³⁸ Thereafter, the MCG saw intercolonial/state games almost annually until 1906.³⁹ The largest attendance for a domestic lacrosse match at the MCG was estimated at 6,000 for the Victoria v South Australia game in 1898. But



Above: Basil Murray joined his brother Cis at the MCC in 1897. Basil, like his brother, was a prolific and ambidextrous goal scorer. He is posed in full MCC uniform shooting over his left shoulder. *Australasian*, May 22, 1897. p.1080. (MCC Library collection)

Right: 1901 fixture published by the MCC for three of the club's winter sports. (MCC Library collection)





attendances for interstate games at the MCG declined in the early years of the twentieth century. Victoria's game against New South Wales in 1901 drew as few as 1,000 spectators.

The biggest lacrosse drawcard of the era was the Canadian team that toured Australia in 1907. Australian lacrosse officials had corresponded regarding a tour with a variety of Canadian counterparts irregularly from as early as 1900. But when the prospect of this tour fell through, the MCC's secretary, Major Ben Wardill, was also used briefly as a conduit. In 1902 Wardill was the manager of the Australian cricket team in England, and he was engaged to arrange for an English team to tour, and contact the manager of the Toronto Lacrosse Club, then touring the British Isles that northern summer. Wardill wrote to Dan White (VLA's secretary and MCC captain) that Toronto's manager, J. Melrose Macdonald, was in principal sympathetic to a tour.⁴⁰ But such approaches amounted to nothing. Pessimists thought a tour by a fully representative Canadian team was unlikely. The Australian and Canadian lacrosse seasons clashed making a tour unattractive to Canadian professionals, and some of Canada's best lacrosseurs were Indian and may be barred under the White Australia Policy.

It was only after the South Australian Lacrosse Association's Lindsay Jones corresponded with John C. Miller that the prospect of a visit was realised in 1907. Miller, vice-president of the Canadian Lacrosse Association (CLA) and Mayor of Orillia, Ontario, organised and managed a team, "said to be thoroughly representative of amateur lacrosse in Canada"⁴¹ and composed "almost entirely of university men and graduates". The tour was guaranteed with £1,500 (C\$7,500) from the Victorian, South Australian, Western Australian

Top: The 1907 Canadians are pictured with the Victorian team, whom they played at the MCG on Monday August 12. Canada won nine goals to one. The Canadians wore royal purple and white jerseys with "Canada" emblazoned in white across the chest, white caps, white knickers, and no stockings. (AGOS&OM 1987.1857.6)

and Queensland lacrosse associations, aided by £250 from the South Australian Cricket Association and the MCC each.⁴²

Despite some confusion over the first instalment, the Canadians left Vancouver for Australia on June 21 and played their first match against Queensland before 8,000 spectators in Brisbane on July 20. The first full international was one week later at the MCG. Prior to the Tests there were concerns over differences in the rules, such as the size of the grounds. The Australian field was 150 yards from goal to goal while the Canadian standard was 110 yards.⁴³ A compromise of 135 yards was determined for the first Test.

At a MCG reception soon after the Canadians arrived in Melbourne, MCC president, Justice Leo Cussen stated that the club "had taken great interest in the visit, hoping it would do much for lacrosse and clean sport generally."⁴⁴ The Victorian Football League (VFL, now AFL) had not programmed matches for Saturday July 27, the weekend of the first Test, and a crowd of 14,000 gathered for the historic lacrosse match. Many were football supporters new to the game, and *Melbourne Punch* observed that they got, "enthusiastically excited over the play and it was amusing to observe the interjections inspired by football habit. For instance, when the little ball was caught in the crosse by a player the cry, 'Mark,' would be raised, and the shout, 'Free Kick,' was frequent."⁴⁵ To the applause of the crowd and the surprise of the Canadians, Australia won five goals to three.

Canada partially attributed this loss to the large size of the field, which they would renegotiate down to 130 yards for the second Test, and then 125 yards by the third. Canada's players also responded to their first defeat by resorting to physical and ruthless tactics, common to the Canadian game, in subsequent Tests. Of the second international at the Adelaide Oval, the *Australasian's* correspondent commented that the Canadians, "were rougher and trickier than their opponents. They did not hesitate to smash at the body, trip, shepherd and lay hands on their opponents' crosses."⁴⁶ Canada won the Test six goals to three, and these physical tactics would also be exploited by the Canadians when they returned for the third international at the MCG.

