

LEVELED Book • Z

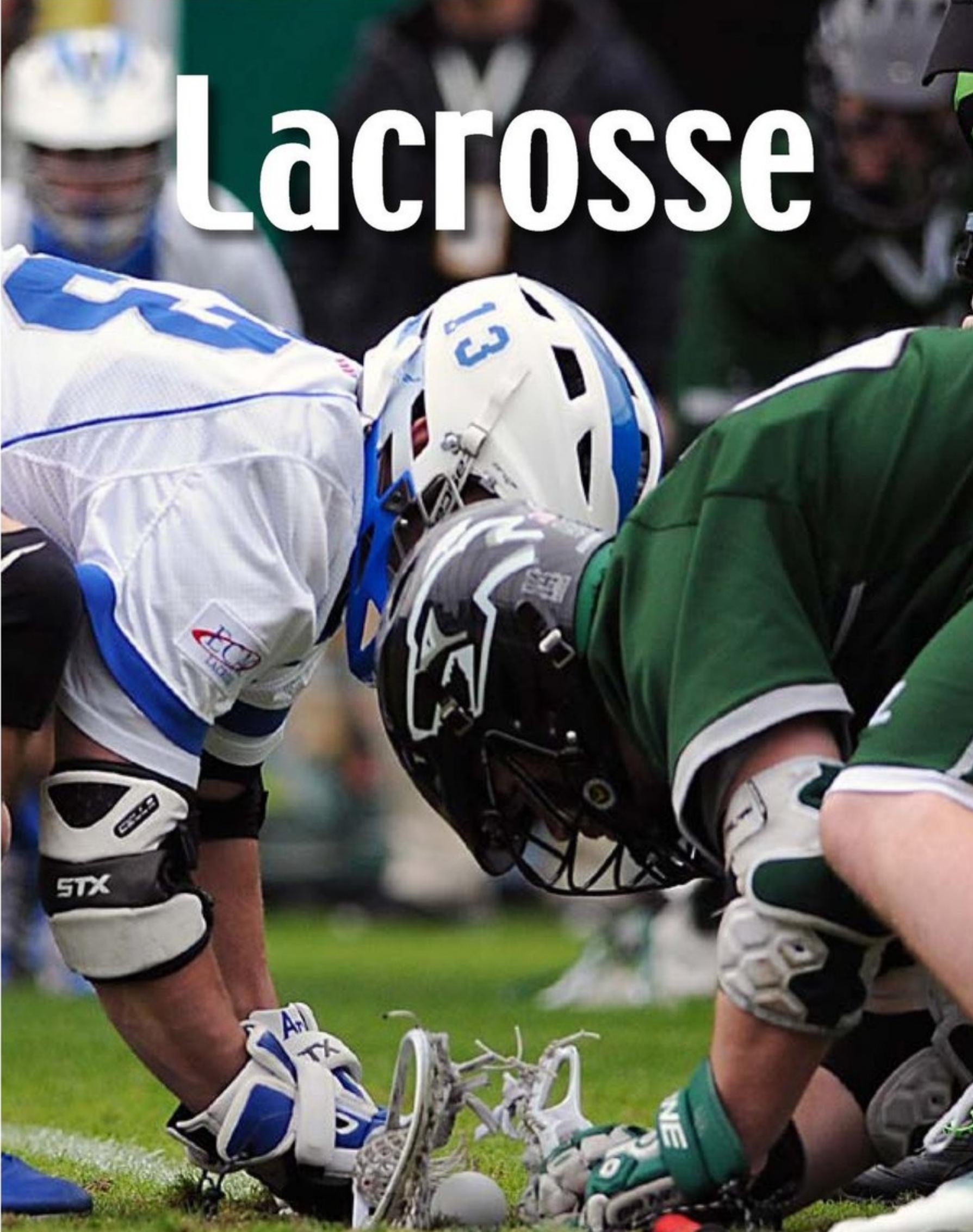
Lacrosse



Written by Evan Russell

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

What makes lacrosse a thrilling and fast-paced sport?

Words to Know

adapted
agility
cradle
gravitated
humanitarian
indigenous

inducted
mainstream
maneuvering
rite
spiritual
zoning

Front and back cover: College women compete in Hamden, Connecticut.

Title page: Loyola University Greyhounds and the Air Force Academy Falcons face off at Mile High School in Denver, Colorado.

