



*North American  
Indigenous Games  
Research Symposium  
Proceedings*

*University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Canada  
July 25th & 26th, 2002*

## Dedication

*It was an honor to have Charles Wood, one of three founding members of the North American Indigenous Games and Elder to the Aboriginal Sport Circle, attend the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium. He listened and contributed to the papers that were presented on the day, respectfully reminding us of the original intent of the NAIG and his hopes for the Games in the future. Without a doubt, his voice brought much needed perspective to our academic and organizational thinking, calling attention to the distortions already present in our work and encouraging us to remember the 'spirit' in which the Games were created. These ideas are especially important now that the NAIG are on the verge of being funded by Sport Canada as part of their major games projects, a development that has both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, the Canadian Government will now fund the NAIG on a regular basis. No more scrounging for dollars, so to speak. On the other hand, more care must be taken by Aboriginal sport leaders and their non-Aboriginal supporters to ensure that the NAIG remain under Aboriginal control and benefit Aboriginal athletes. To this end, Charles encouraged us, as researchers and practitioners, to keep searching for new and innovative ways to increase Aboriginal participation in sport and recreation, and to do this in a way that respects Aboriginal values and ideals. Whatever work we do must have some practical application now and in the future. Charles, we dedicate these Proceedings to you. Thank you for your time, your willingness to share, and your guidance. We look forward to your attendance and insights at our next Research Symposium!*

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Table of Contents  | i   |
| Introduction: 2002 NAIG Research Symposium Proceedings   | iii |
| Maurice Smith, Native American Sports Council<br>Keynote Address: Academics and Athletics in Indian Country  | 1   |
| Janice Forsyth, University of Western Ontario<br>A 'Stepping-stone' to Something Better?: A Preliminary Examination<br>of the NAIG in Windspeaker, 1990-1997             | 5   |
| Christine O'Bonsawin, University of Western Ontario<br>Time to Take Notice: A Biographical Analysis of the Firth Sisters   | 13  |
| Vicky Paraschak, University of Windsor<br>"Get Into the Mainstream": Aboriginal Sport in Canada, 1967-2002   | 23  |
| Rick Brant, Aboriginal Sport Circle<br>Keynote Address: The Aboriginal Sport Circle: Canada's Emerging<br>Sport Delivery System  | 31  |
| Susan Haslip and Victoria Edwards, University of Ottawa<br>Does Sport Belong in the Medicine Chest?  | 37  |
| Audrey Giles, University of Alberta<br>Women's Participation in Sport, Games, and Physical Activity in<br>Sambaa K'e, Northwest Territories                              | 49  |
| Chris Szabo, Government of the NWT; Michael Heine, University of Manitoba<br>'Culture to Coaching:' Traditional Aboriginal Sport Coaching Resources                      | 57  |
| Joe Bailey, Advocate for Aboriginal Sport<br>Creating Space for Traditional Values in Contemporary Society:<br>The Origins of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association | 63  |
| Sheldon Baikie, University of Windsor<br>The 'Bright Side of the Road:' The Strengths Perspective in Nain, Labrador  | 70  |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Shane Thompson, Government of the NWT<br>Regional Approaches to Development and Delivery of Recreation and<br>Sport Programs in the NWT         | 77 |
| Louise Champagne and Joannie Halas, University of Manitoba<br>'I Quit': Aboriginal Youth Negotiate the 'Contact Zone' in Physical Education     | 85 |
| Darius Lee Smith, Regis University<br>North American Indigenous Games: Increasing American Indian Participation<br>(Post-Conference Submission) | 94 |
| Angela Busch (moderator) and Panelists<br>Transcript of the Sport Leadership Panel Discussions  | 99 |

— Introduction —  
2002 NAIG Research Symposium Proceedings

Now, more than ever, there is a broad base of interest in research on Aboriginal sport and recreation. This is due to many factors: the growing Aboriginal sport and recreation movement in Canada and the United States; the desires among Indigenous peoples of both countries for culturally appropriate, self-determined sport and recreation programs; and the aspirations of non-Aboriginal peoples to help facilitate this process.

The 2002 NAIG Research Symposium is evidence of the tremendous value Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have attached to research in this area. Significantly, senior staff members of Sport Canada, Canadian Heritage, and Indian and Northern Affairs, practitioners and members of the Aboriginal sport community, as well as the general public attended the Symposium. Additionally, the Symposium was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the University of Manitoba Employment Equity Incentive Fund, the Manitoba Physical Education Supervisors Association, Sport Manitoba, and the Health, Leisure and Human Performance (HLHP) Research Institute Visiting Scholar Fund. Clearly, our research is of interest to a diverse group of people.

Despite this attention, there is still a lack of knowledge on Aboriginal sport and recreation issues. Information gained through research can lead to better policies and programming, and help to gain financial support for specific programs and projects. Our role as researchers is to help advance Aboriginal priorities by examining current policies and practices and suggesting different avenues for action.

This introduction outlines the background for the 2002 NAIG Symposium, the process for the conference, and recommendations from those present about how, as researchers, we can contribute to the ongoing development of the Aboriginal sport and recreation movement in Canada and the United States. The twelve papers presented at the conference on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002 are then provided, as well as a paper written by one of the attendees at the conference, Darius Smith, that we felt complemented the others. A transcript of the Sport Leadership Panel discussions held on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002 completes the Proceedings.

## Background

---

The concept for the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium emerged out of several discussions between the 2002 NAIG Host Society, the University of Manitoba, Aboriginal students and staff, and various

representatives from the sport, education and recreation leadership in the local Aboriginal community. While planning this Symposium, organizers became aware of some exciting, innovative and ground breaking advances in the area of Aboriginal sport and recreation programming, as well as some ongoing challenges that needed to be addressed.

To encourage dialogue on these issues, the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium brought together a wide range of people working in different areas of Aboriginal sport, including academics (new and well-established researchers), government officials, and leading representatives of the Aboriginal sport movement in both Canada and the United States. The organizing committee hoped to provide a welcoming environment for these presenters, where they could share their information, engage in dialogue, and foster research on Aboriginal sport and recreation issues.

## Process

---

The 2002 NAIG Research Symposium took place on July 25, 2002. After initial greetings, the Symposium began with the first keynote speech by Maurice “Mo” Smith from the Native American Sport Council. The morning session on Indigenous Sport History included three papers, written by Janice Forsyth, Christine O’Bonsawin and Vicky Paraschak. The second keynote speech was given by Rick Brant, of the Aboriginal Sport Circle, during lunch. The first afternoon session, on Access to Quality Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Opportunities, included papers by Susan Haslip & Victoria Edwards, Audrey Giles, and Chris Szabo & Michael Heine. In the second afternoon session, titled Contemporary Perspectives on Current Programs, four papers were presented, by Joe Bailey, Sheldon Baikie, Shane Thompson, and Louise Champagne & Joannie Halas. The next evening, a Sport Leadership Panel, including seven presenters and a moderator, shared their ideas on a wide range of issues related to the NAIG and Aboriginal Sport more generally. Panelists included Rick Brant, Janice Forsyth, Waneek Horn-Miller, Jason Loutitt, Christain Sinclair, Mo Smith and Charles Wood. The moderator was Angela Busch.

## Recommendations

---

*The idea of holding a symposium on the NAIG is a positive step in keeping the spirit of the games to remain ‘Strong, Brave and True’!! I sincerely believe that it is the responsibility of us all to do what we can in providing a medium that will help all Indigenous youth towards positive growth.*

— Charles Wood, NAIG Founding Member  
Advisor and Elder, NAIG Council

These were the words written by Charles Wood, NAIG Founding Member, Advisor and Elder for the NAIG Council, after the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium. It was an honor to have him in attendance at all of the symposium presentations, and to receive his advisory feedback on many of the issues raised in the papers. Meegwetch.

As presenters, we share a common belief about the important role research and education plays in the Aboriginal sport and recreation movement in Canada and the United States. Our research informs the ideas and practices of other academics and people working in this field at the community, regional, national and international levels.

We also agree that the Research Symposium was the ideal place to share our information, expand our understandings of Aboriginal sport and recreation, and develop new and better lines of questioning. As researchers, we often feel as though we are working alone or in isolation from one another with few, if any, opportunities to connect and talk about the things we know in a friendly, focused environment. As one participant stated,

*The Symposium was an excellent idea and long overdue. It was a great opportunity to network with some great people and to take in some interesting and varied perspectives on aboriginal sport!*

—Joe Bailey, Presenter, 2002 NAIG Research Symposium

We also see the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium as a timely event in light of the development of the Aboriginal sport system in North America over the past decade. The continued success of this system, which includes the growth of the NAIG, can be enhanced by further research, collaboration on projects, and cross-sectoral discussions.

At the close of the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium, the Organizing Committee and the presenters agreed to work together to 1) create a nurturing environment for researchers in the field; 2) foster the lines of communication between researchers, government officials, and sport and recreation programmers and directors; 3) share known research on Aboriginal sport and recreation in Canada and the United States with the wider public. Since that time, there have been continued discussions among the presenters about how to reach our goals. We have agreed on the following points:

**1. Annual Research Symposium.** The 2002 NAIG Research Symposium emphasized the need for greater collaboration and communication between researchers, government officials, and Aboriginal sport and recreation directors in both Canada and the United States. At present, there is no established forum in North America to discuss socio-cultural issues on Aboriginal sport and recreation. The development of an annual research symposium on Aboriginal sport and recreation would create that forum, fostering an environment that supports cross-discipline, cross-sectoral, and international discussions.

**2. Permanent NAIG Research Symposium.** Every three years, the annual research symposium (as outlined above) would be hosted in conjunction with the NAIG. This could be included in the Hosting Agreement with the Host City and Province/Territory or State. The NAIG Council could ensure that this Symposium is included in future bid packages and staging manuals. This would ensure that future Research Symposiums would be a guaranteed part of the NAIG, whether hosted in Canada or the United States.

**3. Fostering Post-Secondary Student Research.** There also is a need to encourage undergraduate and graduate post-secondary students to engage in Aboriginal sport and recreation research.



Future conferences will be a critical site for encouraging and mentoring these young, innovative thinkers. We also need to foster and support their research interests, and provide them with research opportunities, by including them as meaningful partners in Aboriginal sport. These incentives will help ensure there is an ongoing, lively, and constructive debate on Aboriginal sport and recreation for many years to come.

**4. Directed Research Opportunities.** Researchers have expressed a need for more collaboration between researchers and workers in the field of Aboriginal sport. We would like to see each Provincial/Territorial jurisdiction, as well as organizations like the ASC, Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies and the Native American Sport Council become involved by contributing to a list of areas that would benefit from further research. NAIG legacy funding, starting with the 2002 NAIG, can be used to support research grants in these areas. This would allow researchers to match students to areas where we need research completed. At each NAIG Symposium, we could have presentations on the research currently being undertaken through this grant program.