Despite inclement weather and directly competing against football matches, as many as 11,000 people returned to the MCG on August 10 for the third Test. The game is notable for the debut of the MCC's first international, Allan Box, and two Queenslanders; the first two Test teams were composed exclusively South Australians and Victorians.⁴⁷

A Contrast in Styles and Attitudes

The Canadian lacrosse team brought a game to Australia that was quite different to that hitherto employed in Melbourne. Lacrosse had evolved in isolation here. "Left Home" for the *Leader* noted that following the sport's somewhat naive but enthusiastic introduction by Mount, "no Canadian had helped its progress."⁴⁸ The interchange of lacrosseurs between the continents had been negligible with the notable exception of Cis Murray in 1890.⁴⁹ Therefore, the game's basic skills and implements were similar, but differing social factors, intensity of competition and the size of playgrounds created distinct styles.

The Canadians' throwing skills were much superior to the Australians. The Canadian field was 110 yards between goals, and they favoured a possessive game based on short precise passes, and endeavoured to direct play through the centre of the ground. Their play could be quite attractive as they slowly worked the ball down field coolly and methodically, "until after the centre is passed the forwards come on like a cloud passing the ball rapidly backwards and forwards one to another."⁵⁰ The Canadians were not adverse to "wasting time behind the goal" when advantageous. This tactic frustrated Adelaide spectators at the fourth Test "who hooted vigorously".⁵¹

The Australian style was expansive with tactics seemingly derived from their distinctive football code. They used the wings extensively, often ran with the ball – trusting their speed of foot and dodging ability – and penetrated opposition defences with long throws forward on their large grounds – 150 yards from goal to goal. This approach was risky and gave the Canadians a number of opportunities to intercept the ball. Given the differing styles the crosses also varied. The Canadians' netting was baggier, better suited to catching and their possession game, while the pockets on the Australians' crosses were tighter and

favoured throwing with velocity and shooting.

Lacrosse in Australia was strictly amateur and its players were largely middle class. Canadian lacrosse, in contrast, appealed to a wide cross-section of classes and communities, and after decades of professional lacrosse in Canada, many of the Dominion's lacrosseurs valued gamesmanship and winning above sportsmanship and the manner in which the game was played.⁵² Therefore, the 1907 tourists were nominally amateur, but the ethic of open lacrosse led to a tough and ruthless attitude not previously experienced in Australia. Prior to the tour a Canadian wrote to an Australian friend and described the Australian style as "kid glove". He wrote,

I saw a team play lacrosse in Australia when I was there, and it struck me that they were accustomed to playing in the parlour instead of in a good open field. They seem to be afraid to strike one another, or afraid to bring their sticks down on each other for the fear they would break.⁵³

This may explain why Canadians played in protective attire. The 1907 Canadians introduced specialised padded headwear and thick leather gloves to Australia, which soon became a part of many Australian lacrosseurs' kits. Prior to and during the tour, Australians generally played without much protection and more than once an Australian left the field with "cuts". "Crozier" claimed in *Table Talk*,

... that every man in the Australian team bore the marks of the fray, their bodies being beaten and streaked with blue weals, their faces cut, the tendons of their legs bruised... The Canadians took the field armour-clad, conclusive proof that they are used to a hard-hitting and vindictive style of play. When a man passed them, they made spiteful remarks and cold-bloodedly tripped him – an un-British, low, cunning, savage trick.⁵⁴

Australia's Fred Kell (left) and Canada's Frank Grace prepare to face off.
Australasian, August 3, 1907.
(MCC Library collection)





Scene from the third Test at the MCG. *Melbourne Punch*, August 15, 1907. (MCC Library collection)

The match was also rough, *The Age* commented,

It was unfortunate that the spirit of fairness which characterised the first game in Melbourne was not so manifest, the Canadians frequently resorting to tripping their opponents who happened to have at the moment bested them.⁵⁵