Page 3: Women practice for the national championship in 1926.

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Spectacular Sports
Level Z Leveled Book
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A Cornell University player runs with the ball in a lacrosse match against Syracuse University.

Why Is Lacrosse Spectacular?

The thrilling game of lacrosse comes from one of the oldest competitive field sports in the world. Europeans arriving in North America **adapted** lacrosse from a game that First Nations (Native) people played in various forms for centuries. Lacrosse is the fastest field game there is and one of the most challenging and exciting to play and watch.

The sport has much in common with three extremely popular sports—soccer, hockey, and basketball—yet for various reasons, for much of the twentieth century only a relatively small number of athletes in a few regions played lacrosse. However, the sport's popularity is booming, and lacrosse is entering the **mainstream** of sports today—especially as a youth sport.

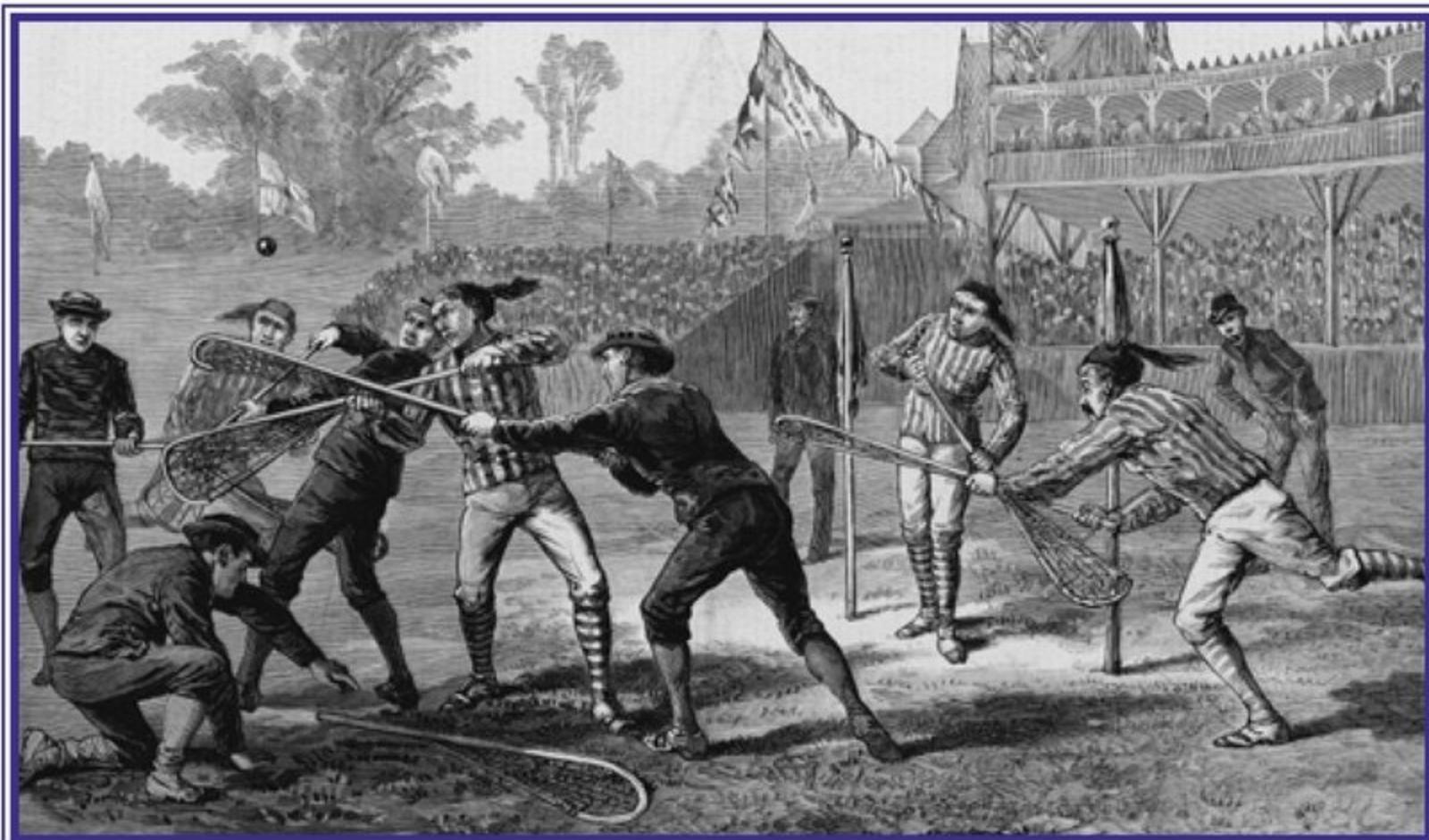
Where Did Lacrosse Begin?

