

# History Of Australian Lacrosse- Written in 1965



The Garland-McHarg Cup

**BETWEEN 1874 AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR, LACROSSE TRAVERSED THE ISLAND CONTINENT FROM A PARK IN MELBOURNE TO THE GOLDFIELDS OF COOLGARDIE.**

One afternoon in the year 1874, the attention of a group of boys playing in a park on the outskirts of the city of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, was attracted by a man carrying a number of wooden sticks to each of which was attached a curiously devised net. The man was not slow in noticing the curiosity he had aroused, and soon each boy found himself in possession of one of the sticks and listening intently as the man explained to them an entirely new game.

The man was Mr. L. L. Mount who had recently settled in Melbourne. He was a Canadian and very keen to see if people in his adopted country would show interest in his favourite sport. The game was called lacrosse and there then followed the first demonstration of it ever seen in Australia.

Soon afterwards enough players were developed to form sides, then the first lacrosse club, Melbourne was founded. In 1879 three more Clubs were formed, and in that same year the Victorian Lacrosse Association came into being. By 1882 the game had progressed to a point where a formal Premiership

(or State Championship) was played for the first time.

During this period a Mr. Wilkinson of Adelaide, South Australia was introduced to the game in Victoria whilst visiting friends and was so impressed that on his return to Adelaide he set about attempting to introduce the game there. Unfortunately he had little success as the only sticks available were locally made and broke rather easily. However, in 1885 Mr. W. Patterson had more success. With a few friends he formed the Adelaide Lacrosse Club, and three years later the game had taken on so well that with eight clubs operating, the South Australian Lacrosse Association was established.

Meanwhile, in 1884, Mr. G. Beech, a pioneer of the game in Melbourne, set about inaugurating it in Sydney, New South Wales, and soon the Sydney Lacrosse Club was formed. The game progressed, and in 1886 with four clubs in operation, the New South Wales Association was born.

In that same year, lacrosse commenced in Brisbane, Queensland. The following year the Brisbane players, with com-

mendable enterprise, invited the Sydney players over. Two matches were played and the honours were even. (The Sydney players, still new to the game, had travelled over 500 miles for these two games.) By 1888 the game had continued to thrive in Brisbane and the Queensland Association came into existence.

In June, 1887, the first visit by a team from Victoria to South Australia took place. The following year, 1888, saw the first official inter-colonial match. (At that time each of the present States were British Colonies).

The match between Victoria and South Australia was played on the East Melbourne Cricket Ground and the following extract from the press report of the game makes interesting and amusing reading:

"The players are clad in coloured shirts, knickerbockers, long stockings and shoes. Some are bearded like the bard, and nearly all sport flourishing moustaches. Their heads are adorned with a assortment of little round caps and turbans. They wield racquets with very long handles, the net being tightly strung, very narrow, and extending a long way down the blade. With their racquets the ball can be thrown tremendous distances (one throw has been measured at 162 yards 6 inches), but the taut net and almost entire absence of a "fence" makes catching and carrying the ball a difficult art.

At each end of the field, and over 150 yards apart, stand two goal posts, six feet high. There are no goal nets. The play is fast, open and vigorous, with much of it taking place on the wings and at centre field. The Victorians are a little more experienced than their opponents, and win the game by five goals to one."

Whenever lacrosseurs are transplanted to a place where their beloved game is not played, they immediately set about devising ways and means of again enjoying the fascination of their sport.

by Bert Sterck

# AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE

It was not surprising, therefore, to find that when the sensational finds of gold in Western Australia had attracted many men from the Eastern States and from Canada as well, a meeting was convened for the purpose of establishing Lacrosse in the West. That meeting took place in Perth in June 1896 and two clubs were formed. The following year further clubs emerged and the Association was established.

Clubs sprang up on the goldfields and in 1899 a team representing the coastal Clubs (in and around Perth) paid a visit to Coolgardie, and met with defeat.

A year before the establishment of lacrosse in Western Australia a small band of enthusiasts started lacrosse in Tasmania. An association was formed in the south of the island (Hobart) and two years later an association was organised in the north of the state at Launceston.

Matches were played between the two associations and in 1906 the Melbourne Cricket Club (lacrosse section) paid a visit defeating the separate teams from the respective associations but met defeat at the hands of a combined North-South side.

With the game established in all States and holding a place amongst the top Amateur sports in the Country all was in readiness to receive a visit from a Canadian Lacrosse team.