The most egregious and baffling act occurred in the final quarter. As a goal umpire remonstrated with the Canadian Frank Grace for deliberately striking his opponent with his crosse (who retaliated in kind, the pair having "a duel with crosses"⁵⁶), Grace's team mate, H Camplin, tripped the umpire "in fun" and was promptly sent off for five minutes. Still, *The Age* correspondent was forgiving, "But for these incidents," he wrote, "the game was a splendid one. Both sides checked hard, but so long as the checking, is confined to the crosse it is quite competent and in, accordance with the rules."⁵⁷

The Canadians defeated the Australians four goals to nil. At a smoke concert in the MCC Members' Pavilion after the game, Canada's captain, Tom Hanley, stated that, "he exceedingly regretted one or two incidents in the game that could not appeal to the public or to the players." However, he qualified it. "He and his team had found it difficult to interpret the rules as they were understood in Australia. Often he thought he had mastered them, but when on the field some things had been done which showed him he had failed."⁵⁸

Canada also won a similarly rugged fourth Test six goals to four at Adelaide to claim the series. Of 17 matches in Australia the Canadians lost just one, threw 162 goals and gave up 37. The tourists played matches in all mainland capitals as well as Ballarat, Bendigo, Fremantle and Kalgoorlie, and the four Tests in Melbourne and Adelaide exposed the sport to large crowds. The Canadians introduced a systematic short passing technique to Australia and Australians soon reduced the size of their pitches to suit.⁵⁹ However, Australian lacrosse remained isolated. Australia was invited to send a team for the 1908 London Olympic Games but the local associations were unable to finance it. Entreaties in 1909 for a tour by an English team in 1910 would not be realised either. Half a century would pass before the Australian national team faced international opposition.

Australian lacrosse enthusiasts returned to a diet of club and interstate matches. There does not appear to be an immediate increase in player numbers in Melbourne; the same number of VLA teams existed in 1908 as there were in 1907.⁶⁰ Lacrosseurs were still drawn from the middle class and they maintained a strict amateur ethic, thereby limiting the pool of potential recruits.⁶¹ Further, without an international attraction the game failed as a mass spectator sport. Only 2,071 watched Victoria play South Australia at the MCG in 1909, and 2,281 in 1911.

The ultimate threat to regular lacrosse games at the MCG was the co-tenancy of the VFL's University Football Club in 1911. From its origin the MCC's lacrosse team had shared winters at the MCG with the Melbourne Football Club. The introduction of a second VFL team filled the MCG's winter programme and forced MCC A Section lacrosse on to the Albert Ground. University's attendances were modest by VFL standards, it averaged 6,109 per "home" match at the MCG in 1911, but these figures far exceeded the potential attendances for club lacrosse. Nor could the lacrosseurs play as curtain-raisers for the football games. That place in the programme was the almost exclusive preserve of the MCC Baseball Club. Therefore, when the MCC lacrosse team defeated South Yarra eight goals to five on August 27, 1910, to register its 51st VLA A Section win at the MCG, it would be the last time the MCC's lacrosseurs would grace the arena for decades. Of 72 MCG games from 1896 to 1910 it had lost just 19 pennant matches and two were drawn.

For a few years lacrosse would be staged occasionally at the MCG. In 1911 an interstate match was played at the



The 1907 Australian team prior to the first Test. Australia wore dark green jerseys with a gold (yellow) ring over the shoulders and around each forearm, dark green caps, white knickers, and black stockings. *Melbourne Punch*, August 1, 1907. p.19. (MCC Library collection)

Standing: C Graham (V), CV Hughes (SA), AS Mann (SA), JG Latham (ref.), R Taylor (SA), WC Noblet (SA), W Bryning (V). Seated: V Steet (V), F Kell (SA), F Delves (V), L Humphris (SA), L Jones (SA), EO Gooden (SA).

MCG LACROSSE STATISTICS

LACROSSE AT THE MCG 1879 – 1959

| | Games | Goals | Highest Score |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|---|
| International (Test) | 2 | 12 | 5 – Australia v Canada, July 27, 1907 |
| Intercolonial/state | 15 | 217 | 20 – Victoria v New South Wales, July 20, 1901 |
| VLA A Section | 76 | 1045 | 23 – MCC v South Melbourne, July 17, 1897 23 – MCC v Hawthorn, July 10, 1909 |
| VLA B Section | 5 | 58 | 14 – MCC B v University B, June 17, 1905 |
| VLA D Section | 1 | 13 | 10 – Hawthorn D v Brighton Wanderers, August 12, 1911 |
| Exhibition/Tour/Other | 33 | 325 | 24 – University v VLA B Division, May 24, 1899 |
| | 132 | 1670 | 24 – University v VLA B Division, May 24, 1899 |

The above table excludes the 35 six-a-side matches played at the MCG in 1933.

