

# The Resurgence of the Creator's Game and Its Healing Power

Tyler Rastovski

On June 22nd, 2022, the Iroquois Nationals changed their name to the Haudenosaunee Nationals as a way of embracing their past.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they restored a connection back to the origins of the people of the longhouse, which is what Haudenosaunee means. This event was very impactful, as their previous name was of French origin, and did not reflect the desired Haudenosaunee autonomy.<sup>2</sup> Moves for more autonomy have been shown by the Haudenosaunee community in recent years, with some notable ones being through their lacrosse team. Considering the waves that lacrosse has been making for Haudenosaunee sovereignty, it begs the question of how exactly the game of lacrosse connects to the culture and way of life of the Haudenosaunee people, and how its re-emergence in the 20th and 21st centuries helped bring attention to Indigenous sovereignty. This essay explores how the formation of the Haudenosaunee Nationals, the national lacrosse team for

---

<sup>1</sup>(AP) "Why We Changed Our Name," [haudenosaunee-nationals.com](https://www.haudenosaunee-nationals.com/). Retrieved 30 June 2022.

<sup>2</sup>Anna Taylor, "Haudenosaunee Nationals' Olympic Inclusion Receives Presidential Endorsement," NLL, December 8, 2023. <https://www.nll.com/news/haudenosaunee-nationals-olympic-inclusion-receives-presidential-endorsement/>.

Indigenous people, can best express the re-emergence of lacrosse in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Additionally, lacrosse itself is a game that is embedded within Haudenosaunee's culture, and its re-emergence allows for the resurrection of a game that embodies the culture of Indigenous ancestors, allowing for a spiritual connection among Indigenous people and a rekindling of the Haudenosaunee way of life within Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, ultimately healing them.

The Haudenosaunee nation was not a single Indigenous group, but rather a confederacy of different nations, and was therefore given the title of the people of the Longhouse. The name was rather suitable considering that there were six, but initially five, nations within the confederacy, and a longhouse, as used back then, typically contained several different families. The six nations within the confederacy were the Seneca, the Cayuga, the Oneida, the Onondaga, and the Mohawk, with the Tescura joining the confederacy later on.<sup>3</sup> The confederacy was primarily based upon the Great Law of Peace, which was “both a political constitution and a basis for Haudenosaunee society”<sup>4</sup> that the confederacy was united under and would come to play a

---

<sup>3</sup>Peter G Ramsden, "Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)." <em>The Canadian Encyclopedia</em>. Historica Canada. Article published December 14, 2006; Last Edited May 18, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Ramsden, "Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)."

massive part in shaping Haudenosaunee society. Lacrosse was also important to the Haudenosaunee culture, and they would go to great lengths to participate. Considering its deep roots within Haudenosaunee culture, it is also considered a healing game. Not to mention that several aspects of the Haudenosaunee's life revolve around the game, and its usage essentially embodies the Haudenosaunee culture.

The name lacrosse is not of Haudenosaunee origin but instead of French origin.<sup>5</sup> The Haudenosaunee name for the game differs within each nation. For example, the Onodogans call the game Dehontsigwaehs, meaning they bump hips,<sup>6</sup> while in the Ojibwe language, it was called baaga`adowe, also meaning bump hips.<sup>7</sup> Players would play with hand-carved sticks made from wood, and the game's objective was to get a leather ball between the goalposts. The game consisted of fields that could be as long as one hundred and ten yards, with teams comprising hundreds to thousands of players per side and games that would last for days.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, lacrosse is considered a medicine, a cure for disputes between nations within and outside the Confederacy,

---

<sup>5</sup> Philip P. Arnold and Kent Lyons, "The Creator's Game at Onondaga." Indigenous Values Initiative, June 9, 2017. <https://indigenousvalues.org/creators-game-onondaga/>.

<sup>6</sup> Philip P. Arnold and Kent Lyons, "The Creator's Game at Onondaga."

<sup>7</sup> Guy T. Gambil, Charles Lippert and Weshki-Ayaad, "Freelang Ojibwe-English Dictionary," FREELANG, November 30, 2003. <https://www.freelang.net/dictionary/ojibwe.php>.

<sup>8</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, "Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators," p.11

and a way to dispel animosity towards one another.<sup>9</sup> The game was meant to bring people together, which was also a common theme amongst the culture of the Haudenosaunee, who valued togetherness. In some regards, the game was considered a way of life, as “when baby boys are born in Onondaga, a traditional wooden lacrosse stick is gently placed in the cradle. They learn to love the game, to cherish it, and to respect it. Then, one day, they’re buried with it — because more games are to be played with their ancestors and the Creator.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the game of lacrosse and the traditions that followed it were meant to be taken seriously. Respect for one's opponent was expected. Red Jacket, a speaker on numerous Senecan councils, advocated for the Seneca to go to war against the Mohawks after a game of lacrosse became violent between the two groups.<sup>11</sup> Such an action would be understandable, considering that the game of lacrosse is meant to be in patronage to the will of the Creator.