Experts think lacrosse developed among the Algonquin tribes in the St. Lawrence River valley, in present-day Canada and New York. In time, the game spread far to the west and south. Different tribes called the game different names, but the Algonquin name for lacrosse is *baggataway*.

The original form of the game was very different from the version of lacrosse that is played today. The field of play could cover miles, and each side would rarely have fewer than one hundred players—sometimes as many as one thousand. Still, most tribes used curved sticks that were 3 to 4 feet (0.9–1.2 m) long, with a net attached to pass, carry, and shoot a ball made of stuffed deerskin.

Early lacrosse competitions were huge and could last up to three days.





A sketch by artist H.W. Hall shows First Nations and other players in a well-attended lacrosse game in Canada.

First Nations people considered lacrosse a sacred **rite** watched over by the gods, and many tribes called it *the Creator's game*. They used the game to toughen and strengthen young men, to settle major tribal disputes and conflicts, and to reinforce tribal fellowships.

In 1834, a local tribe played a demonstration match for a predominantly white Canadian audience at a racecourse in Montreal, Quebec. The game took hold in the region, and before long there were many white and First Nations lacrosse clubs in Canada. In 1860, a Montreal dentist named George Beers codified, or wrote a rulebook for, the game. Because his rules are the foundation of the rules used today, Beers is called the “father of modern lacrosse.” Beers addressed the size of the stick, ball, and goal, as well as the number of players and the dimensions of the playing field.

The game took off in the United States in the 1870s. Lacrosse clubs sprang up in New York City, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and Newport, Rhode Island. Male students played lacrosse in private schools and elite colleges throughout the Northeast, and Rosabelle Sinclair, a member of the first international Scottish team, introduced women's lacrosse at Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore. Only teams at these schools played the game. For this reason, people considered lacrosse a gentleman's sport—one that was played for the sake of the game, and not for paying audiences, much less advertisers. As a result, many talented athletes who might have helped the sport grow had no interest in it. Instead, they **gravitated** toward sports where they might find fame and fortune.

Another reason lacrosse stalled in the United States was a lack of equipment, including sticks, or *crosses*. Until the 1970s, only certain Mohawk craftsmen in Ontario, Canada made crosses. The sport was unpopular in the United States, so there was little demand for sporting-goods manufacturers to mass-produce sticks the way they did baseball gloves and basketballs. When cheaper sticks made of lightweight metal hit the market in the 1970s, lacrosse began to really take off in the United States.

A Sport for Everyone

Today, men, women, boys, and girls all over the world enjoy lacrosse. In iceless hockey rinks, some teams play an indoor version of the game called *box lacrosse*. Teams typically play traditional outdoor lacrosse tournaments in football stadiums.

There are many different levels of lacrosse. The Federation of International Lacrosse includes nations from across the globe and holds men's and women's World Championship tournaments every four years. In North America, there are two professional-level leagues. Major League Lacrosse represents outdoor lacrosse, consisting of eight teams, and the National Lacrosse League represents the indoor, box lacrosse league, consisting of nine teams. Men's and women's teams play lacrosse competitively in colleges throughout the United States and Canada. Although lacrosse has long been hugely popular and competitive in northeastern colleges, interest in it is rapidly spreading, and it is now a significant college sport.



Lacrosse has been included in the Summer Olympics twice, in 1904 and 1908. This photo shows the Canadian winners in 1908.

In the United States, lacrosse is growing most rapidly at the youth level, as well as in high schools. As the game is embraced by youth across the country, its popularity at the college and professional levels will certainly increase.

Outside North America, there have always been small groups of dedicated lacrosse enthusiasts in Australia and England. Northern England, especially the area around the large city of Manchester, has produced some of the finest lacrosse players ever. Over the last thirty years, lacrosse has been growing in popularity throughout Europe and East Asia and all over the globe. Lacrosse may one day become the next huge international sport.



