

# Conventional Sporting Culture of Box Lacrosse

Christopher Luke, Nick Cirillo, Kiyoshi Perkins, Phil Murgun and Michel Lamy

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## **Introduction**

Box lacrosse has a reputation of being a physical and competitive sport played in the spring and summer seasons throughout the year, in fact known for being Canada's official summer sport. With regards to conventional sporting culture, our group has chosen box lacrosse as the focus of our study. When looking at the conventional sporting culture of box lacrosse, we must first address what the term "conventional" is described as. In its most basic sense, to be conventional is to be based on or in accordance with what is generally done or believed. When analyzing the various aspects of the sporting culture that box lacrosse holds, it becomes evident that box lacrosse can be considered a conventional sport. It is a sport that is both easily accessible and widely accepted within society. These two elements are key to whether a sport is conventional or not, as well as a multitude of other aspects. For example, the sport of lacrosse has deep roots in the aboriginal community which can attest to lacrosse's acceptance as a national summer sport. There are many aspects to the sporting culture of lacrosse, ranging from gender issues within the sport to class/ethnicity inequalities. Within this paper, our group will be focusing on the social elements to lacrosse as well as the way the body is perceived in terms of how injuries are dealt with. When observing the social elements of lacrosse, our group noted several key focus points such as the interaction players have with their parents and coaches. As well as looking at the social aspects of lacrosse, our group also looked at the way the body is understood in lacrosse, more specifically injuries. Concussions were a common reoccurrence among player answers when inquired about play stopping injuries. Observations on both the social elements as well as injuries were done conducted in a sit in of a rep 1 lacrosse try out with participants aged 12-14. Prior to the observation collection, our group hypothesized that various social influences such as parents, peers, and coaches have a significant impact on participation in box lacrosse.

## **Methods**

To research the conventional sporting culture of box lacrosse, our group used several different qualitative research methods. Our group conducted research at a public arena on bantam boys – ages 13-14 – box lacrosse evaluations. We were granted permission from the

lacrosse club's president to conduct research for an hour-long session of evaluations. Our first method of research used was non-participant observation. Non-participant observation can be described as when a researcher will observe an event from outside with no engagement with the activity or the subjects (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Non-participant observation is known as an unobtrusive research method as it does not effect the social environment under study, and requires no interaction between subjects and researchers (Gratton & Jones, 2010). During our observation of the box lacrosse evaluations, Kiyoshi and Phil situated themselves around the arena where the evaluations were taking place. They took notes based on what they saw; also what they heard from players, coaches, and parents attending the evaluation. Nick also took part in the observations; but during the evaluation he was placed on one of the team's benches, as he was one of the individuals making evaluations of the players, as well as coaching during this time. Although Nick was not directly part of the game play happening, he was instructing players on the bench on offensive and defensive strategies in order to succeed during the game, as well as keeping the bench organized such as shuffling player lines and making sure line changes occurred in an orderly and timely manner. In this case, Nick was a participant observer on the bench as he was directly coaching the players. Participant observation is when a researcher takes part in the event being studied (Gratton & Jones, 2010). While Nick was on the bench, he took notes based on how players interacted with each other while in play on the floor, as well as how they interacted once they were resting on the bench.

For our second method of research, we conducted informal interviews with players, coaches, and parents attending the evaluation session. For the interviews conducted, our group created seven semi-structured questions in which Kiyoshi, Phil, and Nick asked to participants in our interviews. The interview team prepared interview release forms since the players who were to be interviewed one-on-one were under 18, but due to time constraints and other commitments of the interviewees, interviews of players were conducted with the parents present. Although our questions were designed to follow a set sequence, but the interviewer could alter the questions based upon specific answers from the players and parents if they believed it would reveal more information and gain a better understanding. When the observations and interviews concluded, the research team compared and contrasted their notes from observations, as well as the answers they received from the interviews. The combination of participant and non-participant observation, as well as conducting interviews is known as a triangulation method of research

where the use of multiple data collection methods are used to investigate particular phenomenon (Lake, 2015). Using the triangulation method allows researchers to validate their findings. The use of these research methods allowed for our group to make correlations between our results and academic articles supporting our findings.