The Oneida even have a specific creation story about valuing everyone despite their strengths and weaknesses, and the story uses lacrosse to teach this premise. The story has four-

---

<sup>9</sup> Kyle Edwards, “Sport,” Indigenous People’s Atlas of Canada, June 8, 2018, <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/sport/>.

<sup>10</sup> Kyle Edwards, “Sport,” Indigenous People’s Atlas of Canada, June 8, 2018, <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/sport/>.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas S. Abler, “SHAKÓYE:WA:THA’ (Sagoyewatha, Otetiani, Red Jacket),” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 6, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed March 15, 2024, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shakoye\\_wa\\_tha\\_6E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shakoye_wa_tha_6E.html).

legged animals competing against winged birds. When the Squirrel and the Mouse wanted to join in, the four-legged animals rejected them, so they appealed to the Eagle of the wingbird team. The Eagle wondered how to incorporate the mouse and the squirrel, and eventually, another bird on the team decided to create wings for the mouse from the leather of a water drum. As a result, the mouse became a bat. As for the squirrel, another bird suggested stretching the squirrel's skin to essentially create a flying squirrel.<sup>12</sup> When it was time for the teams to face off, “The flying squirrel caught the ball and passed it to Hawk, who kept it in the air for some time. But then, as the ball nearly hit the ground, Eagle saved it and, through elaborate maneuvers, kept possession of it, saving it from the fastest four-legged animal – Deer. Faking a pass to Squirrel, Eagle passed it to Bat, who scored the winning goal for the birds.”<sup>13</sup> As seen from this tale, the creation story of lacrosse is embedded within the Haudenosaunee culture. It involves animals of different species coming together for a common purpose, which parallels the union of the nations of the Confederacy through the Great Law of Peace. The story also “emphasizes how Indigenous people should treat other walks of life, and how they should respect

---

<sup>12</sup> Oneida Indian Nation, “A Lacrosse Legend.” Oneida Indian Nation -, May 17, 2023. <https://www.oneidaindiannation.com/a-lacrosse-legend/>.

<sup>13</sup> Oneida Indian Nation, “A Lacrosse Legend.”

others regardless of their size or skill set.”<sup>14</sup> The lacrosse legend exemplifies how deeply rooted lacrosse was in the Haudenosaunee culture. However, in the early twentieth century, attempts would be made to abolish Haudenosaunee lacrosse games, to which the Haudenosaunee rebelled by continuing to play.

From 1916 through 1924, the Lord’s Day Alliance was an organization whose goal was to increase church attendance on Sunday by lobbying to remove other distractions on the day of the Sabbath.<sup>15</sup> The Lord’s Day Alliance continuously attempted to abolish Sunday Haudenosaunee lacrosse games, citing that sports should not be practiced on the day of the Sabbath. In reality, the Haudenosaunee were likely targeted because they were Indigenous and not of the Anglophone majority population, and not to mention, the federal government had already set several policies that aimed to eradicate Indigenous identity. When faced with this adversity, the Haudenosaunee stood their ground and continued playing the creator's game in defiance of both the Lord’s Day Alliance and the Federal Government.<sup>16</sup> By defying the Lord’s Day Alliance,

---

<sup>14</sup> Kyle Edwards, “Sport,”

<sup>15</sup> Sharon P. Meen, "Lord's Day Alliance of Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published February 07, 2006; Last Edited December 16, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Allan Downey, “Playing the Creator’s Game on God’s Day: The Controversy of Sunday Lacrosse Games in Haudenosaunee Communities, 1916-24.” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 2015. 49 (3): 114 doi:10.3138/jcs.49.3.111.

the Haudenosaunee exposed themselves to a unique set of consequences, and by continuing to participate in lacrosse, the Haudenosaunee risked their self-determination, which colonial authorities could further lessen.<sup>17</sup>

Even though they knew of the consequences of their act of defiance, the Haudenosaunee continued to play the Creator's game as the games themselves accumulated fairly strong attendance, likely due to the date the games were played on, as "for promoters, Sundays became an opportune time to hold sporting events as working-class audiences had a work-free day, ensuring the best possible attendance outcome."<sup>18</sup> Not to mention that "for Haudenosaunee communities, the Sunday lacrosse games were an extension of an already familiar source of athletic showmanship. By the turn of the twentieth century, Haudenosaunee athletes and lacrosse teams were well-versed in gaining profits from demonstrating their athleticism for non-Indigenous audiences."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the games provided for revenue raised were put tthe fight of Haudenosaunee sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> The actions taken by the Haudenosaunee to continue playing lacrosse from 1916 to 1924 demonstrated their fierce loyalty to their cultural traditions and a willingness to

---

<sup>17</sup> Allan Downey, "Playing the Creator's Game on God's Day:," p.114

<sup>18</sup> Allan Downey, "Playing the Creator's Game on God's Day" p.115

<sup>19</sup> Allan Downey, "Playing the Creator's Game on God's Day:." p.116

<sup>20</sup> Allan Downey, "Playing the Creator's Game on God's Day." p.121

continue to display their autonomy through practicing their culture.