Basic Rules of Play

Lacrosse shares many aspects with soccer, hockey, and basketball, but lacrosse is definitely unique. The most distinctive feature of lacrosse is the crosse itself—the stick every player uses to **cradle**, catch, pass, and shoot the lacrosse ball. Cradling is the back-and-forth motion of a crosse head that keeps the ball in place while a player runs. No one but the goalie may touch the ball with his or her hands (in that way, the rules are the same as those for soccer).



The shaft of a crosse is between 2 and 5 feet (0.6–1.5 m) long, and at the top is a triangular head that is fitted with a net. The goalkeeper's crosse head is larger.

The goal is 6 feet (1.8 m) high and 6 feet across. The ball is rubber and about 8 inches (20 cm) in circumference. In men's lacrosse, the field is 110 yards (101 m) long and 60 yards (55 m) wide. There is a midfield line, marked with an X at the center, where two opposing players face off at the start of every period. At the blow of a whistle, they each try to get control of the ball. Each team has ten players: three attackers who stay on the opposing team's half of the field, three defenders who stay on their side of the field, three midfielders who cover the entire field, and a goalkeeper.

Men's Lacrosse Field



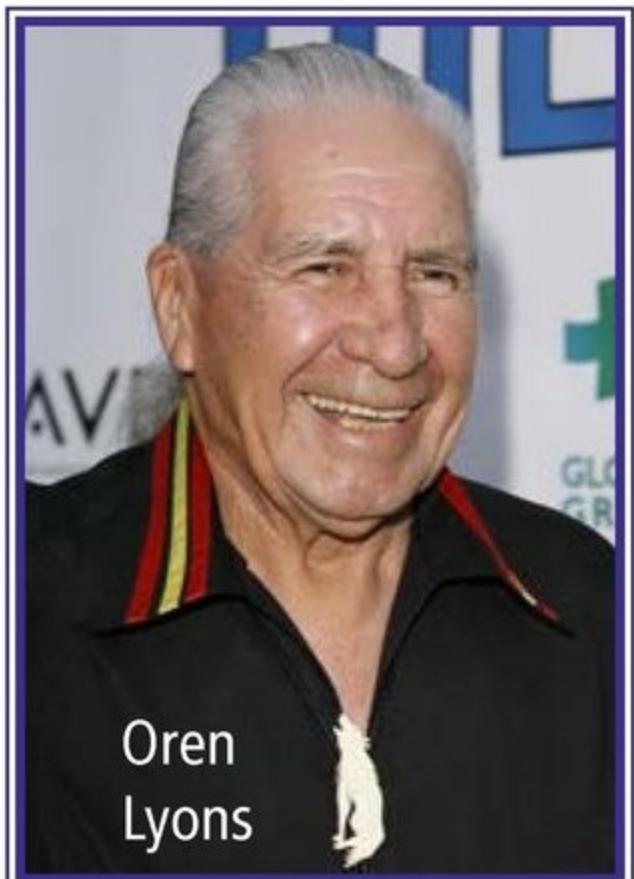
Women's lacrosse fields have fewer markings. There are ten players on men's teams and twelve on women's.

The object of the game is to score the most goals by hurling or bouncing the ball into the opponent's net. After the face-off, the player with the ball runs toward the other team's end of the field. That player can try to get the ball into the goal or pass the ball to an attacker on his or her team who is in good position to score. The defensive players on the other team try to defend their goal and get the ball away from the attacking team. To get the ball, defensive players can poke the ball carrier with their sticks or slap at his or her stick to make the ball fly out of the carrier's crosse. There are no tie games in lacrosse; sudden-death overtime settles a tied match. The playing time is one hour. Men's lacrosse is separated into four fifteen-minute quarters; women's lacrosse is separated into two halves. Other differences between men's and women's lacrosse are the **zoning** of the field and the number of players—in women's lacrosse there are twelve players on the field for each side instead of ten. Women's lacrosse also allows much less physical contact than the men's game.

What all kinds of lacrosse share is speed, speed, speed! The running, **maneuvering**, and complex teamwork of the players is breathtaking to behold, and shots on goal can easily exceed 100 miles (161 km) per hour.