**5. Website Development.** A website for the Research Symposium should be established and updated regularly. This website will provide information about presenters, current research, literature on Aboriginal sport and recreation, government programming, and Aboriginal sport and recreation initiatives. This website will help increase the lines of communication between academics, government officials, sport and recreation directors, leading Aboriginal sport officials, and the wider general public. The website could be attached to a host site, or developed as a stand-alone unit.

**6. Annual Proceedings.** Starting with the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium, all of the papers presented at future Symposiums should be published in a Proceedings and mailed to participants and interested organizations. The proceedings could also be made available on-line.<sup>a</sup>

All of the presenters at the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium endorse these recommendations. We believe their implementation will assist individuals, communities, organizations and governments to more effectively facilitate the development of Aboriginal sport and recreation throughout Canada and the United States. We readily share this information with you, hoping it will spark an initiative or idea that contributes to the larger picture for Aboriginal sport and recreation development.

*Thank you to all who contributed to the NAIG Research Symposium and to the vision that it has fostered.*



—Keynote Address—  
Academics and Athletics in Indian Country

Maurice Smith  
Native American Sports Council

*Maurice 'Mo' Smith is a tribal member of the Navajo Nation and the first American Indian to break the four-minute mile. He accomplished this feat at an international track and field meet in Belfast, Ireland in June 1986. He is a five-time national collegiate champion in the 1500 meters and a former National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) record holder in the same event. Since retiring from competitive running, Mo has transferred his energies to sport and wellness programming, working as Executive Director for the Native American Sports Council (NASC). The NASC mission is to promote athletic excellence and wellness within Native American communities through sports programs that combine traditional Native American values with modern Olympic ideals.*

## Introduction

---

The NASC<sup>1</sup> is a non-profit, community-based, multi-sport member of the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). The NASC believes community based sports and wellness programs that balance physical, mental, spiritual and cultural aspects will assist Native communities in their recovery. This belief provides the foundation for the NASC, which is dedicated to helping Native American communities to sustain their values and traditions through culturally appropriate community based programs.

The NASC's Athlete Development and Assistance Program (ADAP) identifies and assists potential Olympic hopefuls in the areas of nutrition, coaching development and training resources. The NASC supported six emerging elite athlete Olympic hopefuls who were contenders for the 1996 and 2000 U.S. Olympic Team. The purpose of ADAP is to help emerging, elite Native American athletes to be identified and developed for national, international, and Olympic competition. The mission for the ADAP is to advocate for, recognize the achievements of, and provide opportunities through sport for Native American athletes who aspire to compete at the Olympic level. ADAP provides selected athletes with financial assistance, performance evaluation, coaching support, equipment and apparel. To date, over 1500 Native American athletes and coaches representing more than 70 Indian communities have participated in programs conducted in cooperation with various Olympic Sports Federations.<sup>2</sup>

Central to NASC programming is the concept of the Sports Warrior. The characteristics of a sports warrior include excellence, strength, bravery, honesty, discipline, respect, courage, and humility.<sup>3</sup> The sports warrior is someone who blends sport, culture and education into his or her daily practices to create a harmonious and personally fulfilling life.

## Academics in Indian Country

---

The NASC aims to help Native American communities and their youth by encouraging personal development through culturally appropriate sport programs. Many Native American youth aspire to higher levels of education, but face many challenges when trying to make the transition to post-secondary education. Recent statistics showing the relationship between Native American youth and education hints at some of the profound barriers facing Native American students today.

Statistics captured by federal agencies, state education departments and independent research organizations tell us that, when compared to other ethnic groups, Native American children are the poorest academic performers in public schools. They are the least likely to perform well on assessment tests, least likely to enroll in advanced placement classes, and the most likely to drop out. Native American students also have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group in the United States. They have the lowest academic achievement levels as measured by mainstream standardized tests, lowest rates of school attendance, and the lowest rates of participation in post-secondary education of any minority group, with a drop out rate at the post-secondary level exceeding 70%.<sup>4</sup>

For many Native American youth, moving from their home community to the mainstream for post-secondary education is not an easy transition to make. Often, there are social, economic, and political barriers limiting their ability to gain a post-secondary education. However, the NASC firmly believes that culturally appropriate sports programs can help facilitate this process. The values and ideas they learn as Sports Warriors are carried with them as they travel from their communities into the mainstream, providing them with the essential tools to maintain their cultural connections and to lead personally rewarding lives as they work towards higher levels of education.

## Athletics in Indian Country

---

As well as facing educational barriers, statistics also show that Native American students are not making the transition to sports programs at the collegiate level. While Native American youth are participating in sports at the community and high school level, they are registering record low numbers in comparison to other ethnic populations at institutions of higher learning.

Table 1 reveals the startlingly low levels of American Indian and Alaskan Native participation at Division I, II, and III post-secondary schools in the United States. These statistics are a concern because of the positive role sports can play in helping Native American students stay in school, as well as achieve higher levels of education. Education is vital for success in today's world. This is

| Table 1: NCAA Estimate, Student-Athlete Frequencies for Division I, II, III<br>American Indian / Alaskan Native Population <sup>5</sup> |           |          |  |               |          |          |
|---|-----------|----------|--|---------------|----------|----------|
| Sport   | Men       | Women    |  | Sport         | Men      | Women    |
| Archery   | 0         | 1 (1.9%) |  | Soccer        | 30 (.2%) | 41 (.2%) |
| Baseball  | 81 (.3%)  | N/A      |  | Softball      | N/A      | 71 (.5%) |
| Basketball  | 43 (.3%)  | 50 (.3%) |  | Tennis        | 12 (.2%) | 18 (.2%) |
| Cross Country   | 35 (.3%)  | 34 (.3%) |  | Track & Field | 101 (.5) | 98 (.6%) |
| Football  | 148 (.3%) | N/A      |  | Volleyball    | 2 (.02%) | 31 (.2%) |
| Golf  | 28 (.4%)  | 14 (.4%) |  | Water Polo    | 6 (.6%)  | 2 (.2%)  |
| Ice Hockey  | 12 (.3%)  | 5 (.4%)  |  | Wrestling     | 36 (.6%) | N/A      |
| Lacrosse  | 19 (.3%)  | 13 (.3%) |  |               |          |          |

of course especially true for Native American peoples who are working towards self-determination and self-governance.

## Connection between Academics and Athletics

---

There is a strong relationship between academics, athletics and higher education. Statistics have clearly shown that students who show improvement in middle school and high school and who are involved in athletics are better prepared for the transition to post-secondary education.

The NASC believes in this relationship and promotes achievement in school through sports. The NASC has developed the Native American Sports Academic Training Institute to support this relationship.<sup>6</sup> It is intended to assist educators, counselors, and coaches to better prepare Native American student-athletes for higher education and to assist student-athletes in selecting the institution that will help them meet their own goals for sport and education. The program is designed to help student-athletes feel more comfortable in their move from high school to higher education. It consists of the following eight components:

### 1. Individual assessment

- Academic aptitude and foundation
- Athletic caliber and ability
- Financial resources availability
- Social comfort zones and norms
- Family support and proximity
- Expectations

### 2. Academic preparation

- Guidance counselor
- College counselors
- Friends and family input
- College reports and reviews

### 3. Planning and research

- Resource guides
  - American Indian college fund
  - NCAA
- Web-site search
  - NCAA
  - Tribal colleges
  - Foundations (for example, Women's Sport Foundation)
  - NASC

#### **4. Athletic preparation**

- Primary sports participation
- Secondary complimentary sports
- Off-season preparation
- Athletic assessment, performance evaluations

#### **5. Seeking resources (scholarships)**

- Athletic scholarships
- Financial aid
- Tribal scholarships
- Tribal school programs
- Stipends and scholastic financial support

#### **6. Mentorship relationships**

- Coaches
- Family and friends
- Peers
- Programs

#### **7. College campus familiarity**

- Summer college programs
- Support programs (clubs and associations)
- Dorms and athletic facilities
- Social environment

#### **8. Transition opportunities**

- Academic summer programs
  - Tribes
  - American Indian Science and Engineering Services (AISES) program
- Athletic summer camps
  - Local camps
  - Regional and national
- Leadership programs
  - Boys and girls leadership
- College campus orientations

## **Conclusion**

---

The NASC is dedicated to helping Native American communities sustain their values and traditions through culturally appropriate community based sport programs. Along the way, many Native American youth show great promise both academically and athletically but have a difficult time making the transition to higher levels of education. The NASC is helping Native American student-athletes make this transition by providing them with a comprehensive support program that addresses their specific needs and goals.

Our advice to aspiring Native American athletes is to start planning for your future, both academically and athletically. It is critical to start visualizing your transition from middle school and high school to post-secondary education, integrating athletics as an integral part of your program. This will help keep your life balanced at school. Also remember, knowledge is power. Academics is the key to a better future. Be proactive and ‘take charge’ of your life. Search out all of the possible resources you will need to get a good post-secondary education, using technology to help you in your search.

## **Endnotes**

---

1 Information on the NASC can be found at [www.nascsports.org](http://www.nascsports.org).

2 Web site: [www.nascsports.org/about.html](http://www.nascsports.org/about.html).

3 The characteristics of a ‘sport warrior’ were borrowed from the NASC website.

4 American Indian Report, “Left Behind: Are Public Schools Failing Indian Kids?” September 2001.

5 Ibid.

6 Web site: [www.nascsports.org/about.html](http://www.nascsports.org/about.html).

A “Stepping-stone” to Something Better?:  
A Preliminary Examination of the NAIG in *Windspeaker*, 1990-1997

Janice Forsyth  
University of Western Ontario

The mainstream sport model is premised on a number of assumptions. Three key assumptions are: 1) the mainstream sport system is the preferred system for sport, 2) organized elite-level competition is the activity most deserving of resources, and 3) sport is inherently good and will ‘naturally’ build good character, help people make better life choices, and prepare youth to be tomorrow’s future leaders. Over the years, these and other assumptions have become ‘naturalized’ within the Canadian sport system, often resulting in the uncritical acceptance of the mainstream sport model and the activities it supports as the ‘right’ way for doing sport, and therefore, the only type of sport worth funding.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, these assumptions are supported in part by a broad based physical education program that emphasizes highly structured competitive activities, the professionalization of coaching initiatives, financial support for high performance athletes, and an award recognition system that favors participants who contribute to this system.