On July 23rd, 1923, Deskaheh, the Chief of the Cayugan people, travelled by ship to Geneva, Switzerland, to present the issues Indigenous communities faced to the League of Nations. His goal was for the League of Nations to assist in recognizing Haudenosaunee sovereignty, or, at the very least, place sanctions on Canada so that the Canadian government would consider the sovereignty of Indigenous groups.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his time in Switzerland, he would lecture different audiences in different cities about the promises made between Europeans and Indigenous peoples through the use of the two-pact wampum belt.<sup>22</sup> While his speeches were receptive to the Swiss people, they did little to change the British and Canadians' perception of Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> In fact, about one year later, the RCMP would dissolve the government of the Six Nations with another that was more in line with the Indian Act.<sup>24</sup> This action taken by the RCMP under the Canadian Government would be one of many actions taken by the Canadian government to slowly eliminate Indigenous culture.

---

<sup>21</sup> Laurence Hauptman (2008), "Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations Since 1800" Syracuse University Press. ISBN 978-0-8156-3165-1. p.135

<sup>22</sup> Robert G Koch, "Chief Deskaheh." crookedlakereview, 1992.  
[https://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34\\_66/54sept1992/54koch.html](https://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34_66/54sept1992/54koch.html).

<sup>23</sup> Hauptman, "Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership." p.137-138

<sup>24</sup> Hauptman, "Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership." p.140



Throughout the twentieth century, the Canadian government continuously attacked Indigenous culture and sovereignty, making it hard for any sense of cultural identity to remain. In 1951, new amendments towards Indigenous Child Jurisdiction allowed for the Sixties Scoop to occur.<sup>25</sup> In 1969, the Canadian Government proposed the white paper to abolish all Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> However, throughout all of these hardships, the game of lacrosse remained, albeit mainly unseen to the public eye. Despite being popular in the early 1900s, its spotlight was stolen by other sports, such as hockey, especially after the last Canadian league folded during the Great Depression.<sup>27</sup> However, the fortunes of the lacrosse game would change in the following two decades as the resurrection of lacrosse would help re-establish the game as a source of healing for more than just the Haudenosaunee. Additionally, the resurgence of lacrosse would create a medium of sorts by which the Haudenosaunee traditions could be passed down to future generations.

---

<sup>25</sup>James Niigaanwewidam Sinclair and Sharon Dainard, "Sixties Scoop." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published June 21, 2016; Last Edited January 10, 2024.

<sup>26</sup>Nathan Legrae, and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, "The White Paper, 1969." *The Canadian Encyclopedia* Historica Canada. Article published September 11, 2015; Last Edited June 10, 2020

<sup>27</sup>Donald M Fisher, "'Splendid but Undesirable Isolation:' Recasting Canada's National Game as Box Lacrosse, 1931-1932", *Sport History Review* 36, 2 (2005): 115-129  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20171017042337/https://www.humankinetics.com/acucustom/site name/Documents/DocumentItem/5223.pdf>

In 1983, the Haudenosaunee people could participate in the creator's game at the highest level, doing so with the formation of the Iroquois, now known as the Haudenosaunee, Nationals. The team's formation came after it was confirmed that they would be sanctioned by the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee.<sup>28</sup> Now, a game “played primarily by affluent white men - and women - who take it from prep school to college to amateur club”<sup>29</sup> would now be played by the descendants of its creators once again, this time at an international level. Oren Lyon, a former Syracuse Goaltender and an Indigenous rights activist, helped pioneer the creation of the Haudenosaunee Nationals. The team's formation happened around ten years after the Six Nations lacrosse League was formed, with Oren Lyons and a few colleagues picking the team from the stars of that league.<sup>30</sup> The formation of the Haudenosaunee Nationals would be a massive step toward recognizing Indigenous sovereignty. Still, the team would face challenges in their first three years from a familiar thorn in their sides.

In 1985, the Haudenosaunee Nationals toured England, playing five different club teams, winning against three, and

---

<sup>28</sup>Haudenosaunee Nationals, “Our History.” Haudenosaunee Nationals. Accessed April 11, 2024. <https://haudenosauneenationals.com/pages/our-history>.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Lipsyte, “Lacrosse: All-American Game.” *The New York Times*, June 15, 1986. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/15/magazine/lacrosse-all-american-game.html>.