The matches against the Canadian team was the only International contest Australian Lacrosseurs had up to that time. In fact another 52 years were to elapse before they again had this opportunity.

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Since his introduction to the game in 1950, Bert Sterck has served Australian lacrosse in various official and coaching capacities. Honorary Secretary of the Australian Lacrosse Council since 1962, and secretary to the Australian Touring Team of that year. Bert is also proud to have coached the team which last year won the Victorian "B" Premiership.

These matches revolutionised the game in Australia. The Canadians introduced short baggy racquets, with which they were enormously more efficient in their stick work than the Australians with their old type "Flannery" racquet.

They were past masters in clever team work and in tactics. The Australian

backmen were accustomed to go out and try to beat the forwards for initial possession of the ball and a great deal of their play centred in the middle of the field. The Canadians introduced the less spectacular method of crowding their defence and obviating centre field play as much as possible.



Headgear dates these scenes from 1912, but the brand of enthusiasm hasn't changed.





The Canadian team that won nine of ten on a visit to Australia in 1907.

in pace and stamina however the Australians had the advantage, and despite the fact that the visitors had settled down into a combination with every member knowing the others' play perfectly, the Australians were by no means disgraced.

The tactics and equipment thus introduced were soon adopted by the Australians. This evolution of the game was held by many to have been a detriment to the advancement of Lacrosse. Be that as it may, the publicity and interest aroused by the Canadian visit gave the game a much needed fillip and materially assisted its development.

As a matter of record the Canadians played 10 matches and won 9.

They arrived in Queensland and played that colony's team in Brisbane on 20th July, 1907 defeating them 6 goals to 3.

Their next encounter was the first test match on the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 27th July in the presence of over 16,000 spectators. This record has never been equalled. Australia won this match throwing 5 goals to Canada's 3.

For the second test at the Adelaide Oval on 3rd August the ground was shortened from 150 to 130 yards. This was a compromise as the Canadians were accustomed to 115 yards. Canada

won 6 goals to 3.

The tourists returned to Melbourne for the third test and won 4 goals to nil. Once again this match was played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Two further matches were played in Victoria and then the Canadians returned for the fourth test in Adelaide.

They had an early lead of 5 goals to nil but the Australians made a thrilling finish to the game and were finally defeated 6 goals to 4.

The Canadians then visited Western Australia and won their three engagements in that colony.

Perhaps the most important feature of Australian lacrosse is the matter of interstate contests. The early legislators were not slow in realizing that the best means of testing the standard of the game in their colony, and of increasing the interest of the public in lacrosse affairs, was to hold a match with another colony's representatives.

Here again, mainly due to the Canadian visit, another step forward was achieved. A handsome cup was presented to the Victorian Lacrosse Association by Messrs Garland of Canada and McHarg of Australia. This brought the question of organizing regular inter-

state matches to a head and thus the all States Carnival (now called Championships) was born. The winners of the cup carries with it the title of Champions of Australia.

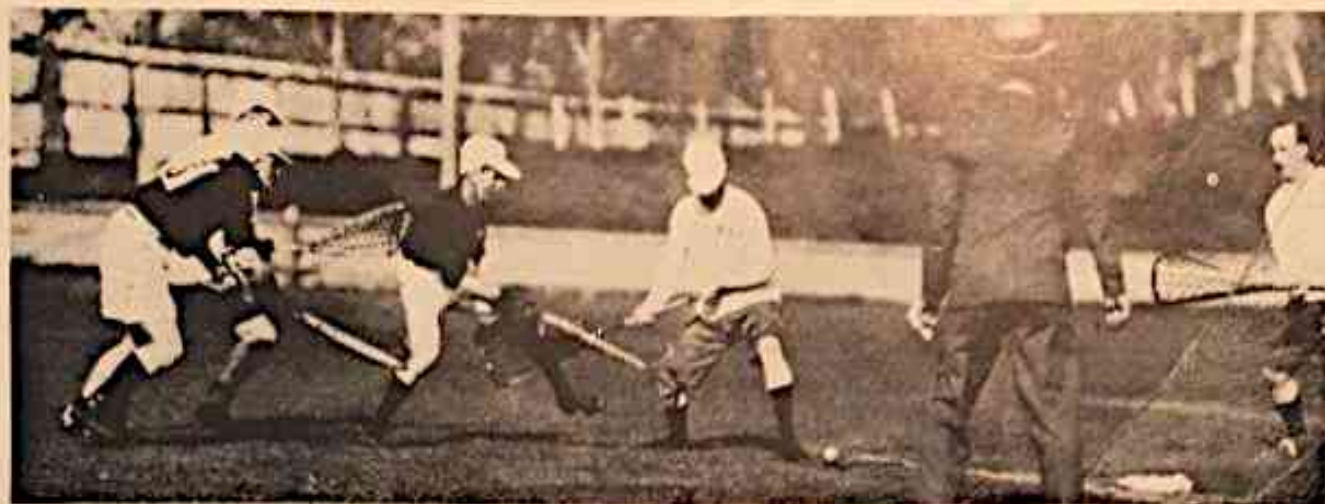
The first of the series was played in Adelaide, South Australia in 1910.