The naturalization of these assumptions in Government organizations has posed significant problems for Aboriginal peoples who continue to try to create their own preferred system for sport, a system that is shaped by their own cultural values.<sup>2</sup> It has meant that Aboriginal peoples have had to continually shape and reshape their ideas for sport in order to qualify for and maintain funding. Despite this tendency towards cultural homogeneity, there are signs of resistance.<sup>3</sup> Even while working within the mainstream sport model, Aboriginal peoples have established their own agenda for sport, claiming that space to promote their cultural distinctiveness from the mainstream, to instill Aboriginal cultural values in participants, and to strengthen individual and collective identities.

This paper examines the various ways Aboriginal peoples have challenged and reproduced dominant assumptions about sport at the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) as reported in *Windspeaker*, a popular national Aboriginal newspaper in Canada. Media coverage of the first four NAIG events (1990, 1993, 1995, 1997) is examined. At present, *Windspeaker* has a monthly circulation of more than 25,000 copies, delivered to more than 620 First Nations communities, and over 2750 Aboriginal organizations throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is the only national newspaper, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, to report on all four NAIG. Its wide circulation base and

consistent reporting of the Games means that *Windspeaker* is a significant tool for influencing public perceptions about the NAIG, its participants, and the organizers.

The emphasis on *Windspeaker* reporting is significant for another reason. Research has clearly shown how the mainstream print media in Canada has discriminated against Aboriginal peoples by promoting distorted ideas about them.<sup>5</sup> This is problematic for many Canadians since the media is often their only source of information for learning about Aboriginal peoples. What is produced often restricts opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural dialogue. As a result, Aboriginal peoples have resorted to their own media to set their own political agendas and to ‘talk back’ to the mainstream press.<sup>6</sup>

The NAIG is an Olympic-style sport and cultural celebration organized by Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and the United States. The concept for the NAIG was developed by a group of Indigenous leaders from Alberta who were concerned about social inequalities and racial discrimination within the Canadian sport system that prevented many Aboriginal athletes from participating in high level, competitive mainstream sport competition. Thus, they designed the NAIG to provide Aboriginal athletes with the opportunity to develop and enhance their athletic skills in a culturally supportive environment, with the primary goal being to produce successful athletes for major mainstream international sporting competitions.<sup>7</sup>

Since the Games were first held in 1990, the NAIG has developed into one of the largest multi-sport events hosted on Canadian soil. For example, the total number of the Aboriginal athletes from Canada who competed at the 1997 NAIG in Victoria, British Columbia matched the total number of athletes who participated at 1997 Canada Summer Games in Brandon, Manitoba with over 3000 athletes at each event.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Games also attract a large number of cultural participants, with approximately 3000 cultural performers taking part in various activities, like the powwows, arts and craft displays, and food fairs held at the 1997 NAIG.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, the NAIG is an impressive demonstration of Aboriginal sporting excellence, cultural renewal and pride.

## Reinforcing Dominant Assumptions at NAIG

---

The NAIG is an all-Aboriginal event that resembles other major multi-sport competitions hosted in either Canada or the United States. At the NAIG, athletes participate primarily in mainstream sport events. For instance, the 1997 Games featured sixteen sports; fourteen of these events were part of the official Olympic program, arguably the most influential sporting event in the world.<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on mainstream sports has resulted in the marginalization of some traditional Aboriginal events, like Inuit and Dene Games, which are relegated to the cultural program and their athletes labeled ‘cultural participants’ as opposed to ‘NAIG athletes’.<sup>11</sup> Placing Inuit and Dene Games within the ‘cultural’ portion of the program conveys the idea that these traditional activities are not

considered to be legitimate sport forms. As such, Aboriginal organizers have shaped the NAIG to reinforce the underlying structure of the mainstream sport model.

From the outset in 1990, organizers and supporters have packaged and sold the NAIG to the public as a 'stepping-stone' to elite level mainstream sport competitions, referring to the Games as a 'training ground' for the next generation of high performance athletes. *Windspeaker* has often emphasized this aspect of the NAIG. In a 1990 edition of *Windspeaker*, Charles Wood, one of the original founders of the NAIG explained, "elite athletes will emerge from these games and will continue to due process in the North American system of Amateur Sport and Recreation."<sup>12</sup> One year later, Alwyn Morris, Gold Medallist in canoeing at the 1984 Olympic Games and a leading figure in the Aboriginal sport movement, expressed similar sentiments stating that the Games "will give Native youth a chance to prove themselves and provide stepping stones to other events like the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics."<sup>13</sup> Whether intentional or not, the message being broadcast through *Windspeaker* is that athletes who are deemed to be 'successful' are those who have 'made it' in elite mainstream sport competitions.

Additionally, *Windspeaker* has repeatedly reinforced ideas about the superiority of the mainstream sport system by calling attention to the organizational and technical aspects of the Games. For the inaugural event in 1990, *Windspeaker* reported how NAIG organizers viewed the Games as an opportunity to 'live up to' mainstream standards of managerial excellence and efficiency. For the organizers, hosting a 'successful' NAIG was crucial for constructing a positive Aboriginal identity, one that is informed by race relations in broader Canadian society. Bill Adsit, general manager of finance for the first NAIG, articulated the connection between identity and sport, commenting that Aboriginal organizers had to "prove" themselves with the 1990 Games because their "reputation (as Natives) is on the line."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, for the 1997 Games, *Windspeaker* recorded different coaching perspectives on how Aboriginal sport and sport teams should be coordinated and run at the Games. One male volleyball coach from the United States defined the ideal NAIG team as being "well-coached, well-prepared, strictly disciplined and tightly, professionally organized."<sup>15</sup>

Athletic performance is another key theme in *Windspeaker*. This interest surfaced in 1995 and dominated the press in 1997. In 1995, several reports stressed the mediocrity of Aboriginal athletes and teams at the Games and repeatedly called attention to the disappointment some athletes experienced with the level of competition at NAIG. In women's basketball, one of the female athletes stated, "We were a bit surprised by the level of play. It wasn't always up to what we were expecting."<sup>16</sup> Concern with athletic performance was the primary focus in the reporting of NAIG 1997. In one particular account, the reporter asked, "Why are many of the winning times or results only of average high school caliber?" This was followed immediately by, "Is it really smart to celebrate such mediocrity with such an expensive and complicated production as the Victoria games?" The reporter then proceeded to find the source of the 'problem' with NAIG.<sup>17</sup>



## Challenging Dominant Assumptions at NAIG

---

Even though the NAIG resembles other mainstream sport events, Aboriginal peoples have not passively accepted the mainstream sport model as the ideal way of doing sport. Rather, they have openly debated dominant assumptions about sport. In February 2001, more than 100 Aboriginal sport leaders from Canada and the United States involved in the NAIG movement were invited by Sport Canada to a 'Think Tank' in Ottawa, to discuss critical issues regarding the future of the NAIG.<sup>18</sup> Prior to the meeting, participants were provided with a framework for the discussions. The framework revolved around several key topics, including whether or not the NAIG should provide a balance between traditional and mainstream sports competitions, if the Games should emphasize high performance athlete development or stress participation for all, and if teams should participate as distinct nations (i.e. Cree or Mohawk) or continue to represent their province, territory, or state.<sup>19</sup> Though no final outcome was reached, the Think Tank demonstrated a consciousness among the Aboriginal sport leaders about the values and ideals promoted by the mainstream sport system. Significantly, the lack of consensus demonstrated an understanding among the delegates at the meeting of the need to respect diverse perspectives about what NAIG 'should be'. Rather than impose idealized mainstream sport values and ideals on the NAIG, Aboriginal sport leaders purposely permitted different interpretations of NAIG to thrive and flourish. As a result, the NAIG means different things to different Aboriginal peoples.

Over the years, the athletes too have repeatedly challenged the assumption that the NAIG is a primary vehicle for Aboriginal sporting excellence. Reports in *Windspeaker* show a growing consciousness among Aboriginal athletes who speak of the NAIG as a place with its own value, distinct from the mainstream sport model.<sup>20</sup> A senior male fastball player at the 1997 NAIG expressed his disappointment at the lack of skilled teams at the Games, but qualified his statement by stating that the NAIG was important to maintain because of the way it brought diverse groups of Aboriginal people together.<sup>21</sup> His team, from Ontario, had skipped the national Native Championships in British Columbia to attend the 1997 NAIG, winning the silver medal (New Brunswick took home the gold). In the same edition, a junior male track and field athlete explained that while he was using the Games as a 'warm-up' for the 1997 Canada Summer Games in Brandon, Manitoba the following week, it was the NAIG he looked forward to most. "It's a chance to meet my people and find out more about who I am. That's very important to me."<sup>22</sup>

Several stories reported on veteran NAIG athletes who had competed at previous NAIG in different sports. This was portrayed as a unique and positive feature of the NAIG. One story reports how, in 1997, one young male Metis athlete had qualified for Team Northwest Territories in fastball, but because of funding problems his team could not afford the travel to the NAIG that year. Traveling with his family to watch his brother participate in track and field, he was entered in the javelin throw at the last minute—and won! His gold medal performance was framed in *Windspeaker* as

an example of the mediocrity at NAIG, but the athlete contested this narrow vision of the Games by emphasizing its cultural significance, stating, "It's more about raising your spirits [and] about who you are."<sup>23</sup>

Athletes themselves have publicly challenged ideas about NAIG by redirecting attention away from elite athlete development and the mainstream sport system toward a positive identity construction. As *Windspeaker* shows, participants have embraced the idea of the NAIG as being 'their' Games and have challenged attempts to subvert this meaning by embracing a liberating perspective about what it means to be Aboriginal in contemporary Canadian and American society. It also permits a feeling of shared empathy between different groups of Aboriginal people. Instead of 'focusing on their own oppression,'<sup>24</sup> Aboriginal athletes at NAIG are challenging the narrow vision that has been constructed for them in *Windspeaker*.

The NAIG facilitates this understanding. Currently, regional teams do not have a minimum qualification standard, so it is customary to see high performance athletes competing alongside recreational athletes, sometimes not in the sport for which they are recognized nationally or internationally. A brief list of elite-level male and female athletes who have competed at previous NAIG include Waneek Horn-Miller, Olympian (water polo), who competed in swimming; Albert Doxtator, World Champion (pankration), who competed in wrestling; Tara Heidican, National and World Junior Champion wrestler, who competed in her primary sport; as did Becky Wells, NCAA Champion (1500m) in track and field. For Aboriginal youth, interacting with, and participating alongside, high profile athletes is an everyday occurrence at the NAIG.

## Conclusion

---

Aboriginal peoples have selected certain aspects of the mainstream sport system and integrated them into the NAIG. The NAIG focuses on mainstream sport events and getting Aboriginal athletes into elite sport competitions so they can succeed at the highest levels of sport. Yet, designing the NAIG as a 'feeder system' to get Aboriginal athletes into the mainstream sport model has its consequences. Structured this way, the mainstream sport system is assumed to be the ideal model for sport, and mainstream sport activities the most acceptable form of competitive sport. Reports in *Windspeaker* have repeatedly reinforced these assumptions by selectively focusing on the performance aspect of sport and elite-level athlete development.