<sup>30</sup>Robert Lipsyte, “Lacrosse: All-American Game.”

even tying against the English National team. Throughout 1986, the men's team was slated to compete against the national teams of Australia and England. The Women's Haudenosaunee Nationals would compete against teams from Britain, Australia, Quebec, Ontario, and the United States. The Men's team was supposed to compete in an international tournament that same year, but had been barred by the host nation, Canada.<sup>31</sup> The reason for the dismissal was "the cost of rearranging logistics and printing new tickets that would work the Iroquois into the tournament."<sup>32</sup> And so the Haudenosaunee would have to wait till 1990 to participate in their first official international lacrosse tournament, in which they would finish fifth out of five teams that participated.<sup>33</sup> And thus, the Haudenosaunee could finally join in their game of healing on the international stage. However, the medicine game would help heal groups beyond the Haudenosaunee, such as the people in the Inuit village of Kugluktuk.

The Inuit village of Kugluktuk has a complicated history. The arctic village has experienced Influenza epidemics and ethnic feuds while also being used as a trading post by the

---

<sup>31</sup>Robert Lipsyte, "Lacrosse: All-American Game."

<sup>32</sup>Robert Lipsyte, "Lacrosse: All-American Game."

<sup>33</sup>Matt Kinnear, "Our Gift to the World": Haudenosaunee Optimistic, Hopeful for Olympic Inclusion." Inside Lacrosse, October 13, 2023. <https://www.insidelacrosse.com/article/our-gift-to-the-world-haudenosaunee-optimistic-hopeful-for-olympic-inclusion/62173>.

Hudson Bay Company.<sup>34</sup> And yet, it also had the unfortunate honour of having one of the highest suicide rates among teens in North America.<sup>35</sup> The issues surrounding the students within Kugluktuk came from “low Inuit self-esteem rooted in a history of colonialism, paternalism and historical events.”<sup>36</sup> But that was all to change in 2001 when newly arrived teacher Russ Sheppard introduced a lacrosse program to combat the students' challenges.<sup>37</sup> Sheppard hoped to combat these issues “in hopes that it might give his students a sense of belonging and purpose.”<sup>38</sup> The program was a success for the students, as attendance at the school increased, and students felt they had a place that made them feel like they belonged. The medicinal game of lacrosse provided healing to teenagers in a struggling community, paralleling the healing powers that the Creator's game had given to the Haudenosaunee. Furthermore, the game of lacrosse branched out, and as a result, the effects of playing

---

<sup>34</sup> Hamlet of Kugluktuk, “History.” Welcome to Hamlet of Kugluktuk - History. Accessed April 11, 2024. <https://kugluktuk.ca/p/history>.

<sup>35</sup> Emily Nichol, “The Grizzlies: The Incredible True Story of a Community Transformed.” *NITV*, March 29, 2021. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/the-grizzlies-the-incredible-true-story-of-a-community-transformed/akq66prii>.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Houpt, “Mistakes and Reconciliation: The Grueling Path to Making the Grizzlies, a Crowd-Pleasing Sports Flick Set in Nunavut.” *The Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2019. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/article-mistakes-and-reconciliation-the-grueling-path-to-making-the-grizzlies/>.

<sup>37</sup> Houpt, “Mistakes and Reconciliation.”

<sup>38</sup> Jason Prno et al. “Community Vulnerability to Climate Change in the Context of Other Exposure-Sensitivities in Kugluktuk, Nunavut.” *Polar Research* 30 (1): 1–N.PAG. 2011 p.13 doi:10.3402/polar.v30i0.7363.

the game of lacrosse became better known worldwide, and would even appear on a passport that a previous Cayugan chief had helped form.

Deskaheh would be the first person to use the Haudenosaunee passport to travel to Geneva in the hopes that he would be able to bring attention to the suffering of the Haudenosaunee, and for that matter, all Indigenous peoples. While his effort was unsuccessful, he helped set the framework for a key identifier of Haudenosaunee sovereignty, the Haudenosaunee passport.<sup>39</sup> The Haudenosaunee passport was officially created in 1977 and has been frequently used since, with the Haudenosaunee using their passports whenever they travelled for international tournaments. The passports have been linked to the Haudenosaunee nationals as they are used for travelling to tournaments, with both the passports and the game of lacrosse assisting in the fight for the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty by representing Indigenous culture internationally, and giving Indigenous people a platform for expressing their issues. It has also allowed other international lacrosse teams to recognize the Haudenosaunee as an autonomous nation.

