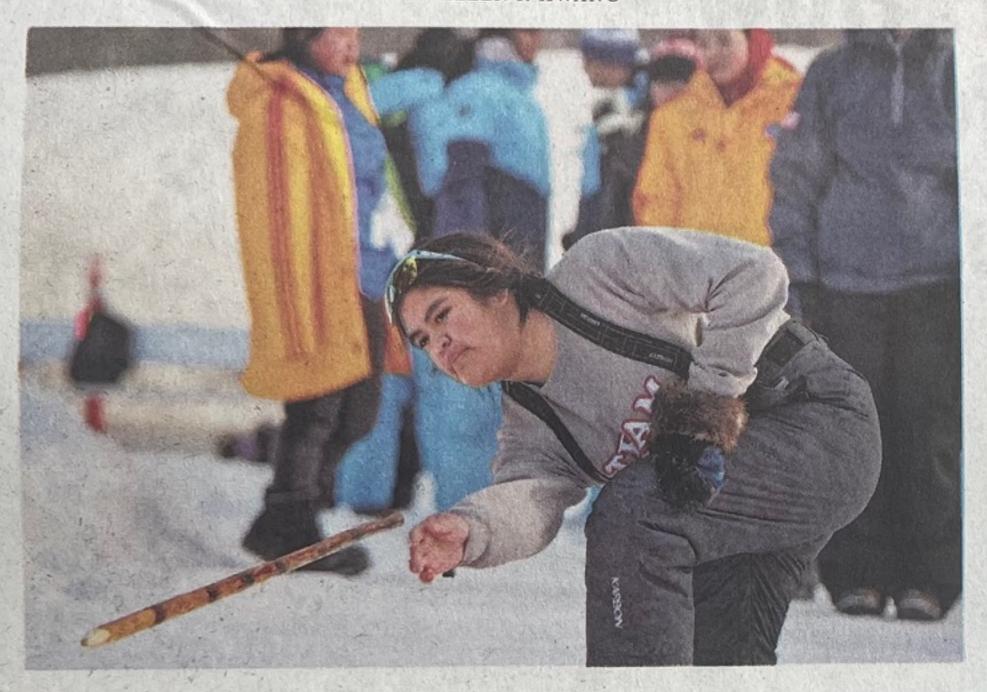
GRABA COAT AND GLOVES.

IT'S THE ARCTIC GAMES!

BY HELEN I. HWANG



Myra Kendi, 16, won the gold medal in snow snake at the last Arctic Winter Games, throwing her stick 169 feet. That's longer than an Olympic swimming pool!

IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE, even everyday activities can be dangerous. Especially in the past, freezing cold temperatures made going outside, finding food and building shelter difficult. So to make sure kids stayed safe, Arctic Native communities created games and sports that also taught important survival skills.

Those games are still taught to many Indigenous kids today. And at the Arctic Winter Games, they get to show off their abilities. It's a weeklong competition that happens every two years. This year, it starts March 10, outside Anchorage. More than 2,000 young people will compete on teams that represent their communities — there's Team Alaska, Team Yukon, Team Sapmi and more. They'll play both Indigenous games and modern sports (like hockey and curling).

KNEEL JUMP

- Rodgers, 14, watched a demonstration of the kneel jump. "I wanted to do it myself," he says. To start, the athlete takes a kneeling position, with toes pointing back. From there, he jumps as far as he can and lands on both feet. The farthest leap wins.
- → WHAT IT TEACHES: In the Arctic, a lot of life happens on ice. Sometimes, it breaks, causing big chunks to float away. The kneel jump teaches kids how to leap to safety.

STICK PULL

→ **HOW IT WORKS:** In stick pull, two people grab opposite ends of a foot-long greased stick. The goal is to pull it out of the opponent's hands.

→ WHAT IT TEACHES: Stick pull helps kids develop grip strength — to grab slippery fish from a river. "At Native camp, we practiced catching fish in the creek during salmon spawning," says Willow Tiedeman, 15. She's competing alongside her twin sister, Taylor, in this year's games.

SNOW SNAKE

- → HOW IT WORKS: "It's fun to throw sticks," says Myra Kendi, 16, who won gold at the last Arctic Games. Players hurl a 4-foot-6-inch stick down a snow-packed track. The winner is the person who throws their stick the longest distance.
- → WHAT IT TEACHES: Snow snake helps train kids to throw spears farther distances, and learn better aim.

TWO-FOOT HIGH KICK

- → HOW IT WORKS: In this game, an athlete jumps up, kicking both feet up to hit
 a small, hanging fur target. "It's a fullbody workout," says Staxx Van Kirk, 13,
 who will be competing for Team Alaska.
 "I use adrenaline to hype myself up." At
 the start of the competition, the target
 dangles about six feet above the ground.
 It is raised after each round. Whoever kicks
 the highest wins.
- → WHAT IT TEACHES: On the flat land of the Arctic, people can see for miles but the wind makes it hard to hear. When a hunter found a meal and was returning with his catch, he would leap high in the air to signal that food was on the way. Then, others could start building a fire. ◆

Soccer: Sajad Imanian/DeFodi Images, via Getty Images. VanDerveer: Illustration by Serge Seidlitz; source photo: Thearon W. Henderson/Getty Images. Arctic Games: Evan Mitsui/CBC.

