

Lacrosse: A gift from the American Indian

By Tula Andonaras

STAFF WRITER

It's said to be the oldest athletic game in North America.

In fact, lacrosse didn't start out to be a sport at all. It was a ceremonial religious rite, practiced long before Columbus' discovery of the New World, where games were preceded by rituals and dances.

Called "baggataway" by the North American Indian tribes that founded and played it, the game was also used as a way of settling land disputes and rivalries.

Except for tribes in the Southwest, all of those in Canada and the United States played some type of lacrosse.

Three years ago, the game came to Asheville.

Tom Heck, director of adventure learning programs at the YMCA, played the sport in high school in Washington, D.C. He met an Asheville businessman who played goalie on his college lacrosse team and the two decided to seek other fellow enthusiasts in the area. Today, Heck has 18 players on the field at the YMCA Community Services Branch on Beavertown Road.

"Lacrosse is a spring and summer sport so that's when we play," he said. "It's played the same time as baseball and great for those who are really not baseball fans."

The sport is played by men and women, adult and youth. Co-ed and youth teams engage in a non-contact version of the sport.

To learn to play the game, a variety of elements from other

sports must be used. The physical demands are similar to those of football. Like basketball, it uses individualized and defensive team concepts. The nature of the game, from offense to defense, over the expanse of a football-size field is close to soccer. And the speed of the hard, solid rubber ball that flies toward the goal like an ice hockey puck can reach 90 to 95 miles per hour.

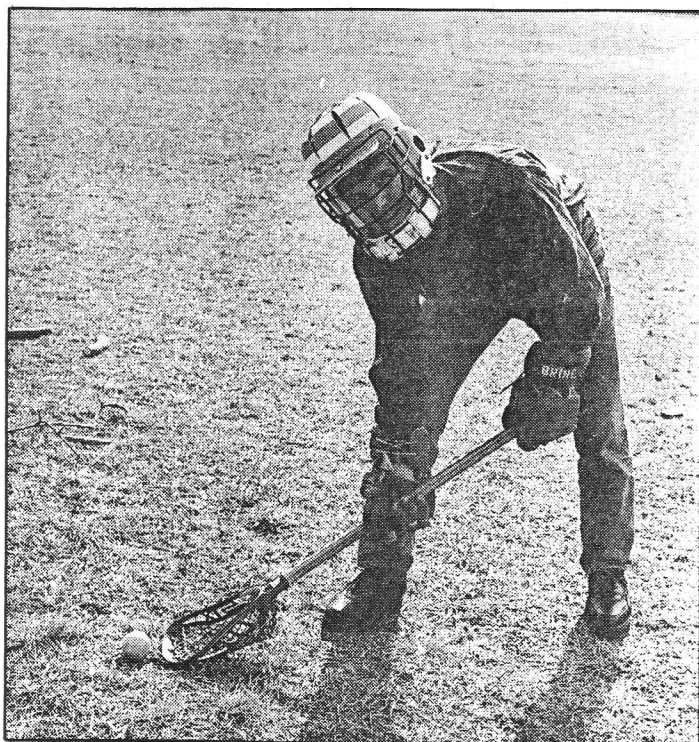
Lacrosse is played with a goalie who also defends the area behind the goal as in ice hockey, three defenders who are not allowed to cross the midfield line, three attack men who can never cross to the defensive side and three midfielders who can go anywhere the ball does.

Each player holds a stick or crosse that is capped with a small net to catch and throw the ball. A helmet, shoulder pads and gloves are gear that must be worn for protection. Goalies also wear throat protectors.

"The game is played in four periods of 15 minutes each," Heck said. "The object is to dislodge the ball from your opponent's stick and to gain possession. This can be done by hitting your opponent's stick or by running into him with a body check as in ice hockey.

"It's a real team sport," he said. "And I have a vision to one day see it played in all of the high schools in Buncombe County."

In addition to the adult team, Heck is also starting a youth lacrosse program for the first time this year.



TULA ANDONARAS/CITIZEN-TIMES

YMCA Director of Adventure Learning Programs Tom Heck demonstrates a move in the sport of lacrosse called scooping the ball. This spring and summer, Heck will form a non-contact co-ed team and a full contact men's team of area lacrosse players. He will also begin a youth program. Lacrosse, he said, is a great team sport that a person, any size, can play.

The youth league will be non-contact and open to boys and girls in fourth and fifth grades. There will also be a middle school team. Needed equipment will be furnished by the YMCA. A clinic will be held on March 26. Practices will begin on April 4 and games will be played from April 30 through May 25. Registration deadline is March 21 and the cost is \$20 for members and \$30 for non-members.

The adult program is open to men and women 17 and up. All equipment is provided and beginners are welcome. A non-con-

tact, co-ed team and a men's full contact team will be formed. The games are played from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesdays. The cost of the spring season, from April 27 through May 25, is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members. The cost of the summer season, from June 1 through Aug. 3, is \$20 for members and \$30 for non-members. Registration for spring play for members begins Wednesday, Feb. 16, and for non-members Wednesday, Feb. 23.

For more information on the YMCA's youth or adult lacrosse programs, call 253-4706.