To provide an example of the struggles of the Haudenosaunee peoples, the fictional story *Borders* by Thomas King sees a Blackfoot mother and son attempting to cross the

---

<sup>39</sup>Hauptman, "Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership." p.137-138

border to visit their daughter and sister who had moved to Salt Lake City. The Mother continually identifies as being Blackfoot at both the entrance to the Canadian and American border, with one of the border security guards stating, “I’d be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be American or Canadian.”<sup>40</sup> This Blackfoot family’s trials and tribulations parallel the struggles that the Haudenosaunee occasionally face when travelling with their Haudenosaunee passports. One example was a group of Haudenosaunee men returning home from Bolivia on a Haudenosaunee passport. When they got to the last checkpoint of their trip, they were informed that they would be refused entry. As a result, the group ended up being stuck in El Salvador for about a month until finally getting clearance to enter the States and, subsequently, Canada.<sup>41</sup>

A few months later, the Haudenosaunee Nationals were preparing for the 2010 lacrosse tournament; however, it was revealed that because of their Haudenosaunee passports, they could not travel. Instead of travelling on either American or Canadian passports, “the Nationals drew widespread media attention as they remained in New York, refusing to travel on

---

<sup>40</sup> Thomas King, “Borders.” In *One Good Story, That One: Stories*, 131–48. *University of Minnesota Press*, 1993. P.138-139 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt4cgg9w.12>.

<sup>41</sup> Greg Horn, “Canada Prevents Mohawks from Returning Home on Haudenosaunee Passports.” *Kahnawakenews*, 2010. <https://kahnawakenews.com/canada-prevents-mohawks-from-returning-home-on-haudenosaunee-passports-p798.htm>.

anything but the documentation of their own tribal nation.”<sup>42</sup> The team had even been offered emergency United States passports, but they had rejected them, citing that they would rather miss the tournament than travel under another nation, as they would be unable to represent their identity.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, the United States granted the team one-time waivers to re-enter the US after the tournament. However, the United Kingdom still refused to grant the team work visas. Consequently, the team could not play and was demoted from the top division.<sup>44</sup> The National team faced the same problem that the Haudenosaunee men who travelled to Bolivia faced; however, this time, the issue garnered much more attention, bringing up the issue of travelling on Indigenous-created passports. It also brought up the much more critical issue of how Indigenous Canadians and Americans should be recognized internationally. The Haudenosaunee men, the Haudenosaunee Nationals, and the mother in *Borders* all chose to address the issue of being forced to identify as either Canadian or American instead of being able to identify as their sovereign group. As a result of this dilemma, more countries

---

<sup>42</sup> Art Coulson, “How Lacrosse Came to the Haudenosaunee.” *Native Peoples Magazine* 27, no. 4 (July 2014): 90.

<sup>43</sup> Evan MacAskill, “Iroquois Lacrosse Team Caught in a Cleft Stick over Passports.” *The Guardian*, July 13, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/13/iroquois-lacrosse-passport-world-cup>.

<sup>44</sup> Tabitha De Bruin, “The Iroquois Nationals and the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published August 15, 2013; Last Edited December 16, 2013.

would begin to honour Haudenosaunee passports for future lacrosse events, with Israel being the first to do so for the 2018 world championships,<sup>45</sup> followed by Ireland, which did so for the under-21 world lacrosse championship.<sup>46</sup>

During the 2018 World Lacrosse Championships, the Haudenosaunee Nationals finished third in the overall standings. Since the 2018 World Lacrosse Championships were to serve as the qualifications for the World Games, the Haudenosaunee Nationals should have been eligible for the tournament. However, before the games, the International World Games Association (IGWA) “cited concerns that the Haudenosaunee Nationals do not represent a sovereign nation as justification for excluding them from the World Games in Birmingham, Alabama.”<sup>47</sup> The criteria that the, International World’s Game Association, (IGWA) cited states that for a team to be considered a “country,” they must be an “independent State recognized by

---

<sup>45</sup> Aidan Fishman, “Iroquois Lacrosse Team Defies BDS to Reach Israel,” B’nai Brith Canada, May 18, 2021, [https://www.bnaibrith.ca/iroquois\\_lacrosse\\_team\\_defies\\_bds\\_to\\_reach\\_israel/](https://www.bnaibrith.ca/iroquois_lacrosse_team_defies_bds_to_reach_israel/).

<sup>46</sup> Sean Kirst, “Between Haudenosaunee and Ireland, Lacrosse Builds Deep Bond of Respect.” Buffalo News, August 13, 2022. [https://buffalonews.com/news/between-haudenosaunee-and-ireland-lacrosse-builds-deep-bond-of-respect/article\\_fa24de98-1a56-11ed-baee-63f1b5926f66.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/between-haudenosaunee-and-ireland-lacrosse-builds-deep-bond-of-respect/article_fa24de98-1a56-11ed-baee-63f1b5926f66.html).

