

This game is fascinating! Lacrosse was invented by Native Americans around 500 AD. It has evolved into a national sport touted by the American elite and is now crossing into Black America. It is somewhere between football and hockey. The Algonquin tribe played it during Spring and Summer and then would play hockey during Fall and Winter. Today, colleges are starting clubs and teams. There is an organized body by the NCAA that manages national championships. It has been previously ignored by Black communities because of the cost of equipment and lack of television exposure. That has changed.

The first Black to excel in Lacrosse was football legend Jim Brown. He played it while growing up in Long Island New York and continued as a side sport at Syracuse University. Later, Morgan State, the great HBCU in Baltimore, Maryland, had a team organized by a guy named Harrison. Kyle Harrison, his son, would later become a great in the sport and motivated my sons, Thomas and Harry III to jump in and do their best at it.

It was 1994 and we had just moved to Washington, DC to start the National Black Chamber of Commerce®. We were staying in a motel on Georgetown University's campus and our twin sons went out to play. They ran into a practice by the Georgetown lacrosse team and became very curious. They approached the players and questioned what they were doing. The gracious players explained the sport and gave them about a dozen lacrosse balls. From that point on, lacrosse would be in the veins of the Alford family. We bought them sticks the next week and entered them into local lacrosse leagues. Their school, St. Albans, was fanatical about lacrosse so it was a natural fit. Little did we know that they would become lacrosse stars. My thing was football, University of Wisconsin, but lacrosse would supersede there football accomplishments.

A Black playing lacrosse was novel but to have twin Blacks playing and excelling in it was worthy of Washington Post tracking. Harry III was a goalie and started varsity his freshman year. Thomas joined him on varsity his sophomore year. They kicked butt!!! The thing I am most proud of is that they inspired other Black kids to jump into the game. The most significant thing about lacrosse is that major schools offer scholarships in it. My boys went to the University of Maryland, one of the greatest institutions on earth, via lacrosse scholarships. It saved me and mama hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Harry and Thomas love lacrosse and are thankful of the opportunities it provided them. Graduating on the Dean's List and making relationships with powerful figures that are just bringing in the dividends. Now they want to give back and alert Black communities everywhere that lacrosse is an avenue to success. It has come a long way just within our experience.

There is now a Black Hall of Fame for lacrosse. Of course Jim Brown is the headliner. Mr. Harrison's son, Kyle, is the biggest star right now. He makes \$1 million plus in endorsements and promotions for the sport. My Thomas idolized him in high school and during his freshman year at Maryland he had the challenge of facing off with him when they played John Hopkins University. He learned a lot that day.

Lacrosse has become our sons' business. They have a website devoted to the sport: www.lacrosseplayground.com. Advertisements are coming in exponentially. It is the second most popular lacrosse website in the world. Only ESPN has a larger website. They also have a lacrosse fashion line known as Lacrosse and Co. where they sell leisurewear featuring the sport. Yes, they are making money but they are also busy alerting our people about the advantages of the game.

Harry III has introduced it to the Washington, DC public school system. Last year he and his high school team mate, Lucious Polk, became the coaches for Wilson High School. This year there are now four DC schools playing it. A couple of charter schools have started teams and even Oxon Hill high school in Prince Georges County, MD is now in the house. It is spreading across the nation. Birmingham, AL has Black high school teams now and they even made a visit to DC to play against Harry's Wilson team. Thomas is an assistant coach at Gonzaga High School which won the Catholic League last year. He is keen on spotting good Black talent and alerting key college recruiters about them. That is making a difference.

Lacrosse can pay the tuition. As a Birmingham parent noted, "I was thinking of Troy St. or Talladega for my baby. Now, we are looking at Duke, University of North Carolina and Vanderbilt. There is a big difference." We can't all play football or basketball. Look at lacrosse y'all.

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