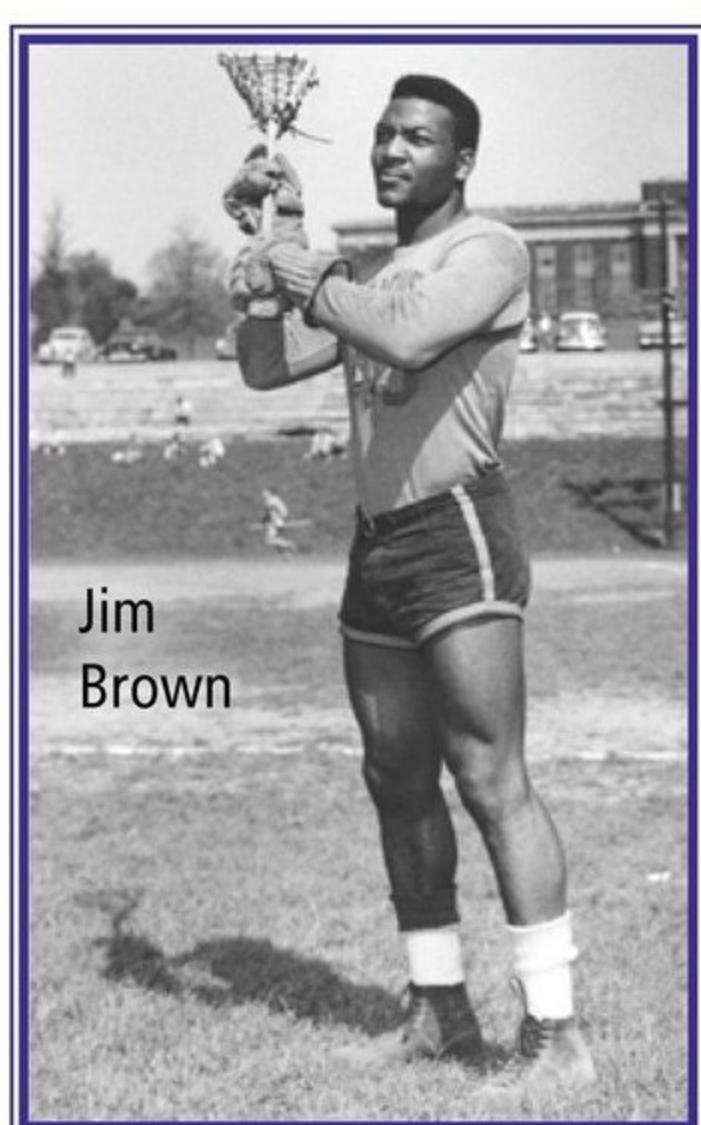
Lacrosse Heroes

Legendary goalkeeper Oren R. Lyons grew up on the Onondaga Reservation and went on to do important work off the lacrosse field. Oren



played for Syracuse University and was named All-American athlete there in 1957. It was after his sporting career, though, that he began his most important work. Today, he is a **spiritual** leader called a Faithkeeper of the Onondaga, one of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. His **humanitarian** efforts have helped **indigenous** people around the world.