<sup>47</sup> Mallory Brown, “Challenges Ahead: Recognition and Sovereignty Issues Face by the Haudenosaunee Nationals Lacrosse Team on Their Path to the 2028 Olympics.” Challenges Ahead: Recognition and Sovereignty Issues Face by the Haudenosaunee Nationals Lacrosse Team on Their Path To the 2028 Olympics | Villanova University, February 5, 2024. [https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/law/academics/sportslaw/commentary/mslj\\_blog/2024/challengesAheadRecognitionandSovereigntyIssuesFacebytheHaudenosauneeNationalsLacrosseTeamonTheirPathTothe2028Olympics.html](https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/law/academics/sportslaw/commentary/mslj_blog/2024/challengesAheadRecognitionandSovereigntyIssuesFacebytheHaudenosauneeNationalsLacrosseTeamonTheirPathTothe2028Olympics.html).



the international community.”<sup>48</sup> Regardless of the true intentions of the IGWA, the exclusion of the Haudenosaunee Nationals was “reflective of the many hurdles the Haudenosaunee have continually faced to have their sovereignty recognized.”<sup>49</sup> The Haudenosaunee Nationals were once again barred from competing in the Creator’s game, a cornerstone of their culture. The action of the IGWA showed a lack of recognition for the Haudenosaunee as the independent nation they were.

However, one of the competitors would rise to recognize the Haudenosaunee as an independent nation and understand the importance of the lacrosse game to the Haudenosaunee, with that national team being Ireland. The Irish national team had recognized the importance of lacrosse to the Haudenosaunee team and felt that it would be wrong for the ancestors of the game’s creators not to be there.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the action was done out of respect for the Haudenosaunee culture or for the assistance that the Haudenosaunee people provided the Irish throughout the Irish potato famine.<sup>51</sup> Either way, it served as

---

<sup>48</sup> Samantha Pope, “More than Just a Game: Iroquois Nationals Fight for Inclusion in the 2022 World Games.” *Canadian Geographic*, August 11, 2020. <https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/more-than-just-a-game-iroquois-nationals-fight-for-inclusion-in-the-2022-world-games/>.

<sup>49</sup> Samantha Pope, “More than Just a Game.”

<sup>50</sup> Bo Hamby, “Ireland Lacrosse Bows out of 2022 World Games so Iroquois Nationals Can Play.” NPR, October 1, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/01/917033527/ireland-lacrosse-bows-out-of-2022-world-games-so-iroquois-nationals-can-play>.

<sup>51</sup> Talia Ricci, “Toronto Researchers Help Uncover Ontario First Nations’ Donations to Irish Famine Relief Fund | CBC News.” CBCnews, March 17, 2024.

another chapter in the symbiotic relationship between the Irish and the Haudenosaunee peoples.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, the action taken by the Irish national lacrosse team demonstrates the respect that some of the other national teams have towards the Haudenosaunee Nationals, with others also displaying that respect. One example of this is the president of the United States, Joe Biden, who backed the bid for the Haudenosaunee Nationals to compete at the 2028 Olympic games in the event of lacrosse.<sup>53</sup> The Irish National team's actions show a change in the perception of what defines a nation and the recognition of how Indigenous people are independent from the countries where their land resides. Additionally, it shows how the Haudenosaunee Nationals has helped others recognize the sovereignty and culture of Indigenous peoples. This serves as an example of how the team as a whole has been working towards sovereignty. Still, the Haudenosaunee Nationals' individual players have also worked

---

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-first-nations-irish-famine-donations-1.7143918>.

<sup>52</sup>Matt Kinnear, 'Our Gift to the World': Haudenosaunee Optimistic, Hopeful for Olympic Inclusion." Inside Lacrosse, October 13, 2023. <https://www.insidelacrosse.com/article/after-ireland-s-gesture-for-the-iroquois-the-nations-are-together-as-one-/5689>

<sup>53</sup>Jenna Kunze, "The Haudenosaunee National Lacrosse Teams Gain Support from Biden for 2028 Olympics." Native News Online, December 19, 2023. <https://nativenewsonline.net/arts-entertainment/the-haudenosaunee-national-lacrosse-teams-gain-support-from-biden-for-2028-olympics#:~:text=At%20the%20White%20House%20Tribal,of%20support%20for%20tribal%20sovereignty>.

towards recognizing sovereignty and the issues surrounding Indigenous communities.

The way that the Haudenosaunee Nationals have helped with the recognition of the Haudenosaunee sovereignty, as well as the recognition of other Indigenous nations' sovereignty, is by using their platform as lacrosse players to promote causes that they care about. One of the more prominent examples is players Lyle Thompson and Randy Staats, who use their platforms as professional lacrosse players to educate others on the history and adverse effects of residential schools and how they still plague Indigenous communities.<sup>54</sup> They began doing this after a mass grave was discovered just outside of the Kamloops residential school.<sup>55</sup> The Premier Lacrosse League (PLL), also chipped in, commissioning a helmet strap to be made that would demonstrate the Every Child Matters movement. They commissioned Steven Saddler of Laxstraps, who had previously made straps campaigning to include the Haudenosaunee nationals at the 2022 World Games.<sup>56</sup> Other organizations that existed before the Kamloops discovery focused on bringing

---

<sup>54</sup>Ty Cunningham, "Every Child Matters: PLL Players Educate and Advocate for Victims of Residential Schools." Lacrosse Playground, August 11, 2021. <https://www.lacrosseplayground.com/every-child-matters-pll-players-educate-and-advocate-for-victims-of-residential-schools/>.