LACROSSE INTERNATIONALS AT THE MCG

July 27, 1907 (First Test)

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|----------|
| Australia | 0 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Canada | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Goals – Aus: R Taylor 2, L Humphris 2, W Bryning.
Can: R Gilbert 2, WD Ramone.

August 10, 1907 (Third Test)

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|----------|
| Australia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Canada | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Goals – Can: WD Ramone 3, W Hanley.

MCC A SECTION LACROSSE AT THE MCG

| Opponent | Played | Won | Drew | Lost |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Auburn | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Brighton | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Camberwell | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Canterbury | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Caulfield (1890-96) | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Collingwood | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Elsternwick | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Essendon | 14 | 5 | 1 | 8 |
| Essendon 2nd XII | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Fitzroy | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Flemington | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Hawthorn | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Kew | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Malvern | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| South Melbourne/ St Kilda/Hawksburn* | 15 | 10 | 0 | 5 |
| South Yarra | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| University | 15 | 10 | 1 | 4 |
| University Collegians | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | 73 | 52 | 2 | 19 |

The above table records VLA A matches or equivalent.

* Civil Service, est. 1893, was renamed South Melbourne in 1895, St Kilda in 1898, and Hawksburn in 1906.

Three VLA A games at the MCG did not involve the MCC:

- June 8, 1895, Caulfield (1890-96) drew South Melbourne*.
- July 26, 1902, University def. Essendon.
- June 5, 1933, Caulfield (est.1909) def. University.

VICTORIAN REP. LACROSSE AT THE MCG

| Opponent | Played | Won | Drew | Lost |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Canada | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| New South Wales | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| South Australia | 9 | 5 | 0 | 4 |
| | 13 | 8 | 0 | 5 |

Three intercolonial/state games at the MCG did not involve Victoria:

- July 8, 1897, South Australia def. New South Wales.
- August 10, 1912, Western Australia def. Tasmania.
- August 10, 1912, New South Wales def. Queensland.

GOAL THROWERS

10+ Representative Career Goals at the MCG

- 16 – P Newland (South Australia)
- 13 – G Gay (Victoria)
- 11 – L Humphris (South Australia 9, Australia 2)

50+ VLA A Career Goals at the MCG

- 67 – PF Pennefather (MCC)
- 65 – CL Murray (Caulfield 1, MCC 64)
- 65 – W Moulton (Essendon 2, MCC 63)
- 50 – BL Murray (Caulfield 2, MCC 48)

Most Goals in a Lacrosse Game at the MCG

- 9 – W Moulton, Victoria 2nd XII v Victoria, July 6, 1904
- 9 – G Gay, Essendon v MCC, VLA A, July 30, 1904
- 8 – CL Murray, MCC v South Melb., VLA A, July 17, 1897
- 8 – JG Latham, MCC v Kew, VLA A, May 31, 1902
- 8 – W Moulton, MCC v St Kilda, VLA A, August 27, 1904

Top: Scene from the first international lacrosse Test at the MCG. *Melbourne Punch*, August 1, 1907. (MCC Library collection)

ground, and in 1912 there was a match between the VLA D Section (schoolboys) team Brighton Wanderers and a team of Canadian cadets who were visiting Australia. The most significant lacrosse event at the ground during this period was the second Australian Lacrosse Carnival in 1912. The important first day was staged during a break in the VFL season at the MCG, with all other carnival matches at St Kilda's Junction Oval. The opening day's early games between Western Australia and Tasmania, and New South Wales and Queensland were played before largely empty stands. It seems most spectators arrived shortly before the main event, the Victoria v South Australia match. Ultimately 5,611 attended the day's lacrosse, which guaranteed the carnival's financial success but not the sport's presence at the MCG.