Though some values and ideals adopted from the mainstream sport system have become embedded in the NAIG, the diverse perspectives voiced by the participants make it clear that the NAIG diverges from, and challenges, mainstream values and ideals in highly symbolic ways. As this paper demonstrated, despite constant emphasis on athletic performance, athletes of all abilities have chosen to focus on the social and political significance of the NAIG and repeatedly identify it as a site where they go to affirm their cultural identity.

No doubt, the NAIG means different things to different peoples. Some people see the Games as an opportunity to promote healthier lifestyles among Aboriginal peoples. Others see it as an alternative to the destructive personal habits that afflict many Aboriginal youth. But, a fascinating interpretation of the NAIG that has emerged from the athletes themselves is seeing the NAIG as a space to exert and further develop their own identities as Aboriginal peoples living in contemporary Canadian and American societies.

In the end, the NAIG have the potential to be a powerful site for building our own Aboriginal identities. In order for this to happen, we need to pay attention to Aboriginal peoples who speak about creating a value system where achievement and status, especially when accumulated within the mainstream sport system, are not the only measures of athletic success. As Aboriginal peoples, we must critically examine our own obsession with gaining recognition and respect within the mainstream sport system. We need to talk about how we have privileged mainstream sport achievements over accomplishments earned within the all-Aboriginal sport system. We need to talk about why we hold successful Aboriginal athletes in the mainstream sport system in such high regard, and tend to marginalize the tremendous sporting achievements earned within the all-Aboriginal environment. We need to set our own expectations for achievement, based on our own values and ideals, and find meaning and pleasure in them. As Aboriginal peoples learn to exercise their own agency, more possibilities will emerge for who they are and can be. Perhaps, then, other Canadians will look to the NAIG as a model for sport that embraces diversities among participants, approaches towards sport, and expressions of culture.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Gruneau, R. "Modernization or Hegemony: Two Views on Sport and Social Development," in Harvey, J. and Cantelon, H. (eds.) *Not Just a Games: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology*. Ottawa, Ont.: University of Ottawa Press, 1988: 9-32.
- 2 Paraschak, V. "Native Canadians in sport: A clash of cultural values," in Uche, L. (ed.) *North-South Information Culture: Trends in Global Communications and Research Paradigms*. Longman, 1996: 99-113.
- 3 Donnelly, P. "Sport as a Site for 'Popular' Resistance," in Gruneau, R. (ed.) *Popular Cultures and Political Practices*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988: 69-82.
- 4 *Windspeaker* began as a regional newspaper in 1983, concentrating on issues pertinent to First Nations in British Columbia, but developed into a national news source in 1993. See internet resource, <http://www.ammsa.com/ammsaads.html>
- 5 Henry, F. and Tator, C. *Full Report: Racist Discourse in Canada's English Print Media*. Toronto: The Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000.
- 6 Meadows, M. "Journalism, Images, and Indigenous Affairs," in *Voices in the Wilderness: Images of Aboriginal People in the Australian Media*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001: 8.
- 7 A history of the evolution of the NAIG, as well as a brief analysis of federal support for the NAIG can be found in Forsyth, J. "J. Wilton Littlechild's North American Indigenous Games". Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2000.

- 8 The numbers are as follows: 3083 Aboriginal athletes (eligible for Canada Games events) competed at the 1997 NAIG; 3094 athletes competed at the 1997 Canada Summer Games. See McPherson, T. A Comparative Analysis of Athlete Participation and Performance for the 1997 North American Indigenous Games (Victoria, BC) and the 1997 Canada Summer Games (Brandon, MB). Unpublished Master's . Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1998: 6 and 25.
- 9 Approximately 8000 participants (including both athletes and cultural performers) participated in the 1997 NAIG. Of the 8000 participants, approximately 5000 took part in the cultural program and 3000 took part in the athletic competitions. See, [www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history\\_games\\_06.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history_games_06.html).
- 10 The seventeen sports offered at the 1997 NAIG included archery, athletics, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, canoeing, golf, box lacrosse, rifle shooting, soccer, softball/fastball, swimming, tae kwon do, volleyball, and wrestling. Only golf and box lacrosse are not official sport competitions at Olympic Games.
- 11 This occurred at the 1990 and 1993 NAIG. See the 1990 and 1993 NAIG histories at [www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history\\_games.html](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history_games.html)
- 12 *Windspeaker*, North American Indigenous Games Newsletter, 30 June 1989, p. 1.
- 13 *Windspeaker*, 30 March 1990, p. 2.
- 14 *Windspeaker*, 22 June 1990, p. 27.
- 15 *Windspeaker*, September 1997, p. 24.
- 16 *Windspeaker*, September 1995, p. 26.
- 17 *Windspeaker*, September 1997, p. 23.
- 18 A Think Tank is a government activity, held every ten years, to allow key stakeholders in various programs to reevaluate strategic goals and visions.
- 19 The Think Tank utilized an "open space" format for generating discussions and identifying the primary topics of interest.
- 20 Since the first NAIG was held in 1990, a total of 10 stories on athletes at NAIG have been printed in *Windspeaker*. It is interesting to note that male and female athletes have thus far received equal press coverage, at five stories apiece.
- 21 *Windspeaker*, September 1995, p. 25.
- 22 *Windspeaker*, September 1997, p. 23.
- 23 *Windspeaker*, September 1997, p. 23.
- 24 The idea of 'focusing on their own oppression' is an extremely limiting standpoint for peoples who are trying to change their social situation for the better. As Birrell discusses, focusing on oppression prevents peoples from imagining other possibilities for identity construction. See, Birrell, Susan. "Women of Color, Critical Autobiography, and Sport" in Messner, Michael, Sabo, Donald (eds.). *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990: 191.

## References

---

Birrell, Susan. "Women of Color, Critical Autobiography, and Sport" in Messner, Michael, Sabo, Donald (eds.). *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990: 185-199.

Donnelly, P. "Sport as a Site for 'Popular' Resistance," in Gruneau, R. (ed.) *Popular Cultures and Political Practices*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988: 69-82.

Forsyth, J. "J. Wilton Littlechild's North American Indigenous Games". Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2000.

Gruneau, R. "Modernization or Hegemony: Two Views on Sport and Social Development," in Harvey, J. and Cantelon, H. (eds.) *Not Just a Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology*. Ottawa, Ont.: University of Ottawa Press, 1988: 9-32.

Henry, F. and Tator, C. *Full Report: Racist Discourse in Canada's English Print Media*. Toronto: The Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000.

<http://www.ammsa.com/ammsaads.html>

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history.html>

Meadows, M. *Voices in the Wilderness: Images of Aboriginal People in the Australian Media*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

McPherson, T. A Comparative Analysis of Athlete Participation and Performance for the 1997 North American Indigenous Games (Victoria, BC) and the 1997 Canada Summer Games (Brandon, MB). Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1998.

Paraschak, V. "Native Canadians in sport: A clash of cultural values," in Uche, L. (ed.) *North-South Information Culture: Trends in Global Communications and Research Paradigms*. Lagos: Longman Nigeria PLC, 1996: 99-113.

*Windspeaker*, March 1989 - September 1997.

## Time to Take Notice: A Biographical Analysis of the Firth Sisters

Christine O'Bonsawin  
University of Western Ontario

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s two Aboriginal sisters from Canada's remote Northern Arctic dominated Canadian cross-country skiing. Sharon and Shirley Firth competed at the national and international levels of cross-country skiing from 1968 to 1985; however, the histories of these extraordinary athletes have yet to be written. Despite a lack of academic and public knowledge concerning the relationship struggles and the experiences of Native women, a rich history exists for Aboriginal females competing in both traditional and mainstream sport. Charles Ballem argues that after some time, black athletes began to receive some of the recognition they deserved.<sup>1</sup> However, this was not the case with Canadian Native athletes. According to Ballem:

*Even if the achievements of [Tom] Longboat and [Jim] Thorpe had been accurately portrayed it is conceded that this alone would not have created a sufficient infusion of motivation and pride amongst natives to counter the symptoms of a social disability that was gripping the native population in Canada.<sup>2</sup>*

Native communities were at a loss for local role models or sport heroes who were 'touchable' and could inspire Native youth to become active and successful.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper is to give the Firth sisters the long overdue recognition they deserve, while providing the Native community of Canada, and its youth, with 'touchable' Aboriginal sporting heroes who can inspire them to achieve sporting success.

Sharon Anne and Shirley Anne Firth were born in Aklavik, NWT, a remote community on the west shore of the Peel Channel in the Mackenzie Delta, on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1953. Their mother, Fanny Rose Greenland Firth, was a status-Indian of Gwich'in descent who lost her status under the *Indian Act* when she married her husband, Stephen Firth.<sup>4</sup> Stephen Firth was a Loucheux-Métis whose grandfather descended from the Orkney Islands of Scotland. Fanny Rose and Stephen Firth had a total of twelve children, including seven girls and five boys. Stephen Firth was a Loucheux-Metis trapper who followed the annual great caribou herds of the MacKenzie Delta. Much like their father, Sharon and Shirley Firth were avid trappers and grew up trapping smaller game animals.<sup>5</sup>

Aklavik, meaning 'barren-ground grizzly place,' became a central Northern community in the 1920s and was largely recognized for its excellent trapping ground. However, by the 1950s, Aklavik

was experiencing severe erosion and flooding problems as a result of rapid industrial development.<sup>6</sup> At this time the federal government was forced to start a construction project in a near-by location in order to relocate Aklavik residents. In 1959, the government relocated one hundred families, including the Firths, to nearby Inuvik, NWT.<sup>7</sup> This government project began in the mid 1950s as a result of federal initiatives to build a base for the development and administration of the Western Arctic.<sup>8</sup> Inuvik was adopted as the new name of the community; it came from the language of the Inuit people, meaning 'place of man.'<sup>9</sup> In 1959, Inuvik became the new home to the Firth family. The Firth sisters spent their childhood and adolescence in this community and they soon became involved in neighbourhood recreational activities, including cross-country skiing.