<sup>55</sup>Ty Cunningham, "Every Child Matters: PLL Players Educate and Advocate for Victims of Residential Schools."

<sup>56</sup>Ty Cunningham, "Every Child Matters: PLL Players Educate and Advocate for Victims of Residential Schools."

recognition to Indigenous communities' issues, with one example being Turtle Island Lacrosse. Lacrosse players Brandon Bomberry and Randy Staats founded Turtle Island Lacrosse to spread “their culture as Haudenosaunee people and the game throughout Turtle Island and beyond.”<sup>57</sup>

In conclusion, the game of lacrosse holds a special place in Haudenosaunee culture as a representation of the Haudenosaunee people. The game itself is even embedded within Haudenosaunee culture through stories and traditions. Consequently, the healing power of the game has resulted in more than just the Haudenosaunee being healed by playing the game; it has become a symbol that allows the Haudenosaunee to distinguish themselves as a sovereign nation. The formation of the Haudenosaunee Nationals has allowed them to become a national team that can represent themselves on the international stage, and has allowed them to address the challenges that the Haudenosaunee people have faced. Furthermore, the game has allowed other nations to recognize the Haudenosaunee's autonomy and the culture within their nation. Additionally the promotion of lacrosse has resulted in others taking the medicine game and using it to heal communities that have been plagued by various issues and has given lacrosse players a platform to

---

<sup>57</sup>Turtle Island Lacrosse, “Turtle Island Lacrosse Collection.” Epoch Lacrosse, March 15, 2021. <https://www.epochlacrosse.com/turtle-island-lacrosse-collection/>.

promote issues that are close to their own heart. Thus, the lacrosse game has allowed for the promotion and recognition of Haudenosaunee culture and sovereignty

## Bibliography

- Abler S. Thomas “SHAKÓYE:WA:THA’ (Sagoyewatha, Otetiani, Red Jacket),” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 6, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed March 15, 2024, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shakoye\\_wa\\_tha\\_6E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/shakoye_wa_tha_6E.html).
- (AP) "Why We Changed Our Name". [haudenosaunenationals.com](http://haudenosaunenationals.com). Retrieved 30 June 2022.
- Arnold, Philip P. “The Creator’s Game at Onondaga.” Indigenous Values Initiative, June 9, 2017. <https://indigenousvalues.org/creators-game-onondaga/>.
- Brown, Mallory. “Challenges Ahead: Recognition and Sovereignty Issues Face by the Haudenosaunee Nationals Lacrosse Team on Their Path to the 2028 Olympics.” Villanova University, February 5, 2024. [https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/law/academics/sportslaw/commentary/mslj\\_blog/2024/ChallengesAheadRecognitionandSovereigntyIssuesFacebytheHaudenosauneeNationalsLacrosseTeamonTheirPathTothe2028Olympics.html](https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/law/academics/sportslaw/commentary/mslj_blog/2024/ChallengesAheadRecognitionandSovereigntyIssuesFacebytheHaudenosauneeNationalsLacrosseTeamonTheirPathTothe2028Olympics.html).
- Coulson, Art. “How Lacrosse Came to the Haudenosaunee.” Native Peoples Magazine 27, no. 4 (July 2014): 88–91.

Cunnington, Ty. "Every Child Matters: PLL Players Educate and Advocate for Victims of Residential Schools."

*Lacrosse Playground*, August 11, 2021.

<https://www.lacrosseplayground.com/every-child-matters-pll-players-educate-and-advocate-for-victims-of-residential-schools/>.

de Bruin, Tabitha. "The Iroquois Nationals and the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships." *The Canadian*

*Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published August 15, 2013; Last Edited December 16, 2013.

Downey, Allan. 2015. "Playing the Creator's Came on God's Day: The Controversy of Sunday Lacrosse Games in Haudenosaunee Communities, 1916-24." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 49 (3): 111–43.

doi:10.3138/jcs.49.3.111.

Edwards, Kyle. "Sport." Indigenous People's Atlas of Canada, June 8, 2018.

<https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/sport/>.

Evans, Noelle E. C. "An Indigenous Lacrosse Team Reclaims Its Native Identity." NPR, June 26, 2023.

<https://www.npr.org/2023/06/26/1184104966/an-indigenous-lacrosse-team-reclaims-its-native-identity>.