Lacrosse was not ostracised from the arena, but in the 1920s the activities were not structured games or competitions. To select the Victorian team for Adelaide in 1924, weekly practice matches by members of a 38 man squad took place at the MCG on Wednesday afternoons from late July until September. The Victorian team again met at the MCG, under a less rigorous schedule, to train and select their captain prior to interstate tours in 1926 and 1928. A visiting team also used the ground as a training venue in 1925. The South Australians arrived on the morning of Thursday August 20 and trained at the MCG that afternoon.

Formal lacrosse competition returned to the MCG in the 1930s. The ground hosted the VLA's second annual six-a-side lacrosse tournament in 1933. It was inspired by box lacrosse, a game conceived as a six-a-side indoor version for a charity sports carnival at St Kilda in July 1931.⁶² The VLA's 1933 tournament was arranged for the King's Birthday holiday on Monday June 5, with games being played concurrently on three pitches marked out on the arena. There were 35 ten-minute matches played that afternoon in two separate tournaments, a "senior" competition that comprised clubs from the VLA's A and B sections, and a "junior" tournament drawn from teams competing in the C, D and E sections. The day's program began with three junior games at 1:00pm. The MCC had the honour of opening the senior grade twenty minutes later with a seven goals to nil victory over Caulfield III; however, it was eliminated in the second round. The senior tournament was ultimately won by Malvern I with Camberwell I runners-up. Williamstown I won the "junior division". The tournament's senior final was played during the half time interval of a Caulfield v University premiership game. This match, the first VLA game at the MCG since 1910, was brought forward to allow the University of Melbourne's lacrosseurs to contest the inter-varsity sports championships the following weekend. Caulfield defeated University 11 goals to eight.

It was hoped that MCC field lacrosse would return to the MCG in 1936 with a match against Caulfield. The MCC lacrosse committee, having negotiated with the MCC's executive and its baseball section, arranged to play the curtain-raiser for the Melbourne v Geelong football match on August 1.⁶³ However, the match was played on the Albert Ground, and it would not be until

1937 that the MCC's senior lacrosse team graced the MCG. On June 19, a VLA A section match between the MCC and Camberwell was the curtain-raiser for the Melbourne v Geelong football game. The MCC won five goals to three. A crowd of 29,376 attended the footy and the lacrosseurs were thrilled to play in the warm-up, but the ground was heavy and an Age columnist noted that the match "did not provide a very high standard. The ground proved to be too large, and the players seemed overawed by their surroundings."⁶⁴

Only one lacrosse match of note has been staged at the MCG since. On August 8, 1959, Australia met an American team comprising NCAA Division I college players from the University of Virginia (Charlottesville) and Washington and Lee University (Lexington, Virginia) at the ground. The match was played according to Australian Lacrosse Council rules, which forbade the aggressive body play permitted by the American code. A crowd of 10,236 saw the Australians win a "hard, fast and rugged" game eight goals to five. Australia's captain, Dudley Hamilton was presented with the Brady Trophy at the post-match dinner in the MCC Members' Pavilion. It was 52 years and two days since the MCC hosted the Canadian team at a post game reception. While six Americans were sent off for short periods for fouls in second half and two Australians were also suspended, the match was a success.⁶⁵

The match presaged the Australian national team's tour of North America and England in 1962, upon which it played its first full internationals since 1907. The contact began a slow process to reconcile the field lacrosse codes of North America, England, and Australia.

The MCC lacrosse section is still active and has provided a number of players for Australia's national team. The sport may no longer be played on the MCG, but the ground's lacrosse legacy survives through the club established to play on it.