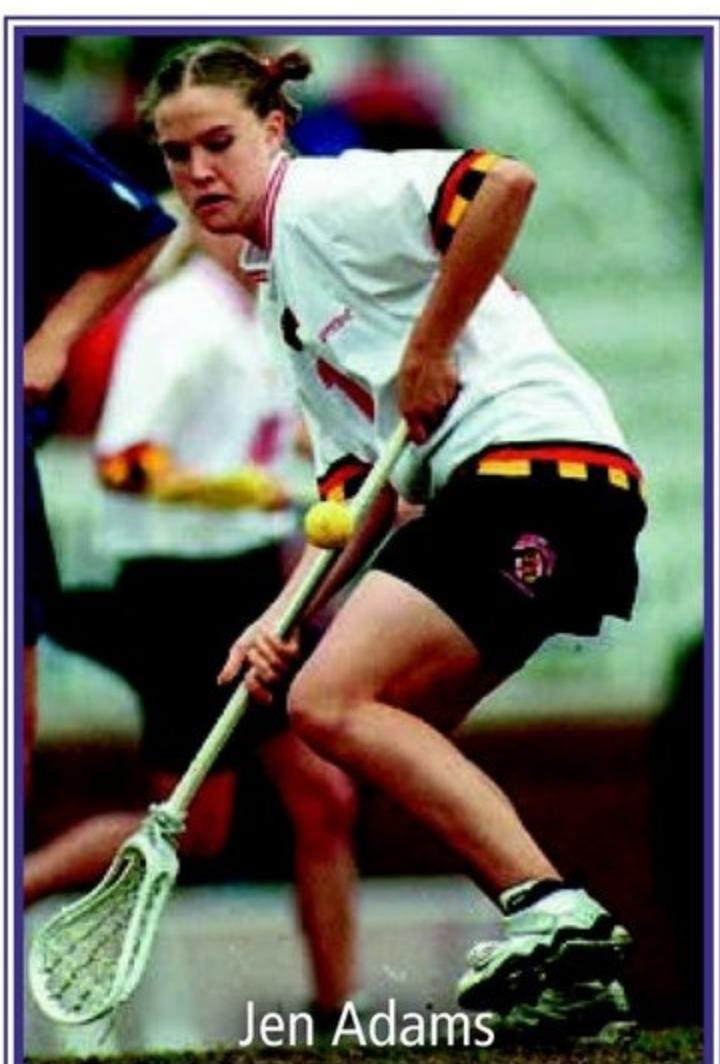
Considered one of football's all-time great players, Jim Brown was **inducted** into the pro football Hall of Fame in 1971. Jim's first love, however, was lacrosse, and many consider him America's greatest-ever player of the sport. Raised in Manhasset, New York, on Long Island (an area with a longtime lacrosse culture), Jim excelled in the sport at Syracuse University and always saw the game as the ultimate outlet for his athleticism.





Like Jim Brown and Oren Lyons Jr., Gary Gait played for Syracuse University. Gary, along with his twin brother, Paul, broke almost every collegiate record there was to break. The two forever changed lacrosse play in terms of speed and trick ball handling. Gary went on to a successful career in both the National Lacrosse League and Major League Lacrosse, and he remains Syracuse's all-time leading goal scorer. He currently coaches the women's lacrosse team there.

Jen Adams is the head coach of the women's team at Loyola University in Maryland. Before that, this young Australian came to America and shattered many records in women's lacrosse. She is famous for her speed and agility on the field, and for her great team play and sportsmanship. Jen scored a record 445 goal points playing for the University of Maryland Terrapins, and in 2009, she played for the Australian team at the Women's Lacrosse World Cup.





High school teams compete in a match in the Oregon High School Lacrosse Association. The sport is more popular now than ever.

A Traditional Game for the Future

For hundreds of years, First Nations people played the traditional game that became known as lacrosse. It was a deeply spiritual and political tradition for many tribes. Today, lacrosse lives on for people all around the world.

Lacrosse is a fast-growing sport that more and more people are embracing. The speed of the game, its unique challenges, and the interactive team play make it simply irresistible to young athletes, and as a result, youth clubs are popping up across North America. Who knows where or when the next Jen Adams or Jim Brown will show up in the lacrosse world?

Glossary

adapted (<i>v.</i>)	changed to fit a new or specific situation or environment (p. 4)
agility (<i>n.</i>)	the ability to move quickly and easily (p. 14)
cradle (<i>v.</i>)	to gently hold or support someone or something (p. 10)
gravitated (<i>v.</i>)	moved toward or became interested in something or someone (p. 7)
humanitarian (<i>adj.</i>)	of or related to a person or group that helps people, especially by eliminating pain and suffering (p. 13)
indigenous (<i>adj.</i>)	native to a particular place (p. 13)
inducted (<i>v.</i>)	formally made part of or admitted as a member of a group or organization (p. 13)
mainstream (<i>n.</i>)	the dominant ideas, behaviors, or trends of a group (p. 4)
maneuvering (<i>v.</i>)	moving around; guiding the motion of something (p. 12)
rite (<i>n.</i>)	a ceremony or ritual to honor a religious or other solemn occasion (p. 6)
spiritual (<i>adj.</i>)	related to spirit, soul, or a divine being (p. 13)
zoning (<i>n.</i>)	the act of designating or marking off an area that has unique features or a special set of rules (p. 12)