Victoria emerged the winners as they also did in the second series in Melbourne, Victoria in 1912 when all states participated for the first time.

The 1914 season had just been completed when war broke out in Europe. Although 12,000 miles away, it had an enormous effect on the game. So many lacrosseurs answered the call to arms during the war (over 500 members of the Victorian Association enlisted) that all of the associations found their ranks so depleted that in some cases no matches were played at all and in other cases only junior games were played and even they played in a somewhat desultory fashion.



In the next issue, Bert Sterok will continue his narrative from the conclusion of WW I to the present day.



Australian action circa 1926. Victoria (in black) against New South Wales.

# 91 YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE

Part II

CONTINUING HIS NARRATIVE, BERT STERCK RELATES THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE FROM THE POST-WWI ERA TO THE PRESENT DAY.

by Bert Sterck

Consequently after 1918 the associations had the task of re-establishing and re-organising the game in their respective states.

The game never recovered in Tasmania except for a brief period in the 1930's but had folded up again before 1938.

In all the other states the game did revive so much so that in 1920, only two years after the war, the third championship series was staged.

On this occasion the games were played in Sydney, New South Wales and South Australia recorded their first victory. The period from 1920 to 1939 could well be described as the most outstanding period lacrosse had experienced in Australia from its inception. During this time the game reached a peak in all states and was being played over a wider area than ever before.

In 1935 lacrosse was being played in all six states and three. South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia also had provincial associations whilst there were two centres in Tasmania.

1935 was also notable as the year when the introduction of lacrosse into schools was first achieved. Prior to that time all club teams were basically made up of senior players and this move was a decided departure from standard practice and proved quite effective in four of the six states.

In 1929 the total number of registered players in Australia exceeded 2,000 of which over 1,000 were registered in the state of Victoria. These totals were maintained at that level for the following 10 years. At one stage the Australian total reached 3,000 players in the ten centres mentioned previously.

With a registration list twice the size of any other state it was not surprising to see that Victoria won all 4 All-State Championships from 1929 to 1939.

Box lacrosse was conceived and played in both Melbourne and Adelaide. It was played in ballrooms and proved a popular feature in those cities. Despite its popularity with the spectators and players, club officials and administrators were not in favour of its retention as, being played during the field season, the added injury risk was a constant worry. At that time attendances at matches were good and in fact at a Victoria Premiership (State Championship) match a local match record attendance of 5,000 was reached.

Several efforts during this period were made to have a team visit Australia from Canada, America and/or England but finance, as so often is the case, was the stumbling block.

Another new idea that had its beginnings at this time was the 6-a-side Lightning Premierships which were conducted in Melbourne on the King's Birthday Holiday

each year.

Eventually this was expanded into a Lacrosse Gymkana which included some of the skilful features of the game such as accurate throwing and picking up the ball on the run, etc. 1926 saw the most thrilling Premiership contest ever recorded in Australian Lacrosse.

Two Victorian teams, Malvern and M. C. C. (Melbourne Cricket Club), played four times before the winner was decided.

The system in force at the time provided the top team with the 'right of challenge' series, should they be defeated during a final series.

Malvern had completed the season without loss and therefore had to be defeated twice in the Finals to lose the Premiership. M. C. C. were determined to achieve this not so easy task.

Their first encounter ended in a 12 all tie as did the replay in which the scores were 9 goals each. In their third attempt M. C. C. outplayed Malvern early in the match and scored a comfortable 10-3 win. Malvern then exercised their 'right of challenge'.

In the fourth match Malvern broke away in the first quarter to lead 4 goals to one. M. C. C. fought back strongly and by the end of the third term were down 6 goals to 7.