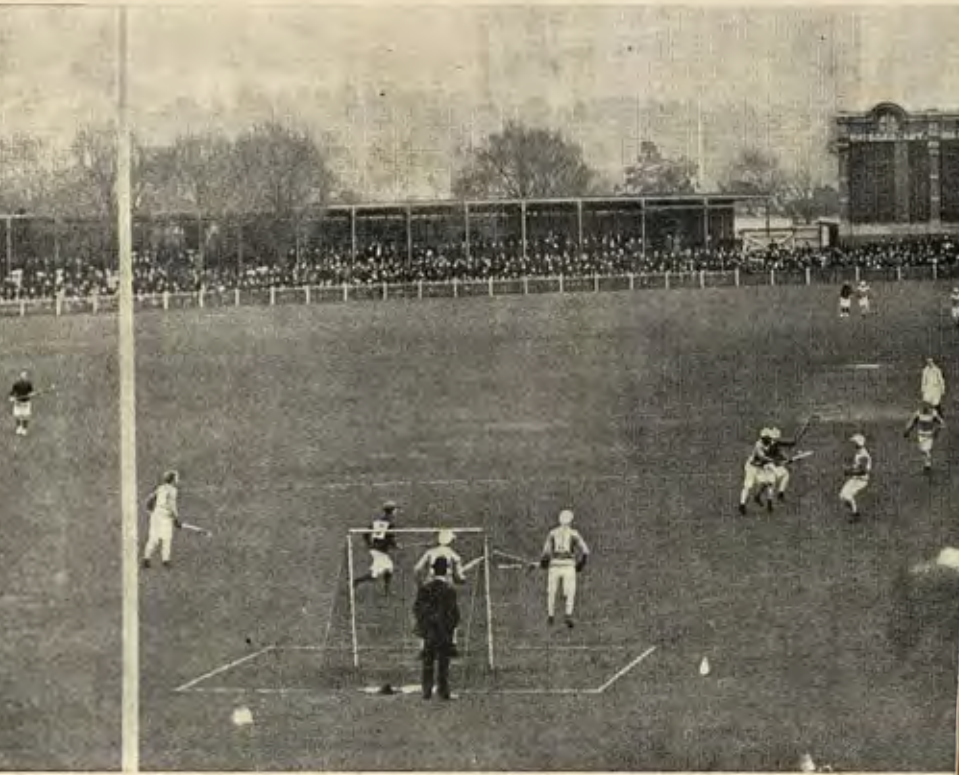
Promotional poster for the 1959 match at the MCG between Australia and "America", actually a combined lacrosse team from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, and Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia. (AGOS&OM 1986.930)



A commuter with a crosse and a gladstone bag takes the "Direct to Football Match" cable car on June 13, 1908. The cable car's destination was the Essendon v South Melbourne football match at the East Melbourne Cricket Ground. The lacrosseur was likely heading to the MCC v Fitzroy lacrosse match at the nearby MCG. *Australasian*, June 20, 1908. [MCC Library collection]