The foundations for the Firth's sporting careers started long before their involvement in cross-country skiing. In 1954, Father Mouchet, a Roman Catholic missionary originally from France, moved from Telegraph Creek, British Columbia to Old Crow, Yukon. In November of 1955, Father Mouchet started a community ski club, which provided the foundation for what eventually would become known as the Territorial Experimental Ski Training (TEST) program. At that time, the community's elders and educators wished to address the issues of juvenile delinquency and alcoholism that were affecting their village-oriented life-style. Father Mouchet proposed that regular sport and exercise could potentially alleviate the boredom factors that were leading to such harmful behaviours. After a brief consideration of downhill skiing, Father Mouchet and the parents in the community selected cross-country skiing. Cross-country skiing was thought to connect to the lifestyles of the people of Old Crow, as it was oriented towards travelling on land.<sup>10</sup> Skiing linked traditional customs to current practices. Equipment was secured through a fund-raising campaign and training began in 1956 with Father Mouchet acting as both coach and organizer.<sup>11</sup>

Those early days in Old Crow, and Father Mouchet's desire to teach the Northern youth to cross-country ski, set the foundations for the TEST program. In 1963, Jacques Van Pelt, an official of the Recreation Department of the NWT, invited Father Mouchet to visit the Territories. This visit eventually resulted in the official launch of TEST in Inuvik, NWT in 1965. Bjorger Petterson, a certified cross-country ski instructor from British Columbia who had considerable Scandinavian cross-country skiing experience,<sup>12</sup> assisted Father Mouchet in overseeing the immediate operations of the program, while the Board of Directors established the TEST objectives and maintained the administrative operations of the program.<sup>13</sup>

Led by the curiosity of Shirley Firth, the girls decided to participate in the new sporting program that had been launched in their community. Immediately, Mouchet and Petterson saw a special uniqueness in the girls' 'primitive' yet energetic attempt at cross-country skiing. However, their participation in this newly introduced sport was not entirely supported by their parents. This sport was foreign to Northern residents and they were not immediately receptive. Many families in the settlement did not fully understand the new sport and sometimes made negative comments to their family members involved in the activity, such as "in those clothes we don't know you,



you don't belong to this family anymore."<sup>14</sup> Shirley remembers her parent's initial reactions to her participation:

*When I first started skiing it was hard for us to go out because my parents didn't want us to, didn't know what we were getting ourselves into I guess... and our first races we won, and since then my parents always said, 'you guys better get out there and train' and they were behind us all the way.<sup>15</sup>*

Soon after their initial experimentation with the cross-country skiing program, the Firth sisters made Petterson's elite team selection and they were participating in national and international competitions, travelling all over Canada, the United States, and eventually the world.<sup>16</sup> The accomplishments and successes of Sharon and Shirley Firth from the beginning of their cross-country skiing careers under the guidance of Mouchet and Petterson in 1965 to their retirement in the mid-1980s are astounding.

In 1967, the Firth sisters competed in their first major cross-country ski race in Anchorage, Alaska. This was their first journey outside of Inuvik. Shirley reflects, "I remember flying to Alaska. I had never been in an airplane. Anchorage was this huge city, with street lights, elevators and things that we don't have in Inuvik."<sup>17</sup> Coach Petterson remembers this day and how it shaped the Firth's careers and the future of cross-country skiing in Canada:

*Well, it dates back to December 1967 for the first time I took those girls to a ski race outside of Inuvik. It was Anchorage, Alaska and I believe Shirley won and Sharon was number three... not only in Northern Canada, but right across the whole North American continent, it set a new standard for cross-country skiing, and this standard I think has been growing ever since and those girls have been growing with the standard and been keeping ahead of it. And there definitely has been a real foundation sewn in improving cross-country skiing in Canada.<sup>18</sup>*

This successful experience, the first of many for the Firth sisters, established them as dominant figures in the sport of cross-country skiing and perhaps more importantly instilled a new sense of confidence in these small town athletes.

In 1968, at the age of fourteen, Sharon and Shirley made their debut at the national level of skiing in the Canadian Junior Cross-Country Championships held in Port Arthur, Ontario. At this event the girls exceeded expectations and Shirley prevailed with a silver medal and Sharon with the bronze medal in the five kilometre individual event. By 1969 the Firth sisters were competing in events nationally and internationally. The majority of their meets took place across Canada and the United States; however, in this same year they were selected to the first Canadian junior team to race and train in Scandinavia.<sup>19</sup> The Firths continued to dominate the Canadian national scene in 1970 and 1971 with several gold and silver placements at the Canadian Senior National Championships.<sup>20</sup> In 1972, the Canadian Ski Association awarded the Firths with the John Semelink Memorial Award for their contributions to skiing in Canada. This marked the first time nordic skiers were so

honoured.<sup>21</sup> In that same year the Firths were selected to represent Canada at the Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo, Japan. What began as a simple curiosity led the Firths to the most celebrated sport competition in the world.

In 1972, the Canadian cross-country team was led to Sapporo, Japan by eighteen-year old sisters, Sharon and Shirley Firth, who were competing in their first Olympic Games. This eight-member team included an unprecedented six skiers from the Mackenzie Delta town of Inuvik, NWT, the youngest cross-country skiers ever assembled to represent Canada at the Olympic Games, and the debut of both Canadian and American women in Olympic cross-country competition.<sup>22</sup> Prior to the 1972 Sapporo Games, Shirley fell ill and was diagnosed with a severe case of hepatitis. Her condition was critical and the disease almost took her life. This was an extremely difficult time for Sharon, of course, as her twin sister fought for her life. Shirley attributes her full recovery and improbable return to the Olympic team in time to participate in the Sapporo Games, to her mental strength and determination. However, she was too weak to be competitive in her first Olympic appearance. In their Olympic debut, the Firth sisters placed in the top thirty in all of their events. Their accomplishments were impressive as the Sapporo Games marked the first time the Canadian Olympic Association (COA) sent a women's team to represent the nation in Olympic competition.<sup>23</sup> Following the Sapporo Games, the twins' reputation in sport grew and they soon became the marquee names of cross-country skiing in Canada. As their popularity grew, so did the attendance of spectators at national cross-country ski meets.<sup>24</sup>

In 1973, 1974, and 1975 the Firth sisters continued to dominate the Canadian and North American cross-country skiing scenes.<sup>25</sup> At the age of twenty-two, the Firth sisters were once again selected to the Canadian Olympic team. Innsbruck, Austria was the site for the 1976 Winter Olympics and, once more, the Canadian women's cross-country ski team participated. For the second consecutive Games, athletes from Inuvik, NWT dominated the Olympic cross-country team selection with five out of the ten representatives originating from the small Mackenzie Delta township. Despite the icy trail conditions in Innsbruck, which did not suit the skiing styles of the lightweight skiers, their accomplishments in the Games were once again notable.<sup>26</sup>

The Firth twins' domination of cross-country skiing continued through 1977, 1978, and 1979. In 1978, *Ski Magazine* selected Shirley as the Canadian Nordic skier of the year. She retained this title selection until 1983. Politics soon took over at the national level of cross-country skiing and the Firth sisters were faced with a number of issues that affected their participation and inclusion on the Canadian National Ski Team (NST). By 1978, Sharon needed a break from the national team. She attributes this to the political issues that were surrounding the team. Specifically, there were some conflicts between coaches and with coaches that were becoming intolerable. Also, there was a breakdown in the NST office, attributed to having too many program leaders and conflicting personal opinions on coaching. Sharon's decision to return to competition in 1979 was two-fold; she missed the racing circuit and she did not feel as though she had reached her potential. However,

returning to the NST in 1979 was a struggle in itself. At this time the NST claimed that Sharon and Shirley were 'too old' and the team needed new blood.<sup>27</sup> Their struggles to remain on the National team and to qualify for the Lake Placid Games of 1980 proved much different than in previous years. At an Olympic qualifying event in Quebec in 1979 the Firth twins received the disheartening news from home that their mother had died in a house fire. Their decision not to return home immediately, but rather to remain in Quebec to qualify for the Lake Placid Games, was an extremely difficult choice for them. During this time period, they did not feel as though their sport association was fully behind them and if they did return home, they believed they would be removed from the Olympic team. At the age of twenty-six, the Firth sisters were made to feel too old for the Canadian cross-country team, as the administrators wanted new faces. Sharon explains:

*They wanted to have new people. But there was no one. We were the best in Canada, and when you sacrifice your time and energy to a sport, you want to stay on that team. But always having threats like 'You're too old and you can stay as long as you produce,' it gets really tiring.<sup>28</sup>*

Sharon also believes that the desire not to include them on the 1980 Olympic team came from the Ski Association's prejudices concerning the Firth's Native heritage.

When their mother passed away during their qualifying trials, the Firths had a very difficult decision to make. They attributed their decision to remain at the competition to the strength of their mother. They recognized the importance of remaining at the event in order to qualify for the Lake Placid Games. Sadly, the Firth's decision to remain in Quebec as opposed to returning home to be with their family through this difficult time was in part a result of their insecurities concerning their Ski Association's lack of support for them.

The Lake Placid Games were to start on February 13, 1980.<sup>29</sup> However, the women's cross-country team was not informed of team selections until mid-January, after their arrival in Quebec City for pre-Olympic training. Prior to the 1980 Lake Placid Games, the COA made a decision to only send Canadian elite athletes, or those who ranked in the top half of the world, to the Games. It was a frustrating decision for many athletes as these 'Backdoor Olympics' in the Adirondack Mountains were less than 100 kilometres from the Canadian border and the financial costs appeared feasible for the COA to send athletes to these Games in order to provide them with Olympic experience. The Firths, Angela Schmidt, and Joan Groothuysen were eventually selected to the women's team.<sup>30</sup> The Canadian cross-country ski team was dealt another blow prior to the Games as it was decided by the COA that the men's team would be dropped from the Olympics. It was felt that there was a lack of potential for the Canadian men to finish within the top sixteen in the world. For the first time since 1928 Canadian men did not represent Canada in the cross-country ski competition.<sup>31</sup> The Firths have attributed their disappointing performances at these Games to the many distractions prior to the commencement of the Games.<sup>32</sup>

Despite scepticism over the age of the Firth sisters, they continued to dominate the National and North American ski scenes from 1981 to 1983. In 1981, the Firth sisters were awarded the Commissioner's Award of the NWT. NWT Commissioner John Parker stated in his banquet speech:

*They have been good citizens and great ambassadors for the NWT. We are proud of their achievements and we are proud of our girls. I am both thrilled and delighted to present Sharon and Shirley Firth the Commissioner's Award for public service at the highest level.*<sup>33</sup>

In a follow-up speech, both Sharon and Shirley expressed their pleasure in receiving the award and in having assisted in the promotion of Northern Canada and its people. In 1982, Shirley placed eleventh in the overall World Cup standings, which constituted the highest point total ever for any Canadian cross-country skier, male or female. The Firth's selection to the 1984 Olympic team marked an unprecedented fourth consecutive appearance for a Canadian athlete competing in the Winter Olympic Games.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, these Games marked the end of the Firth's impressive Olympic careers. By 1984 Shirley had been married for one year and decided it was time to retire from the sport. She retired in April of 1984, following the Swiss ski week circuit.<sup>35</sup> Sharon knew that when one of them retired, the other would as well,<sup>36</sup> but she remained in competition for one more year and retired in 1985 following her participation in the North American Championships and her victory in the Great American Ski Chase.<sup>37</sup>

Following their retirement from sport, the Firth sisters received further recognition beyond the John Semelink Award and the Commissioner's Award. In 1985, the Firth Award was established by Cross Country Canada (CCC) in recognition of Sharon and Shirley's contribution to Canadian cross-country skiing. This award recognizes the achievements of women who have made an outstanding contribution to cross-country skiing in Canada.<sup>38</sup> In 1987, Sharon and Shirley received the Order of Canada, which "pays tribute to Canadians who exemplify the highest qualities of citizenship and whose contributions enrich the lives of their contemporaries."<sup>39</sup> The Canadian Ski Museum inducted the Firth sisters into its Skiing Hall of Fame in 1990. Finally, in 2000, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) produced and televised a documentary on the Firth sisters. This documentary recognized both their accomplishments and struggles in Canadian sport.