Both teams managed to score one goal each in the final term but Malvern held their narrow margin and emerged Premiers for 1926.

Soon afterwards, in 1931, the Malvern Club commenced setting what, at the time, was considered a world record.

The club's "A" Section team won 10 consecutive Premierships from 1931 to 1940, in what was one of the strongest competitions ever seen in Australia.

As early as 1910 representatives of the various associations considered that an Australian controlling body was needed. Many difficulties, particularly in regard to rules, were experienced during the Canadian visit in 1907 and it was felt that this could have been overcome had there been overall control. For that visit the Secretary of the South Australian Cricket Association was appointed organising Secretary.

In 1926, with the possibility of teams visiting Australia from overseas, the subject was again raised. A meeting of delegates from all states was arranged with this object in view and the foundations were laid for the formation of the Australian Lacrosse Council. Negotiations took several years but finally, in June 1931, the A. L. C. was constituted.

Probably the most outstanding feature

of the growth and activity of the game during this time was the fact that it was accomplished during the depression years.

The number of interstate visits being made not only by associations but club teams as well was quite surprising. These visits were in addition to the All-States Championships and some regular annual visits between states.

These were undoubtedly the best years lacrosse had experienced with all States except Tasmania recording record membership and team entries. It is no wonder that at this time lacrosse was one of the top amateur sports in the nation. Then again disaster struck.

The State Championships had just been completed in 1939 when again the world was plunged into war.

As in 1914 with the First World War a large number of lacrosseurs (approximately 2,000 throughout Australia) joined the fighting forces and associations were forced to curtail their activities and Western Australia fought hard to keep the game 'alive'. They were able to do so by operating with junior teams and when possible organized senior matches. Unfortunately the smaller states of New South Wales and Queensland were unable to continue

and went into recess for the duration of the war.

With the war successfully concluded, the task of reconstruction was begun. Thanks to their ability to keep the game going through junior teams Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia were soon back to three quarters of their pre-war strength. Meanwhile, Queensland and New South Wales were starting almost from scratch.

In 1947 the game had revived well enough for the All-States Championships to take place. This series was staged in Perth, Western Australia and the home State recorded their first Championship victory. The other States competing were: South Australia, Victoria and Queensland.

The game was recovering well from the war years and hopes were high that, before long, lacrosse would once again become a force in Australian amateur sport. Then an unexpected turn of events placed the game in as dire a position as it had experienced previously.

Dollar restrictions were imposed, sports stores sold out of sticks and were not granted licences to import any whatsoever. This situation lasted for several years.

In the 1930's an attempt was made to

Combined U. of Virginia and Washington and Lee team which competed in Australia in 1959. (1st row) H. Tracht, M. Alley, J. Spilman, D. Nice, L. Horst, F. Askin (2nd row) L. Peas, C. Lea, E. Feldstein, E. Briscoe, T. Swindell, G. Corrigan, M. Church (3rd row) J. Diekel, K. Sappington, R. McHenry, J. Storkerson, P. Quisenberry, J. Taylor, M. Applefeld (4th row) J. Snyder, J. McCleary, W. Thompson, H. Bohlman absent J. Stull. (Virginia team in italics)





Australian team which toured U.S. in 1962. (1st row) Durham, Hill, Goding, Miller, Turnbull, Pearce, Post Hogg, Coldstream (2nd Row) Sterck, Martin, Bryning, Jewell, Ramsey, Melville, Jeffrey, Neill, Griggen, Weatherill (3rd row) Trainor, Minniece, Campbell, Atkins, Stammers, Toomey, Eddy (Absent) Humphries

manufacture sticks from a Queensland wood very similar to hickory. This, however, proved a failure. Sticks made in Pakistan were imported but they also failed to stand the test of match play. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Organisation was contacted and they produced a laminated stick but to no avail. It could not stand the work either.

In the meantime the shortage of equipment was having its effect. In 1949 the New South Wales Lacrosse Association found they could not keep going and went into recess. In 1951 Queensland also ground to a halt. In the remaining three states the game was rapidly declining and had almost reached the point when they, too, looked as though it would only be a matter of time before they also would go under.

In the early fifties a cricket bat manufacturer in Adelaide attempted to make sticks but he, too, met with failure. Finally permission to import a quantity of hickory was obtained, and the manufacturer proceeded to produce sticks from this wood. Whilst not up to the Canadian article, they did avert the crisis and the downward trend was halted.