Endnotes

1. Thomas P. Power (ed.), *The Footballer: An Annual Record of Football in Victoria*, Henriques & Co., Melbourne, 1875. p.52.
2. [Free Kick], *Australasian*, October 2, 1875. p.428.
3. Lambton L. Mount, "The Game of La Crosse", *Australasian*, April 8, 1876. p.13.
4. The name of the Creek version of the sport may be translated as "little brother of war."
5. Donald M. Fisher, *Lacrosse: A History of the Game*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (USA), 2002. pp.24-25.
6. W. George Beers, *Lacrosse: The National Game of Canada*, Dawson Brothers, Montreal, 1869. xii-xiii. Beers published rules for the sport as early as 1860, but in 1867 a refined version of Beers' code was generally agreed to.
7. Canadian champions were determined through bilateral challenge matches from 1866 to 1884. The Shamrocks won 39 of 75 title matches in that era. Alan Metcalfe, "Sport and Athletics: A Case Study of Lacrosse in Canada, 1840-1889", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol 3, No 1, 1976. p.14. Donald M. Fisher, *Lacrosse: A History of the Game*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore (USA), 2002. p.36.
8. Lambton L. Mount, "The Game of La Crosse", *Australasian*, April 8, 1876. p.13.
9. Similar lacrosse tours of the British Isles took place in 1867 and 1883.
10. Lambton L. Mount, "The Game of La Crosse", *Australasian*, April 8, 1876. p.13.
11. Harrison's account of his races with Mount were reproduced in A. Mancini and G.M. Hibbins (eds.), *Running with the Ball: Football's Foster Father*, Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, 1987, pp.105-117, 185.
12. *Leader*, April 29, 1876. p.12.
13. *Australasian*, June 24, 1876. p.813. Mount was yet to receive crosses from Canada and so the players made do with local facsimiles that tended to "smash". These were possibly copied from Mount's "genuine Indian La Crosse stick". However, it was soon realised that the intricate nature of the crosses' construction meant no Australian timber could serve, and quality crosses had to be imported from Canada for much of the twentieth century.
14. "Lacrosse Combination Match", *Australasian*, October 11, 1879. p.460.
15. John M. MacDonald, *Australasian*, September 30, 1882. p.429.
16. *Minutes of MCC Committee Meeting*, June 6, 1888.
17. "Mr Cecil L Murray", *Sportsman*, May 9, 1899. p.1.
18. *Sportsman*, June 14, 1892. p.7. The VAAA was apparently referred to as the "Australian Athletic Association" in the column.
19. "Australasian Championship Sports", *Argus*, November 10, 1893. p.3. Presumably this was similar to the "Lacrosse Obstacle Race" at the Melbourne Harriers' meeting on December 10, 1892, at the Warehousemen's Cricket Ground (later Albert Ground).
20. "Australasian Athletic Championship Meeting", *The Argus*, November 13, 1893. p.7. Cecil Murray has purportedly thrown the lacrosse ball on the MCG over 162 yards, but, accounts of the precise distance differ and the date of the supposed event is unconfirmed. Reg Wilmot's *Victorian Sporting Record* of 1903 stated that Murray threw a ball "a world's record" 162 yards and six inches at the MCG on November 11, 1903 (p.244) - a date after the book was published, and years after illness forced Murray's resignation from the game in 1900. The July 15, 1899, *Adelaide Chronicle* reviewed Victorian players and wrote Cecil Murray "holds the Australian record for long throwing, his throw being 162 yards 2 ft." The *Australasian* of July 7, 1900, wrote that "Cis Murray... holds the record for the longest throw made with a crosse in Australia, 162 yards 2ft., which was accomplished at the V.A.A.A. sports in 1893." Preceding the 1904 University Lacrosse Club Sports the September 3 *Leader* noted that Cecil Murray held the "Victorian Record" of "163 yards 2 feet". To confuse matters the *British Medical Journal* of June 1, 1929 (pp 1020-21), wrote that Hugh Murray, "At 21 [c.1890] he threw the lacrosse ball 163 yards 2 feet, which remained the world's record until it was beaten by the present holder, his brother Cecil." Hugh Murray's "world's record" throw was actually 151 yards 1 foot 10 inches at the University Athletic Sports on the University Cricket Ground on October 1, 1887.
21. The University Athletic Association Sports included a "Throwing the Lacrosse Ball" event since 1886. Although the University sports were usually staged at the University Cricket Ground, the 1896 and 1897 meetings were held at the MCG but, due to the size of the program in 1897, "Throwing Lacrosse Ball" was one of four events held at the University Cricket Ground one week earlier.
22. [Centre], *Sportsman*, July 19, 1892. p.6.
23. [Centre], *Sportsman*, August 2, 1892. p.6.
24. [Centre], *Sportsman*, May 30, 1893. p.2.
25. This South Melbourne LC played as the Civil Service LC in 1893 and 1894, and is not to be confused with the old South Melbourne LC that folded after the 1890 season.
26. [Facing Off], *South Melbourne Record*, June 15, 1895. p.2.
