

Lacrosse Team Forms Partnership with Onondaga Nation

The St. Albans varsity lacrosse team's trip to Syracuse, New York, in late April produced more than just a victory over national powerhouse West Genesee High School. Perhaps the biggest highlight of the trip was the connection formed between the Bulldogs and the Onondaga Nation Native Americans.

After beating West Genesee and watching eventual national champion Syracuse in the Carrier Dome, the Bulldogs attended a "box lacrosse" game on the Onondaga Nation reservation at an arena called Tsha'Hon'nonnyendakwha' (for "Where They Play Games"). The Bulldogs watched the host Onondaga Redhawks—a minor league team consisting of men ranging in age from nineteen to forty-four—defeat the Tonawanda Braves, 18-5, in a skilled, entertaining, and physical contest.

According to the Onondaga Nation Web site, the Onondaga Nation is a member of the Haudenosaunee ("People of the Long House"), an alliance of native nations united for hundreds of years by traditions, beliefs, and cultural values. Also referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations, the Haudenosaunee consist of the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, and Tuscarora nations.

During the Redhawks game that St. Albans attended, the Onondaga public address announcer enthusiastically saluted the Bulldogs on numerous occasions, much to the delight of the Onondaga crowd, which cheered boisterously for their young visitors from the nation's capital. Following the game, the Redhawks cleared the arena of spectators and asked the St. Albans squad to step onto their field to greet their visitors and have photos taken of both teams.

The St. Albans players commented afterwards that they were surprised that the men they had seen attempting to knock the Tonawanda players into the boards just minutes before were so gracious and friendly with the visiting high school team. At the suggestion of STA athletic trainer Jay Driscoll, the STA lacrosse coaching staff sent fifteen St. Albans lacrosse tee-shirts—designed by team member Brian Bates '08—to the Onondaga Nation the following week. According to Onondaga coach and player Brad Powless—whose father, uncles, and brothers make up one of the most prominent Native American lacrosse families—the tee-shirts were joyously received by the boys and girls at the Onondaga Nation School.

Powless and STA head coach Malcolm Lester plan to continue the partnership between the two lacrosse programs. Powless coaches at nationally ranked Lafayette High School, in New York; located on the Onondaga reservation, Lafayette is the only high school team in the country whose roster is primarily made up of Native Americans. A game between St. Albans and Lafayette is not out of the question for the future.

In an article in the December 2006 issue of *Lacrosse* magazine, Powless discussed the spiritual nature of lacrosse amongst many Native Americans and its importance in their culture. He wrote: "Like all the families at Onondaga, my family plays lacrosse too. As the spring snows melted, the fields next to the Longhouse were almost ready. There would be a game soon to give thanks to the special game that the Creator gave to us, Dehoñtjihgwa'es. The French called our sport lacrosse for the stick we use. But the name we gave it, Dehontshigwiehs, is much more descriptive to the actions seen on the field, 'They Bump Hips.' It's a rough game."

The Onondaga Nation players and fans gave the St. Albans Bulldogs a memory they won't soon forget. We hope there will be many others between the two groups over the years. 🏒



Children at the Onondaga Nation School happily sport Bulldogs lax tee-shirts.