This paper serves as a brief postscript to an extensive study into the lives and sporting careers of the otherwise hidden accomplishments of two of Canada's most successful athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the lack of literature concerning these athletes' contribution to both Canadian and Aboriginal sport history, we now know that recognition for these two extraordinary athletes is long overdue. At a time when the Aboriginal sport community is longing for tangible sporting heroes to inspire and motivate its youth, the Firth sisters have come to the forefront of sporting greatness. The Native sport community and sport historians now hold the responsibility for ensuring that the stories of these remarkable athletes are accessible to its youth, providing them with 'touchable' role models who can motivate them to success in their own lives.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Ballem, Charles. "Missing from the Canadian Sport Scene: Native Athletes," *Canadian Journal of Sport History* 14, no. 2 (1983), 33-34.
- 2 Ibid. p 34.
- 3 Ibid. pp. 33-43.
- 4 Interview by e-mail with Sharon Firth, Canadian Olympian, April 15, 2002
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 In the early 20th century, Aklavik was considered to be the key transportation centre of the North. As the major community in the Mackenzie Delta, Aklavik supported the Hudson Bay post, which was established in 1912, and the Roman Catholic Mission founded in 1926. As a result of the erosion and flooding the federal government was forced to start a construction project in a near-by location in order to relocate Aklavik residents. See The New NWT–Aklavik. *Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*. [Online].
- 7 The New NWT–Aklavik. *Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*. [Online]. (cited June 28, 2002); available from <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/NewNWT/Aklavik.html>.
- 8 The New NWT–Inuvik. *Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*. [Online]. (cited June 28, 2002); available from <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/NewNWT/Inuvik.html>.
- 9 The federal government put a great deal of thought into the geographical location of this new administrative centre of the Western Arctic, including physical characteristics of the land. These characteristics included a large and level area for modern airport facilities, presence of gravel materials, and a listening post in close proximity to the Soviets. Inuvik is located in the far corner of the NWT and is considered to be one of the harshest tundras in the world. Soon after its development Inuvik became the new capital of the North as it came to be known as the place where science and industry met with a whole range of social forces. The population of the North West was traditionally comprised of Indian, Eskimo, and Metis people. However, the establishment of an administrative centre meant promised oil and gas incentives, attracting a large non-Native population, which has staggered in numbers throughout Inuvik's short history. Population numbers in Inuvik have largely depended on the announcements of proposed mega projects. Inuvik has become known for many things, including its airport, which is the busiest airport in Canada north of Edmonton. This airport includes a 6,000 foot paved runway to support the size of aircrafts and the frequency in which they come in and out of Inuvik. Inuvik is a town built on stilts, which keeps the buildings off the permafrost, and the town Utilidor runs throughout the community distributing heat and water to residents. This community has often been referred to as "Toy Town" as it has been said by community residents to resemble the characteristics of a winter wonderland. See, The New NWT–Inuvik. *Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*. [Online].
- 10 Paraschak, Victoria, and Heine, Michael. "A TEST of Time: Histories of the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program of Northern Canada." Canadian Sport History Symposium, Brock University, St. Catherines, Ontario, June 2001.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 CBC Accume Clips. Date unknown (The accume clips obtained from the CBC Sport Media Archives Library is an accumulation of unedited footage of cross country races and the skiers who competed in these competitions. This videotape includes footage of Canadian cross country skiers as well and interviews and voice dubbing of members of the TEST program).

- 15 Ibid.
- 16 The Firth Sisters: Northern Lights. *CBC Sports Online: The Olympians—a Century of Canadian Heroes*. Available: <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympians/firth.shtml>
- 17 Ibid. p 3.
- 18 CBC Accume Clips. Date unknown.
- 19 During their time in Europe, at a meet in Hasselaloppet, Sweden, Shirley captured the first gold cross-country skiing medal by a Canadian junior at a European meet. Sharon also achieved a remarkable accomplishment with the silver medal in the same five-kilometre event. These medals marked the first top-three finishes by Canadians at a European event. In that same year, Sharon and Shirley competed in the Canadian and US National Championships in both the junior and senior levels. They were members of the first NWT ski team at the Canadian Senior National Championships and achieved top-place finishes in all their events. Shirley finished in first place in the women's five-kilometre and ten-kilometre events, while Sharon achieved second place finishes in both events. The two sisters teamed up with Roseann Allen, also of Inuvik, to finish in first place in the women's three-by-five-kilometre relay. This year also witnessed Firth victories and medal accumulations in competitions across North America. See, Cross-Country Canada. *Ski Results and Accomplishments of Sharon and Shirley Firth*. Date Unknown.
- 20 Their accomplishments went even further as they were members of the first Canadian women's team to compete in the World Nordic Championships in Vysoke Tatry, Czechoslovakia. They were also members of the first Canadian junior team to compete at the world's biggest junior meet (in effect a World Championship). In these same years the Firth sisters competed in meets across Canada and the US, where they finished with many top three finishes and were selected to the European Circuit of Scandinavia. See, Cross-Country Canada. *Ski Results and Accomplishments of Sharon and Shirley Firth*.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. Available: <http://canada.x-c.com/>.
- 24 The Firth Sisters: Northern Lights. *CBC Sports Online: The Olympians — a Century of Canadian Heroes*. Available: <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympians/firth.shtml>
- 25 In 1974, their domination of cross-country skiing in North America was complemented by the first back-to-back appearance by a Canadian woman at the World Championships. In 1975, in preparation for the 1976 Innsbruck Olympic Games, Sharon received gold in the five, ten, and relay events at the North American Championships, the first Canadian to sweep all three golds at a North American Championship. See, Cross-Country Canada. *Ski Results and Accomplishments of Sharon and Shirley Firth*.
- 26 Shirley finished the Games as top Canadian in twenty-seventh position out of forty-four competitors in the women's ten-kilometre event, and in twenty-ninth position in the five-kilometre event. Sharon placed twenty-ninth in the women's five-kilometre race and twenty-eighth in the ten-kilometre event. Both sisters were members of the women's relay team, along with Joan Groothuysen also of Inuvik and Ottawa's Sue Holloway. This women's relay team finished with a Canadian best-ever seventh position, a placement that presently remains as Canada's top finish in Olympic relay competition, See Cross-Country Canada. *Ski Results and Accomplishments of Sharon and Shirley Firth*.
- 27 Interview by e-mail with Sharon Firth, Canadian Olympian, April 15, 2002
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. [Online].

- 30 "Bureaucrats anger skier." *The Edmonton Journal*. Feb 14, 1980. F7.
- 31 Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. [Online].
- 32 At these Games, Shirley placed twenty-eighth in the five-kilometre event and twenty-fourth in the ten-kilometre event. She was also a member of the women's relay team, which finished in eighth position out of eight competing teams. Sharon competed in the women's five-kilometre event where she placed thirty-fifth. See, Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. [Online].
- 33 CBC Accume Clips. Date unknown.
- 34 Sharon competed for Canada in the debut of the women's 20-kilometre event, which she finished in twenty-first position out of thirty-nine competitors. Sharon currently holds the Canadian top finish in this event (it last appeared in Calgary in 1988 -- it was only included in the Winter Games schedule in 1984 and 1988). Shirley participated in the five-kilometre event where she placed twenty-eighth out of fifty-two competitors and in the ten-kilometre event where she finished in an impressive twenty-second position out of fifty-two skiers. This 22nd placement was a Canada-best that remained until the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, where it was broken by Beckie Scott, who finished in sixth position and Sara Renner who finished in fifteenth position in the women's ten-kilometre event. Canada was unable to field a women's relay team for the 1984 Games as it was short one skier for the four-woman event. See, Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. [Online].
- 35 Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History* [Online].
- 36 Interview by e-mail with Sharon Firth, Canadian Olympian, April 15, 2002
- 37 The Firth Sisters: Northern Lights. CBC Sports Online: The Olympians—a Century of Canadian Heroes. Available: <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympians/firth.shtml>
- 38 Cross Country Canada. *Volunteer Awards Criteria*. Available from <http://canada.x-c.com/womens/volapp.html>. The Firth Award goes to any woman who has made an outstanding contribution to cross country skiing in Canada. Nominees should have been involved at the local and regional level at a minimum, and possibly nationally as well. They will not only have been thoroughly involved in their sport in a wide variety of ways but will have passed on their enthusiasm and had an influence on involving others. The award was created in 1985 in recognition of the outstanding contribution made to Canadian cross country skiing by Sharon and Shirley Firth.
- 39 Industry Canada. *The Order of Canada*. [Online]. available from <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/order/>.

## References

---

- Ballem, Charles. "Missing from the Canadian Sport Scene: Native Athletes." *Canadian Journal of Sport History*, 14, 2, 1983, pp. 33-43.
- "Bureaucrats anger skier." *The Edmonton Journal*, 14 February 1980, F7.
- CBC Archives, Toronto, Ontario. Accume Clips, Date unknown.
- Cross Country Canada. *Canada's Olympic Cross County History*. [Online] Available at <http://canada.x-c.com>.
- Cross Country Canada. *Ski Results and Accomplishments of Sharon and Shirley Firth*. n.d.
- Cross Country Canada. *Volunteer Awards Criteria*. Available at: <http://canada.x-c.com/womens/volapp.html>.



Government of the Northwest Territories, *The New NWT—Aklavik*. Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories (cited June 28, 2002). Available online at <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/NewNWT/Aklavik.html>.

Industry Canada. *The Order of Canada* [Online]. Available at <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/order>.

Interview by e-mail with Sharon Firth, Canadian Olympian, 15 April 2002.

Paraschak, Victoria, and Heine, Michael. "A TEST of Time: Histories of the Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program of Northern Canada." Canadian Sport History Symposium, Brock University, June 2001.

"The Firth Sisters: Northern Lights." *CBC Sports Online: The Olympians—a Century of Canadian Heroes* [cited June 28, 2002] [Online]. Available at <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympians/forth.shtml>.