Eventually the restrictions were lifted and the equipment was again available. After this problem was solved the South Australian Association then instigated a short series of night matches. They played just prior to the opening of their Saturday afternoon matches.

With equipment now more readily available more and more Juniors were introduced to the game. In earlier days few players were under 18, before the

second World War under 17 represented junior lacrosse. Now the players were younger still and Under 14 became the lowest junior section. About this time annual junior (under 16) interstate games were organised between South Australia and Victoria.

After years of trying at long last arrangements were made for a team to visit Australia from the United States of America. With the Australian economy more buoyant than ever before the financing of such a visit became a possibility. Allied with this was the fact that the American team would pay their own fares to and from Australia and this was the deciding factor. The team was made up of players from the Virginia and Washington Lee Universities.

Amid great excitement and feverish activity on 1st July 1959 the first American Lacrosse team to visit Australia arrived. Australian were, at long last, to experience international competition for the first time in 52 years.

Once again rules were a problem. The game in Australia had hardly changed since the departure of the Canadians in 1907 whereas both the Canadian and American authorities had completely re-organized the playing style and rules in their own countries.

The matches began in Perth, Western Australia and the American team won all three matches. They then visited Adelaide and won one game whilst South Australians were successful twice.

In Melbourne their tour coincided with a championship series of all states and their matches were interspersed with these games. The visitors won all three matches against Victoria and also defeated a combined South Australian/Victorian Universities side.

The tour concluded with a test match against an Australian team on the Melbourne Cricket Ground before the largest attendance at a lacrosse game in Melbourne for 20 years. After an exciting, action packed game Australia emerged winners by 8 goals to 5.

Mr. P. J. Brady, maker of lacrosse sticks from imported wood, presented a trophy for perpetual competition between teams of America and Australia. This was duly presented to the Australian team at the conclusion of the match.

Before their arrival the game was in need of a boost and this it received. The game has become more consolidated in the three states and new clubs have emerged and the established ones have grown larger.

Whilst the Virginia - Washington & Lee University team was in Australia the possibility of a return visit was discussed. In due course an invitation was received and accepted. The proposed visit to America presented Australian lacrosse with quite a challenge.

A total of £12,000 was needed for the

*Continued on page 25*

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# 91 YRS

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fares to and from the U. S. A. and after a great deal of hard work and effort the team departed on 13th March 1962.

For the first time in the history of Australian lacrosse we were making an International tour. By this time not only would the team visit America but would now also visit England.

The Australian team played a total of 11 matches on the east coast of the U. S. A. They won 2 tied 1 and lost 8.

It was decided that the Australian team would play the American rules as they were. This then eliminated quite a lot of confusion previously experienced in Australia with overseas teams. The Brady Cup was won by the American team, Baltimore Lacrosse Club, when they defeated the Australian team in Baltimore. The team then played three matches in England, playing English rules, and won two of their engagements.

Following the overseas tour there have been several changes of rules (and a number have been further proposed) and more players are using protective equipment. The rules being adopted are bringing the game closer to the American style. The coach has a new status in club matches. Previously they were not very often seen outside Interstate games etc.

Since 1959 the number of clubs has doubled in Victoria but in all states school lacrosse has not expanded to any sizeable extent. On the other hand more teams are being entered for the junior sections and many young players are starting the game around the ages of 8 to 11.

At the same time the game has still to regain its former pre-war strength. Much now depends on the former players and present club administrators.

Experience has shown that despite 5 major setbacks lacrosse still has an attraction for sportsmen and there is no shortage of prospective players.

Efforts are being made to revive the game in Queensland and New South Wales but so far with mixed success. The players can be found but without support from former players the job is a difficult one.

This year is the 91st birthday of lacrosse in Australia. It is to be hoped that it will become another milestone in the game's history. ★★★



## N. J. Lacrosse Club

Good schedule - Good times

Contact: John Howes

161 Henry St. Brooklyn, N. Y.

## Face Off

*Continued from page 23*

will be able to scoop the ball out of a scramble to an open wingman. The wings and center must work together and talk constantly in a unified effort to gain possession of every face-off.

It can be readily seen that obtaining possession of the face-off is as much an attitude of mind as mastering the various face-off techniques. The center and two wingmen must take great pride in their ability to gain possession of the ball. A center should develop confidence in his skills to the point where no opposing center can take the ball from him. Possession of the ball at the face-off will greatly encourage team morale and tremendously increase a team's scoring potential.★★★

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