
VENNUM, THOMAS, JR. *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994. Pp. xvi, 300. Notes, index, illustrations, bibliographic note, bibliography, appendices. \$19.95 pb., \$44.95 cb.

This is a work derived from the inspiration or, perhaps better, the enchantment of its author by an antique hickory lacrosse stick. An ethnomusicologist by profession, Thomas Vennum Jr. has written a unique hymn to the North American derivation of lacrosse. The hickory stick that charmed the author at a Philadelphia museum seems to be a kind of talisman for his tribute to the origins, and Indian perpetuation of, the game/ritual.

The book moves between historical interpretation and first-person narrative. This style of alternating between first and third person can be a little disconcerting at first. However, by the time one realizes how well Vennum is able to capture his time settings, it becomes a refreshing method of analysis. The author slices into time at various points in the game's history. He begins in 1992 at the NCAA lacrosse championships and telescopes backward to 1637 for an eyewitness account of an early game, then forward to the infamous Michilimackinac massacre in 1763. On balance, it is a way of presenting history that takes some adaptation for the reader. It seems as though we just get into analysis of folklore, or the demythologizing of the "bishop's crozier" origin of lacrosse, when we are suddenly reading a miniportrait of a game or incident. Dispelling common myths—such as the tradition of playing the game naked (not something within the value system of most tribes)—is fascinating but not fully explained or contextualized. Closer reading suggests that Vennum is trying to show how much we stereotype the game and its Indianness.

In between, we are given glimpses into the ritualistic aspects of "scratching" and its physical/religious significance as a prelude to games. There is a marvelous discussion of throwing technique. So, too, are we made conscious of forgotten elements in lacrosse, such as ceremony, music and song, and the undercurrents of healing and fertility so important to most Indian versions of the game. Tribal

location maps precede the text and enable the reader to keep track of the author's discussions. In the section on the year 1866, the author provides a kind of Socratic dialog in which the "father" of modern white lacrosse, Dr. George Beers, explains his rules, ending with Rule 20, Number 6: "No Indian must play in a match for a white club unless previously agreed upon." The author leaves that as the definitive word to end the chapter, a proof positive of white discrimination against the Indian players. There is no question that it was discrimination, but for the historian of the game, there is absolutely no explanation of the notion of the rise of amateur ideals or of the class consciousness so defining of this period in the game's history. Wagering as a cultural and tribal norm connected with the game is well underscored, but the modernization of the sport is not handled well at all. There are other puzzling aspects, such as the subtitle "Little Brother of War" when the game was much more than a war game, in spite of the symbolism and stereotypes attached to that metaphor.

In summary, this is a different kind of history of sport. Its author's background in the study of culture appears evident. The pictures that are interspersed throughout the text add immensely to the discussions. *American Indian Lacrosse* does not claim to be an exhaustive account of the game, but it does demonstrate, for the most part, a familiarity with Indian culture, norms, and rituals, not the least of which was the game of lacrosse.

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