## “Get Into the Mainstream”: Aboriginal Sport in Canada, 1967-2002

Vicky Paraschak  
University of Windsor

Aboriginal sport in Canada has flourished in the last decade of the twentieth century. The Aboriginal Sport Circle, incorporated in 1995 and funded by Sport Canada, operates as the national organization for Aboriginal sport, with members from across Canada representing several provincial/territorial Aboriginal sport organizations. The North American Indigenous Games have become institutionalized since their inception in 1990, with the fifth Games occurring in Winnipeg this month. Federal - Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Sport have kept Aboriginal sport on their agenda since 1995, and in 2000 sponsored two national roundtables—on sport, and on recreation—that produced the Maskwa-chees Declaration addressing physical activity, physical education, sport, recreation, and related cultural activities in Canada. The legitimacy sought by Native organizers has finally been realized—or has it?

Aboriginal sport went through a similar ‘golden age’ during the 1970s. The Native Sport and Recreation Program received funding from the federal government between 1972 and 1981. A National Indian Sports Council was created, with provincial/territorial representatives from across the country. The Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport offered to support this Council as the “governing body of Indian Sport in Canada” (Campagnolo, 1978: 2). Her request—that they “get into the mainstream and compete like everyone else” (Campagnolo, 1978: 1)—was, however, rejected. Aboriginal delegates instead stressed their interest in a view of sport informed by broader Native concerns. They did not want to be ‘assimilated’ into the National Sport and Recreation Centre, preferring to remain connected to the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations). Aboriginal organizers thus asserted their own vision for sport, but when federal funding was withdrawn in 1981, the system being supported by those resources disappeared. Aboriginal sport organizing proceeded in an ad hoc fashion, but federal resources were not reinstated until the 1990s. This paper explores elements of continuity and change, concerning federal government involvement in Aboriginal sport, over this thirty-five year time period. While the rationale underlying federal support to Aboriginal sport has remained consistent, the processes enabling both an Aboriginal sport system and mainstream sport to co-exist have continued to change.

### Period Leading up to the Native Sport and Recreation Program (1967-1971)

The presence—and success—of Native cross country skiers from the Yukon and the NWT at the first Canada Winter Games in 1967 impressed federal politicians, as they could see the potential

for elite performances by Aboriginal athletes. A federally-funded, five year Territorial Experimental Ski Training Program in the NWT was initiated within the year, that further enabled elite Native skiers to excel at national and international levels.<sup>1</sup>

Discussions at the 1967 Canada Games also led to the eventual establishment of the Arctic Winter Games. The first Games were opened by Prime Minister Trudeau in March 1970 and attended by several politicians and elite athletes. John Munro, the federal Minister responsible for sport, remarked in a meeting there that he wished to organize a “Demonstration Project” to cover the isolated or Indian areas of the Prairie Provinces (Meredith and Dedam, 1977).<sup>2</sup> All of these projects involved participants of Aboriginal ancestry participating in Euro-Canadian sports.

In light of John Munro’s interest in Aboriginal sport participants, it is not surprising that his March 1970 release of *A Proposed Sports Policy for Canadians* noted that:

*Among the disadvantaged, the poverty stricken, lies our greatest untapped potential for sports excellence. One concrete example, think of the latent potential of our Indian, Metis and Eskimo populations—as mostly [sic] easily visible in the Territories Cross Country Canadian Ski Championship Team. We do not think, however, that we can tap such a potential until the idea of mass participation in any given sport spreads to these low-income communities, in general, and becomes an accepted part of their culture. (p. 29)*

Munro thus extended his assumption—that developing grassroots sport would produce elite athletes—to Aboriginal peoples as he had for others in Canada. He produced a subsequent document, *Sport Canada/Recreation Canada*, in 1971. Here, he reiterated his concern for both participation and elite performance. Along with assisting other levels of government, this policy noted a federal commitment to “our involvement with special population groups such as the Eskimos, the Indians, the Metis, the handicapped and the poor [which] is increasing and growing in effectiveness” (p. 26).

## Native Sport and Recreation Program (1972-1981)

---

In September 1972, a pilot project for Aboriginal peoples across Canada was passed by Cabinet. This five year experimental program was “to increase the quality of participation and raise the level of performance to the point where Native athletics will be able to participate in broader competitive events with other Canadians” (Acting Director, 15 August 1973).<sup>3</sup> In 1977, when the program was reviewed by an interdepartmental committee<sup>4</sup>, concern was raised about the appropriateness of the activities being carried out, which were seen to be beyond Sport Canada’s mandate. Many of the activities were tied to “traditional forms of entertainment and socio-cultural activities... reveal[ing] the very close relationship [sport and recreation] has with the culture of Native people.”<sup>5</sup> A renewed program was recommended by the review staff<sup>6</sup> with specific objectives that included ensuring “that Native sport and recreation recognizes and caters to those unique activities which are an integral part of the Native cultural and social heritage” (Meredith and Dedam, 1977:

14). The review also recommended that a National Native Sport and Recreation Advisory Council be established, “which could be designated as the voice of Native Sport and Recreation in Canada” (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 20). The final line of the Review clarified further the orientation of Aboriginal organizers: “It should be noted that Native sports and recreation officials do not wish to be assimilated but they wish to retain their identity and to compete with all comers as Native teams” (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 21).

A National Indian Sports Council was established, and in 1978 the Minister of State offered to make it the national sport governing body and to relocate it to the National Sport Centre. This offer was rejected because those present at the meeting preferred a form of sport in keeping with a Native vision of physical activity, organizationally linked to the National Indian Brotherhood. They continued in this vein over the next few years, during which time Fitness and Amateur Sport removed itself from other programs involving Aboriginal sport participants. Financial support for the TEST program had ended in 1975, after the program was reshaped to focus more on recreational, community-based skiing. The Northern Games Association, who organized yearly festivals involving Inuit and Dene traditional activities, was informed in 1978 that federal funding would end in 1981. That same year—1981—the Native Sport and Recreation Program was terminated, with funding supposedly redirected to Indian health.<sup>7</sup>

### Inter-program Years (1981-1990)

---

Throughout the 1980s, the legitimacy of Aboriginal rights in Canada was growing, beginning with the 1983 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which acknowledged existing Aboriginal rights. This decision, and subsequent court decisions and land claim settlements, continued to reinforce the legitimacy of Aboriginal peoples as nations with unique indigenous rights. Sport became one of the venues through which that uniqueness could be visually expressed. At the Olympic Games in 1984, Alwyn Morris won a gold medal for pairs kayaking, and held up an eagle feather on the podium as a sign of respect for his grandfather. This image was embraced by Aboriginal peoples, and Morris became a national Native role model, touring reserves. In 1990, the Iroquois Nationals, an all-Native lacrosse team, attended their first world championship under their own Haudenosaunee passports, competing as a nation apart from Canada. Arctic Winter Games, Northern Games and Dene Games had all been held in the north since 1970, and now other Native games festivals joined them, including the Labrador Games, the Aboriginal Games in Quebec (beginning in 1991), and various cultural/summer camps.

Federal sport policies were released in 1981, 1986 and 1988 with no mention of Aboriginal sport, although attention was paid to the needs of women and the disabled. In 1988, however, Ben Johnson was caught using steroids at the Olympics, and the Dubin Inquiry that followed signalled to Canadians that their sport culture was in need of a thorough rethinking, to align the values it espoused with actual practices.

## Calls for an Aboriginal Sport Secretariat (1990-1994)

---

1990 was a landmark year, because the first North American Indigenous Games, held in Edmonton that summer, became the cornerstone of an emerging Aboriginal sport system. These Games, restricted to those of verifiable Aboriginal ancestry, “stress fun and participation while encouraging our youth to strive for excellence” (AS/RA of British Columbia, 1995: n.p.). Health and Welfare Canada provided \$50,000 for these Games, its first foray into Aboriginal sport in almost a decade (Mercredi, 1995). The Games were comprised of mainstream sports, because the intent was to provide a stepping stone to national and international level sport competitions; however, the cultural program showcased various traditional games and dances.

In December that year, a House of Commons Sub-Committee issued a report noting that federal attention to Aboriginal sport had been lacking, and proposing that more attention was needed.<sup>8</sup> They recommended that “a secretariat be established to encourage the increased active participation of Aboriginals in national and international sports competitions” (Minister’s Task Force, 1992: 156). The Minister’s Task Force subsequently commissioned a survey of sport facilities in indigenous communities across Canada. This report by Alwyn Morris outlined problems in both participation and elite sport opportunities for Aboriginal participants, as well as the benefits linked to sport within Aboriginal communities.<sup>9</sup> He also pointed out the need for the sport community to accept the cultural basis of indigenous sport (Minister’s Task Force, 1992).

In May 1992, *Sport: The Way Ahead* was released, and it included a section addressing the needs of Aboriginal peoples within the Chapter on Equity and Access.<sup>10</sup> The Task Force, after weighing the pros and cons of forming a new sport organization during this time of fiscal restraint, nevertheless came out in favour of a new Secretariat:

*The needs of the indigenous community have not been well-addressed. An organization with an understanding of the cultural and spiritual approach to sport could be a valuable asset. It could provide direct linkages between the indigenous community, sport organizations and Fitness and Amateur Sport... the secretariat should be created with funding provided by the federal government, based on mutually agreed-upon goals. (Minister’s Task Force, 1992:156)*

This recommendation led to the creation of an organization that would eventually become the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC).

Sport Canada provided \$90,000 towards the second North American Indigenous Games, held in 1993 in Prince Albert Saskatchewan (Mercredi, 1995).<sup>11</sup> The next year, *A Planning Framework for Sport in Canada*<sup>12</sup> was released. The Plan’s section on Equity and Access pertained particularly to Aboriginal peoples, as it recognized the need to remove barriers to full participation in sport and to ensure that the sport system reflected the diversity of the Canadian population. The federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for sport took on this challenge the following Febru-

ary, when they directed their officials to work in cooperation with national Aboriginal sport representatives to develop joint strategies to eliminate barriers to participation in sport and recreation (Legaree, 2003). Clearly, Aboriginal peoples had become a group deserving of federal—as well as provincial/territorial—attention in sport.