27. *Melbourne Cricket Club Annual Report for the Season 1896/97*. p.19.
28. Dan White, "Lacrosse", in Reg Wilmot (ed.), *Victorian Sporting Record*, McCarron, Bird & Co. Melbourne, 1903. p.240.
29. "The Game of Lacrosse", *Weekly Times*, July 10, 1897. p.13. [Centre], "Lacrosse", *Sportsman*, June 20, 1899. p.3.
30. *Melbourne Cricket Club Annual Report for the Season 1903/04*. pp.17-18.
31. *Table Talk*, May 5, 1904. p.22.
32. *Sydney Referee*, January 30, 1907. p.8.
33. Some secondary sources claim erroneously that the MCC lacrosse section was an outgrowth of the Melbourne Lacrosse Club. It was not. The first Melbourne LC existed from 1876 to 1889. A new Melbourne LC existed from 1891 to 1892. The MCC had no connection with either.
34. [Centre], *Sportsman*, April 3, 1896. p.3.
35. [Home], *Australasian*, May 16, 1896. p.932.
36. The VLA competition was split midway through the 1896 season (July 18) into "First Division" and "Second Division". In 1897 they were relabelled "A Division" and "B Division". From 1900 the VLA used "Section" instead of "Division" for its grades.
37. [Centre], *Sportsman*, August 27, 1902. p.3.
38. Victoria v South Australia on July 3 and South Australia v New South Wales on July 8.
39. Victoria played South Australia in 1898, 1900, 1902, 1904 and 1906, and New South Wales in 1899, 1901, and 1903.
40. *Australasian*, July 24, 1902. p.80 [24].
41. *Leader*, July 27, 1907. p.21.
42. *Australasian*, May 4, 1907. p.1045. [Left Home], *Leader*, May 4, 1907. p.17. "All-Canada Lacrosse Team", *South Australian Register*, April 29, 1907. p.5. David Saveiff in *A History of the Sport of Lacrosse in British Columbia* [1972] noted that in 1908 an average professional lacrosseur on Canada's west coast could earn C\$100 per game, and star players between C\$1,000 and C\$2,000 annually.
43. [Croix], *Adelaide Express and Telegraph*, August 17, 1907. p.3.
44. *The Age*, July 25, 1907. p.8.
45. *Melbourne Punch*, August 1, 1907. p.161.
46. *Australasian*, August 10, 1907. p.26 [346].
47. Eight South Australians and four Victorians were selected for the first Test. Ten South Australians and two Victorians were selected for the second Test. Six Victorians, four South Australians and two Queenslanders for the third Test.
48. [Left Home], *Leader*, May 4, 1907. p.17.
49. British lacrosse probably had a greater influence in Australia. Professor WH Bragg, who played for Trinity College, Cambridge (UK), introduced an English style of teamwork to Adelaide lacrosse in 1886. This may account for South Australia's domination of domestic lacrosse in the 1890s and 1900s. From 1888 to 1908 South Australia's record against Victoria was 14 wins (144 goals) and three losses (65 goals). Victoria's wins were isolated, being in 1888, 1898 and 1904.
50. "International Lacrosse", *Argus*, July 27, 1907. p.17.
51. *Australasian*, August 24, 1907. p.23. [471].
52. Alan Metcalfe, "Sport and Athletics: A Case Study of Lacrosse in Canada, 1840-1889", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol 3, No 1, 1976. p.7, 18.
53. [Crozier], "Lacrosse. The Canadian team's visit. What we may expect", *Table Talk*, June 27, 1907. p.32.
54. [Crozier], "Lacrosse. 'Table Talk' and the Canadians", *Table Talk*, September 12, 1907. p.5.
55. "International Lacrosse", *The Age*, August 12, 1907. p.11.
56. "International Lacrosse", *The Argus*, August 12, 1907. p.9.
57. "International Lacrosse", *The Age*, August 12, 1907. p.11.
58. "International Lacrosse", *The Age*, August 12, 1907. p.11.
59. At the VLA's 1908 annual meeting a resolution was passed reducing the minimum length of lacrosse grounds in Victoria to 125 yards. *The Age*, April 10, 1908. p.8. Four years later a conference of delegates from the six state associations resolved, "That the playing ground be reduced to 110 yards." *Leader*, August 17, 1912. p.22.
60. In 1907 the VLA consisted of 20 teams fielded by 10 clubs. In 1908 the VLA had 20 teams fielded by 12 clubs.
61. *The Age*, April 10, 1908. p.8.
62. [Iroquois], *Australasian*, June 4, 1932. p.45. Box lacrosse became popular in North America rapidly, and soon superseded the field game in Canada.
63. "Lacrosse", *The Age*, May 27, 1936. p.8.
64. "Lacrosse at MCG", *The Age*, June 21, 1937. p.7. *Melbourne Cricket Club Annual Report for the Season 1937-1938*. p.49.
65. "Lacrosse Test to Australia", *The Age*, August 10, 1959. p.10.



1. View of the Stand. 2. Watching the Game. 3, 4, 5. Snapshots of INTERNATIONAL LACROSSE - CANADA



Above: A montage of images from the first lacrosse international at the MCG. *Leader*, August 3, 1907, p.25. (MCC Library collection)
Right: Souvenir program for Australia's first lacrosse Test match. All players wore numbers on their backs, but it was not until the second Test in Adelaide that they were reproduced in a program. (MCC Museum collection M13577)

THE YORKER



DEMONSTRATION



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