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Iroquois lacrosse team bows out of UK tournament

NEW YORK (AP) -- Iroquois lacrosse players who refused to travel on passports issued by the U.S. and Canada because they do not consider themselves citizens of those countries exhausted their last option Saturday for going to the sport's world championship in England.

Leaders of the Iroquois Nationals squad announced Saturday that a last ditch attempt to persuade British officials to recognize their Haudenosaunee passports had failed.

"While we are deeply disappointed we could not bring our talented team to the world championships, there simply was no way we could accede to the recommendation that we accept either American or Canadian passports to travel," the team's chairman, Oren Lyons, said in a statement.

Lyons called the passports "essential to our identity as a sovereign people making our way in the world community."

By Saturday, some team members had already returned home to upstate New York and Canada after spending days camped at a hotel near Kennedy Airport.

The highly ranked team had to forfeit its first two games of the tournament, taking place in Manchester, England, when first the U.S., and then the U.K., refused to honor the passports carried by the players.

The Iroquois' last scheduled game was to take place Sunday, but team officials had continued efforts to obtain visas for the players before getting yet another "No" from British officials on Saturday afternoon.

In the past, the U.S. and other nations had allowed some limited use of passports issued by the Iroquois Confederacy, but tighter security rules since the Sept. 11 attacks have led to a crackdown.

Team lawyer Tonya Gonnella Frichner said the fight will continue. The Nationals have other international tournaments looming on the horizon, including the FIL World Indoor Box Lacrosse Championships in the Czech Republic in 2011.

The story behind the Iroquois and Lacrosse

With the recent controversy surrounding the Iroquois Nation and their inability to compete internationally, Sl.com explains the importance of the sport to their culture and history.

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