

## THE HISTORY OF SPORT THROUGH POSTAGE STAMPS

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by Théo DENU



*A few days after the publication of this article in the Tribune de Genève, its author died suddenly, causing great distress to his friends and colleagues.*

*A Frenchman, settled for a long while in the birthplace of Rousseau, Théo DENU organised from 1948, at the request of Xavier de Gaulle, brother of the General and Consul General of France, classes in literature, history and geography whilst also working as a journalist, at which he excelled in his theatre critics and his speciality of local news. His passion was always stamp-collecting. He collected with skill and could present, from the history of a postage stamp, the character of a country, its traditions, its dreams and hopes.*

... "When we know how many sports interest and even impassion a good many people, we can just as easily think how those responsible for issuing the postal figurines have not neglected the subjects in close relation to this sort of activity. Thus, a while ago, Canada put into circulation a 5¢ figurine in honour of a sport, whose history dates back to the first inhabitants of the country: Lacrosse.

The Indians already played this game, even before Christopher Columbus began his famous voyage of 1492. The colonials changed the name, which was originally "baggataway" before adopting it, and then adapted it to suit their own needs. For them, the netted and curved end to the club used by the Indians looked more like a bishop's crosier, which was the origin for the name of the game. However, it was only towards the middle of the XIXth Century that the game started to be played to any extent by the whites.

Its development, over the years, has led to some important changes in the dimensions of the pitch and the number of players. For the Indians, living centuries ago, baggataway was more of a combat exercise than a sport for tribal warriors: It set tribe against tribe and village against village. As many as 1,000 men took part in these endurance events, which could sometimes last days.

In these distant times, the goal-posts were made up of one or two posts set in the ground about 400 to 500 yards apart. The players in these conflicts were often savage and the Indian women would encourage them to wrestle violently by brandishing tree branches and pacing up and down the edge of the pitch.

It is generally known that we are indebted to G.W. BEERS, a dentist in Montreal who died in 1900, for the first set of written rules laid down some time after 1860 for the game of lacrosse, as we know it today. A major change took place in the rules in 1942 which gave birth to a new game of lacrosse, where teams of six players battle in a covered arena or in special enclosures outside.

One of the particularities of this Canadian sport is that the sticks continue to be exclusively Indian-made. The Indian community, established in the reserve of Saint-Regis, near Cornwall, Ontario, use methods as old as the game itself with purely Indian workmen. They not only meet the local demands for this equipment, but also export to the United States, England, Australia and other countries where this particular game is played".