Fisher, Donald M. "'Splendid but Undesirable Isolation.'" Recasting Canada's National Game as Box

Lacrosse, 1931-1932", *Sport History Review* 36, 2  
(2005): 115-129

<https://web.archive.org/web/20171017042337/https://www.humankinetics.com/acucustom/sitename/Documents/DocumentItem/5223.pdf>

Fishman, Aidan. "Iroquois Lacrosse Team Defies BDS to Reach Israel," *B'nai Brith Canada*, May 18, 2021, [https://www.bnaibrith.ca/iroquois\\_lacrosse\\_team\\_defies\\_bds\\_to\\_reach\\_israel/](https://www.bnaibrith.ca/iroquois_lacrosse_team_defies_bds_to_reach_israel/).

Gambill, Guy T, Charles Lippert, and Weshki-ayaad. "Freelang Ojibwe-English Dictionary." FREELANG, November 30, 2003. <https://www.freelang.net/dictionary/ojibwe.php>.

Horn, Greg. "Canada Prevents Mohawks from Returning Home on Haudenosaunee Passports." *Kahnawakenews*, 2010. <https://kahnawakenews.com/canada-prevents-mohawks-from-returning-home-on-haudenosaunee-passports-p798.htm>.

Hamby, Bo. "Ireland Lacrosse Bows out of 2022 World Games so Iroquois Nationals Can Play." NPR, October 1, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/01/917033527/ireland-lacrosse-bows-out-of-2022-world-games-so-iroquois-nationals-can-play>.



Kinnear, Matt. “After Ireland’s Gesture for the Iroquois, the Nations Are ‘together as One’ .” Inside Lacrosse, September 25, 2020.

<https://www.insidelacrosse.com/article/after-ireland-s-gesture-for-the-iroquois-the-nations-are-together-as-one-/56891>.

Kinnear, Matt. ““Our Gift to the World’: Haudenosaunee Optimistic, Hopeful for Olympic Inclusion.” Inside Lacrosse, October 13, 2023.

<https://www.insidelacrosse.com/article/our-gift-to-the-world-haudenosaunee-optimistic-hopeful-for-olympic-inclusion/62173>.

Kirst, Sean. “Between Haudenosaunee and Ireland, Lacrosse Builds Deep Bond of Respect.” Buffalo News, August 13, 2022. [https://buffalonews.com/news/between-haudenosaunee-and-ireland-lacrosse-builds-deep-bond-of-respect/article\\_fa24de98-1a56-11ed-baee-63f1b5926f66.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/between-haudenosaunee-and-ireland-lacrosse-builds-deep-bond-of-respect/article_fa24de98-1a56-11ed-baee-63f1b5926f66.html).

Koch, Robert G. “Chief Deskaheh.” crookedlakereview, 1992. [https://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34\\_66/54sept1992/54koch.html](https://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34_66/54sept1992/54koch.html).

Legrae, Nathan and James Niigaanwewidam Sinclair. “The White Paper, 1969.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

Historica Canada. Article published September 11, 2015; Last Edited June 10, 2020

Lipsyte, Robert. "Lacrosse: All-American Game." *The New York Times*, June 15, 1986.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/15/magazine/lacrosse-all-american-game.html>.

Macskill, Evan. "Iroquois Lacrosse Team Caught in a Cleft Stick over Passports." *The Guardian*, July 13, 2010.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/13/iroquois-lacrosse-passport-world-cup>.

Meen, Sharon P. "Lord's Day Alliance of Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published February 07, 2006; Last Edited December 16, 2013.

National Museum of the American Indian. "Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators." 2009.  
<https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/HaudenosauneeGuide.pdf>.

Pope, Samantha. "More than Just a Game: Iroquois Nationals Fight for Inclusion in the 2022 World Games." *Canadian Geographic*, August 11, 2020.  
<https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/more-than-just-a-game-iroquois-nationals-fight-for-inclusion-in-the-2022-world-games/>.

Ricci, Talia. “Toronto Researchers Help Uncover Ontario First Nations’ Donations to Irish Famine Relief Fund.”

CBCnews, March 17, 2024.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-first-nations-irish-famine-donations-1.7143918>.

Saddler, Steve. “Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition Fundraiser LaxStraps Two-Pack.” LAX Straps, November 16, 2021.

<https://www.laxstraps.com/product/native-american-boarding-school-healing-coalition-fundraiser-laxstraps-two-pack/>.

Sinclair, Niigaanwewidam James, and Sharon Dainard. “Sixties Scoop.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published June 21, 2016; Last Edited January 10, 2024.

Taylor, Anna. “Haudenosaunee Nationals’ Olympic Inclusion Receives Presidential Endorsement.” NLL, December 8, 2023. <https://www.nll.com/news/haudenosaunee-nationals-olympic-inclusion-receives-presidential-endorsement/>