

ORIGINS OF THE GAME



Deyhontsigwa'eh (They Bump Hips): Lacrosse of the Onondaga Nation

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It's hard to imagine Central New York today without the game of Lacrosse. Athletes, schools and colleges from this area have benefited from the fact that the game of Deyhontsigwa'eh (They Bump Hips) has been played here, in Onondaga Nation Territory, since time immemorial.

Over 1,000 years ago, at Onondaga Lake, the original five warring nations came together under the "Great Law of Peace," to establish the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, or "People of the Longhouse." The Onondaga Nation, south of Syracuse, is the "Central Fire" of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. From Albany to Niagara Falls they are Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Tuscarora (joined in 1700s) and Seneca. It was here at Onondaga Lake that Deyhontsigwa'eh became an integral part of that peace process. The Great Law of Peace is an ancient governmental and ceremonial process that has kept "burning" at the Onondaga Nation for millennia. It influenced the Founding Fathers of the United States, and the Founding Mothers of the Women's Movement.

The Onondagas also refer to Deyhontsigwa'eh as the "Creator's Game," and the "Medicine Game." The game is a form of ceremonial healing which can uplift people's spirits. Deyhontsigwa'eh is the Creator's favorite game and it is perpetually played in the Sky World to the delight of all departed souls. According to the Haudenosaunee, it is a gift of the Creator and they play it for his pleasure—it's played hard, with heart, and with gratitude. In turn, the game should be viewed as a gift to us all from the Haudenosaunee.

Writing to his French benefactors in 1636, Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf witnessed the game and found it too closely tied with non-Christian religious ceremony. He realized he could more effectively convert the

Haudenosaunee by renaming it "lacrosse," because the "racket" resembled a Bishop's crozier.

One hundred years later, white Canadians began to play the game. They created their own rules, modified the stick, and used the game to establish their uniquely North American identity. Not until 1843 was the first game played between a white team and a Mohawk team. The deerskin ball was soon replaced with a hard rubber ball. By the time George Beers created the first rulebook in 1868 reporters started referring to it as Canada's national game.

At Syracuse University, students have been transformed into better athletes, fans, and citizens of Central New York by learning about the profound connection to the Haudenosaunee origins of Deyhontsigwa'eh at Onondaga Lake. There is no other place in the country that has such a vital link to its origin. How fortunate we are to live in the heartland where the game originated and where its spirit has been kept alive.

Deyhontsigwa'eh has had a positive impact on Syracuse University, and all the other great coaches, players, fans and lovers of lacrosse whom have moved on from Central New York. Since 1931, Coaches Simmons (Sr. and Jr.) and Coach Desko have demonstrated great respect for the game by continuing this long connection with the Onondaga Nation and the Haudenosaunee.

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