Lacrosse

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book

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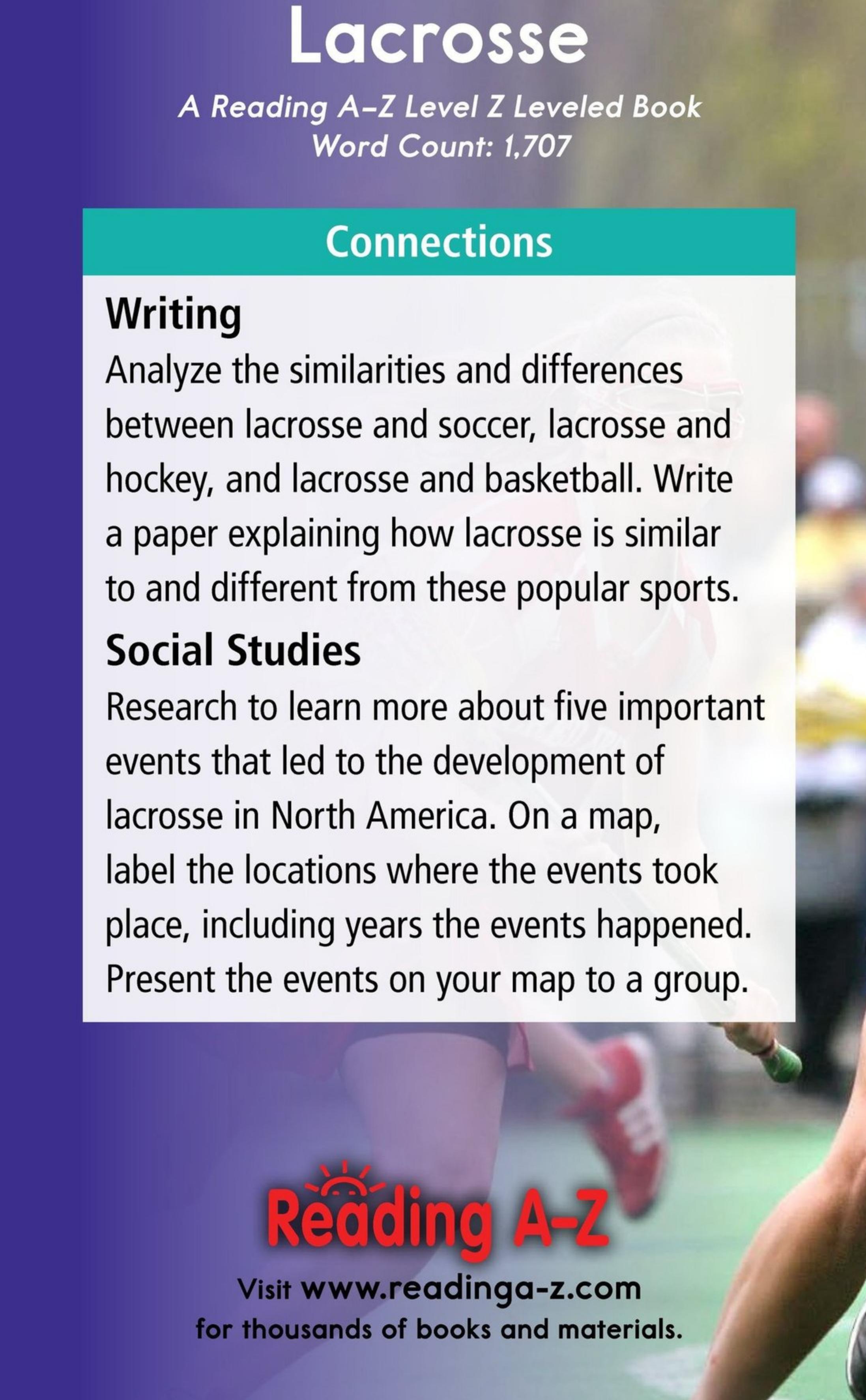
Connections

Writing

Analyze the similarities and differences between lacrosse and soccer, lacrosse and hockey, and lacrosse and basketball. Write a paper explaining how lacrosse is similar to and different from these popular sports.

Social Studies

Research to learn more about five important events that led to the development of lacrosse in North America. On a map, label the locations where the events took place, including years the events happened. Present the events on your map to a group.

A blurred background image of a lacrosse player in motion, wearing a white helmet and red shorts, holding a green lacrosse stick. The player is on a grassy field.

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