

INTERVIEW

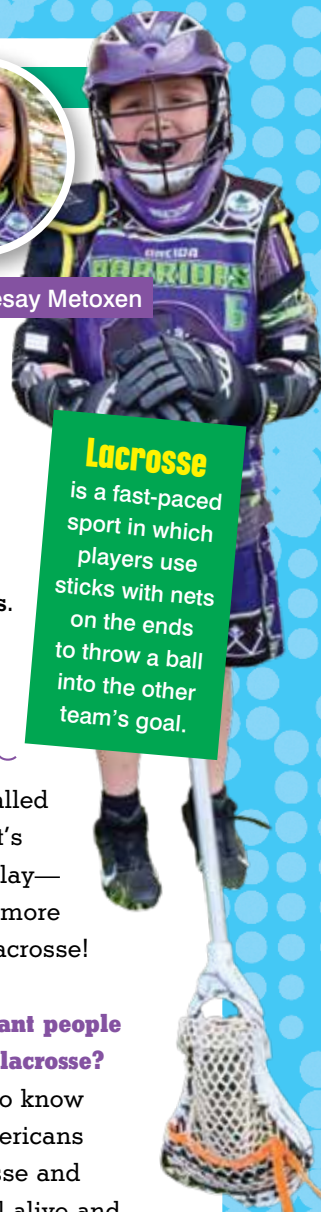
More Than a Sport

Wesay Metoxen celebrates the deep history of lacrosse

By Talia Cowen



Wesay Metoxen



Lacrosse is a fast-paced sport in which players use sticks with nets on the ends to throw a ball into the other team's goal.

Lawisana^wase (Wesay) Metoxen has been playing lacrosse since he was a little kid. But for the 10-year-old, lacrosse is more than a sport. It's a **sacred** tradition.

Wesay is a citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. His **ancestors** belonged to a group of Native American nations called the Haudenosaunee (hoh-dee-noh-SHOW-nee). They've been playing lacrosse for about 1,000 years. Early games could last for days and involve hundreds of players. But lacrosse wasn't just a sport. The Haudenosaunee played—and still play—to make communities stronger. Games are often part of **ceremonies**.

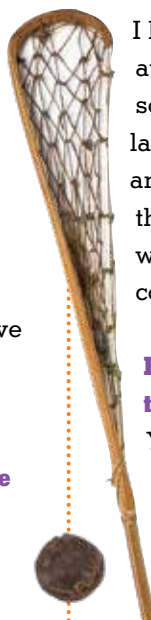
In the U.S., 770,000 kids of all backgrounds play the sport, which is based on the early games the Haudenosaunee played. But many don't know the game's Native roots. Here, Wesay talks about his passion for lacrosse and the connections it has to his culture.

When did you start playing lacrosse?

I've always been around the game. Growing up, I watched my older brother, Lohatiyo, play lacrosse. He taught me how to shoot, catch, and throw—all the fundamentals of lacrosse. I've played and loved the game since I can remember.

How did you learn about the history of the sport?

Lacrosse comes from our tribe's creation story, which is the story our tribe tells to explain how the world came to be. So



Traditional lacrosse equipment includes handmade sticks with nets and balls made of wood or deerskin and fur.

I heard a lot about lacrosse at tribal school. Oneidas sometimes gather to play lacrosse traditionally, like our ancestors played it. We call it the "medicine game" because we play to heal and bring our community together.

Have you ever played lacrosse traditionally? What is it like?

Yes! I've played it for ceremonies. When I first played, I felt scared because you can get hurt. There's no padding, and the ball

is made of wood instead of rubber or plastic. Also, at the beginning of the game, we do a loud

yell together called a war whoop. It's energizing to play—and I think it's more fun than new lacrosse!

What do you want people to know about lacrosse?

I want people to know that Native Americans invented lacrosse and that we are still alive and playing today.

What's your advice to kids who want to start playing lacrosse?

It's hard when you start, but keep playing and don't give up! Keep practicing and you will get better. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

How did Roberto Clemente use his sport to speak out about issues that were important to him? How does Wesay Metoxen's sport help him connect with what's important to him? Answer in a well-organized essay or record an explanation on video.