## **Results/Discussion**

Based on our research, our group found a strong correlation between parent influence and child participation in box lacrosse. A study done in 2010 by Chan, Lonsdale and Fung found that mothers were a more important influence for children than for adolescents. This supports the results of our interviews, where the mother for the most part, was the parent who influenced them to join lacrosse at a young age. Chan et al, also concluded that peers were important for the enjoyment of adolescent athletes, but in our results we did not see any correlation between athletic enjoyment and peer participation, but we cannot assume there was not any. Coaches also play a complex role, appearing more important in enjoyment and effort for child athletes and more important in the competence of adolescent athletes (Chan et al, 2010). In our results we did not see any correlation between coaches and the competence of adolescent athletes, but we cannot assume that was not a correlation since we do not have the information to conclude. From our research we were also able to conclude that although players suffer small injuries – such as bruises and minor strains and sprains – one of the main injuries that young athletes suffer are concussions. Lacrosse is a full-contact sport, players are allowed to body-check. One player slams his shoulder, arm or hip into another player. Because of the rough nature of the game, players wear a helmet, mouth guard, shoulder and arm pads, and padded gloves to aide in the prevention of injury. According to the box lacrosse rule book of 2013, a legal cross-check shall be defined as a check applied with the portion of the stick held between the hands, on an opponent; from the front or side, below the shoulders or above the waist (Box Lacrosse Rules and Situation Handbook, 2013). According to a report on lacrosse injuries, the most commonly injured body sites in competition were the head/face (Box Lacrosse Rules and Situation Handbook, 2013). So it is important to note that not only the body, but the head is a great risk when participating in lacrosse. This correlates with our interviews with young athletes and their parents. Parents explained that the most common injury that their child had was concussions. Some parents went as far as to say that the only injury that would lead them to not letting their

child play was if they were violently ill or had a doctor's note. However, some parents did say they would not let their child play with a concussion until they were cleared, but it is unfortunate that head injuries are still not taken as seriously as they should be.

A cross-check, even though it is not directed at the head, can lead to a concussion due to the force of whiplash applied against the head and neck. This is especially true regarding hits to an unsuspecting player in a vulnerable position. Taking a run at players who are in a defenseless position with his head down in an attempt to play a loose ball is another behavior that has to be modified to reduce injuries in box lacrosse. Like hockey and football, lacrosse has had to implement rules to help defenseless players from taking violent hits. Officials and administrators of the game have to make sure that this rule is being enforced. Unfortunately this behavior frequently goes unpunished as it seen as being a part of the game. Players create habits around deviant behaviors accepted as part of the game, and they retain these habits as they progress through their lacrosse careers. It is important that there is a philosophical change approach to the game if we want to reduce injuries that are caused by accepted deviant behaviors that do not necessarily need to be part of the game. You can still retain the essence of the game by eliminating unnecessary cross-checks and hitting on defenseless players. If the NFL and NHL can keep growing the popularity of their products even though they have added rules to make the game softer, lacrosse can keep growing at a rapid rate by applying the same direction with their sport.

## **Conclusion**

Box lacrosse is played internationally, but predominantly in North America. The growing popularity of the sport among the youth of today has seen the creation of a conventional sporting culture. It is accessible to peoples of all socio-cultural and economic factors, but not always taken advantage of. The views of health and the body of players, even as young as age 12, are plainly reflected by the answers from parents of athletes and the athletes themselves in regards to the handling of injuries. These same views are also reflected by the inclusion of unnecessary violence in the sport, and the lack of adherence towards certain rules laid out by governing associations of the sport. The dominance of head trauma such as concussions leads to questions regarding rules, equipment, and views on body and health. These injuries may also prevent parents from enrolling their child or children in the sport; perhaps because they lack

medical facilities close by. Our group has found these views have via the triangulation of non-participant observations, participant observations, and interviews with athletes and their parents. It is important to note that these findings are from one sample only, and may not necessarily reflect the views on body and health within the conventional sporting culture of box lacrosse nationwide or even internationally.

## Appendix

-How long have you been playing lacrosse?

-How did you feel about the game today and your performance?

-Whose decision was it to start playing lacrosse?

-Why was lacrosse chosen (if not previously answered)?

-What kind of injury would it take to miss a game or practice?

-Have you been injured in such a fashion?

-Would you play another sport?

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