### Aboriginal Sport Circle (1995 - )

---

In 1995, a *Comprehensive Overview of Physical Activity and Recreation/Sport Relevant to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* was released by the Fitness Directorate of Health Canada. This report noted the holistic approach taken traditionally by Aboriginal peoples (Winther, Nazer-Bloom and Petch, 1995: 22), as opposed to the competitive nature of the Euro-Canadian approach—a point made in a report by Alwyn Morris in 1992, and a central focus of the athlete-centred discussion paper released in November 1992. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was published, and one section of the report specifically addressed concerns related to Aboriginal peoples and sport (RCAP, 1996: 70-197).<sup>13</sup> Among the Commission's recommendations was one that charged Ministers responsible for Sport and Recreation to convene a meeting within the year to discuss the form and structure of a proposed national council for sport, with Aboriginal youth and experts in the field invited to take part (recommendation # 4.4.5.) (RCAP, 1996: 176). This report was complemented by the hosting of the first Annual General Meeting of the ASC, with its three prime objectives: coaching development, the creation of provincial/territorial Aboriginal sport associations, and the North American Indigenous Games. The ASC was incorporated under the Society Act in May 1995 (Henry, 1995: 5). Among the ASC objectives were several that recognized their desire to foster an Aboriginal sport system.<sup>14</sup> The ASC's vision statement expresses an intention to 'get into the mainstream' when appropriate, but also to foster a distinct, Aboriginal system.<sup>15</sup>

In 1999, the *Sport In Canada — Everybody's Business* report was released. Recommendations on encouraging accessibility of sport and physical activities had a specific section on Aboriginal sport. This section acknowledged the "emerging Aboriginal sport delivery system," identified the priorities of the Aboriginal Sport Circle, and provided recommendations that would benefit each of those priorities. In 2000, two National Indigenous Roundtables—on Sport, and on Recreation—were held, and the Maskwachees Declaration was issued. This process provided background for the National Sport Summit held in April 2001, which once again included Aboriginal peoples, along with women, people with disabilities and visible minorities, as under-represented and marginalized groups. These groups were seen to be in need of particular attention to decrease barriers, to promote sport participation and leadership roles, to foster social integration, to increase self-esteem, and to overcome personal and social difficulties. The discussion paper noted that "the future of sport in Canada depends on strong leadership, partnership and accountability" (p. 24), and clearly that partnership includes Aboriginal peoples.<sup>16</sup>

## Approaches Towards Native Sport: Continuities and Changes

---

The federal government's rationale for involvement in Aboriginal sport has remained consistent throughout the past thirty-five years. Its intent is to prepare Native peoples for success in mainstream sporting opportunities and to have the benefits attributed to sport extended to Aboriginal communities. The process used to work towards this rationale has, however, broadened to include provincial/territorial sport officials, as well as Aboriginal organizations, in keeping with a recent emphasis on forming partnerships in sport. As well, the federal government has recently acknowledged, in policy and through consultations, the existence of an emerging Aboriginal sport system within Canadian sport.

Aboriginal sport organizations have likewise remained consistent in their rationale—they wish to create a system more closely attuned to Aboriginal values and interests, as seen by the recent creation of National Coaching Certification Program theory units on racism, holistic approaches to sport, and traditional foods. They are fostering all-Aboriginal teams and competitions that remain under Aboriginal control and represent Aboriginal peoples in their preferred manner. Thus, they have increasingly developed Aboriginal sport premised on their separate nationhood. However, there has also been an increased willingness by Aboriginal sport volunteers to work with/in the mainstream sport system.<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Aboriginal participants are 'getting into the mainstream just like everyone else,' but they continue to try and do this on their own terms.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 This "pilot social development experiment" was positioned federally as an attempt to acculturate Native athletes through an elite, Euro-Canadian sport that was, at the same time, compatible with traditional Native ways.
- 2 The previous year he had provided \$60,000 for an Alberta-based All-Indian Junior A Hockey team, following a request from Harold Cardinal, and decided that a broader program was needed for Native peoples.
- 3 Program funding was directed at the provincial/territorial level, so that skills, leadership and competitive opportunities could help close the performance gap and increase participation on the broader Canadian scene (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 6).
- 4 The Steering Committee included representatives from Secretary of State, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Health and Welfare Canada, Fitness and Amateur Sport, the National Indian Brotherhood, the Native Council of Canada, and the Treasury Board. (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 9)
- 5 As well, many programs needed assistance just getting a recreation program started, and were not able to get acceptable assistance from Recreation Canada (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 11A).
- 6 Fitness and Amateur Sport "assigned staff [Doug Meredith] to the undertaking including the services of an experienced Indian gentleman who at one time had been the Recreation Director for one of the larger Status Associations [Alex Dedam]" (Meredith and Dedam, 1977: 9).
- 7 In 1980 the federal government acknowledged that recreation was a provincial/territorial and not a federal responsibility. Thus, they moved even further towards an emphasis on elite sport, as well as on fitness, rather than on recreation.

- 8 The Canadian Olympic Association also recommended that assistance be given to Aboriginal peoples in sport.
- 9 He noted (Minister's Task Force, 1992) that "Aboriginal peoples have their own culture and their perceptions of sports and recreation is different than that of Euro-Canadian society" (p. 30); thus he argued for the need to develop an Aboriginal Sport Secretariat (p. 30), while noting the existence of Aboriginal sport organizations in British Columbia, Yukon, Saskatchewan and Alberta (p. 36).
- 10 The lack of Aboriginal athletes within the Canadian sport system, including elite levels, was noted even though sport was understood to be an important aspect of Aboriginal culture—an aspect that was closely integrated with other aspects of their social life (Task Force, 1992: 153).
- 11 Various teams also received provincial/territorial funding to assist them in their costs.
- 12 This policy was created by the sport community and the federal and provincial/territorial governments.
- 13 This section pointed out many prominent Aboriginal leaders who had a sport and recreation background, thus reinforcing the importance of developing leadership skills through sport "that would serve the unique concerns of Native communities." Sport was presented as a productive activity for youth, and a method for enhancing cultural retention, and fostering skills, leadership, self-esteem and pride.
- 14 Examples of these included a) To formulate a philosophy of Aboriginal spheres of culture, sports, fitness, recreation and youth development, community development and healthy lifestyles, and e) To assist in the creation of Aboriginal sport organizations, leagues and infrastructure, and have them recognized and integrated in the non-Aboriginal sport bodies at the local, provincial, national and international levels.(Aboriginal Sport Circle, 1996)
- 15 It claimed: "A strong support and communication system assists Aboriginal athletes to take advantage of opportunities within mainstream sport and when these are unavailable, the Circle works to ensure alternative activities are available [i.e., the Aboriginal sport system]. In order to accomplish [this], the ASC has a strong partnership with Sport Canada, mainstream sport, Aboriginal organizations, and public and private sector funding sources" (Aboriginal Sport Circle, circa 1996).
- 16 Bill C-54, the Physical Activity and Sport Act, was passed by the House of Commons on June 18, 2002. The only reference made to Aboriginal sport is indirect. Under the Objects and Mandate, point (m) notes that they can "facilitate the participation of under-represented groups in the Canadian sport system".
- 17 Areas of Aboriginal involvement with/in the mainstream sport system include, for example, the National Coaching Certification Program, elite athlete development, and organizing the North American Indigenous Games in conjunction with provincial/ territorial sport departments.

## References

---

Aboriginal Sport Circle. Business Plan, circa 1996.

Aboriginal Sports/Recreation Association of B.C., "Media Release" on the 1997 North American Indigenous Games planned for Victoria B.C., 25 October 1995.

Acting Director, Recreation Canada. Memorandum to Executive Assistant to Deputy Minister of Health, 15 August 1973.

Bill C-54. The Physical Activity and Sport Act. Ottawa: House of Commons, 18 June 2002.

Campagnolo, Iona. Speech at a Recreation Meeting in the Sport Federation Building to Aboriginal Sports Representatives, Ottawa, Ontario, 12 December 1978.



Coderre, Denis. "Building Canada Through Sport: Towards A Canadian Sport Policy – A Discussion Paper." Heritage Canada, April 2001.

Government of Canada. "Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Perspectives and Realities." Volume 4. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1996.

Henry, Danny. "Sport Circle Business Plan (Draft)." Fax from Aboriginal Sport/Recreation Association of British Columbia to Victor Mercredi, 21 November 1995.

Legaree, Ian. Email to author, May 3, 2003.

Mercredi, Victor. "Aboriginal Sport in Canada: Government of Canada – Sport Canada (Draft)." GNWT Binder #1-1001-001, 16 January 1995.

Meredith, D. and Dedam, A. "A Report on Assistance to Native People for Development of Sport and Recreation – Program Review and Recommendations." September 1977.

Mills, Dennis. "Sport in Canada: Leadership, Partnership and Accountability – Everybody's Business." Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, 1999.

Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy. "Sport: The Way Ahead." Canada: The Report of the Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy, May 1992.

Munro, John. "A Proposed Sports Policy for Canadians." National Health and Welfare, 20 March 1970.

Munro, John. "Sport Canada, Recreation Canada." National Health and Welfare, 7 May 1971.

Sport Community and Federal/Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee. "A Planning Framework for Sport in Canada." October 1994.

Winther, Neil; Nazer-Bloom, Leanne; and Petch, Virginia. "A Comprehensive Overview of Physical Activity and Recreation/Sport Relevant to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada." Fitness Directorate of Health Canada, March 1995

—Keynote Address—

## The Aboriginal Sport Circle: Canada's Emerging Sport Delivery System

Rick Brant

Aboriginal Sport Circle

*Over the years, Rick Brant has emerged as an influential leader within Aboriginal sport in Canada. He is the Executive Director and a founding member of the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC), the national body mandated with the responsibility for developing Aboriginal sport and recreation in Canada. He also has extensive involvement with the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) movement, where he has served as Head Coach for Saskatchewan's Track and Field Team (1990), General Manager for NAIG (1993, 1997), Chef de Mission for Team Ontario (1995), and, recently, provided consultation to the 2002 Host Society. He is also a former member of Canada's National Track and Field Team, and in 1987 received the national Tom Longboat Award for most outstanding Aboriginal athlete in Canada.*

### NAIG Observations

---

I have been invited to speak to you over the lunch hour about the ASC, but before I do, I would like to take the opportunity to share with you some of my observations on the NAIG. These Games have 'blossomed' into a magnificent event. The vision of a few and hard work of many have made this event a focal point of our communities. It has been fascinating to participate in the NAIG movement and witness its growth from relative obscurity to where it now attracts a diverse group of supporters with varying backgrounds, expertise and interests.

Not to single out any one group, but a prime example is that of the Federal Government. In 1993, I traveled from Saskatchewan to Ottawa with the goal of convincing Sport Canada that they should be funding (or investing if you will) in the NAIG. The fact is that I was not taken seriously. The idea of bringing thousands of athletes, coaches and cultural performers together with an anticipated budget of only \$1.5 Million was considered a "pipe dream". Now, almost 10 years later, Glynis Peters is here representing Sport Canada's Major Games Unit, and she is accompanied by mission staff willing to roll up their collective sleeves to do what it takes to support the development of Games. It is amazing!

Frankly, at previous NAIG events a symposium like this would not have taken place. We were so consumed with securing the necessary funds and planning to provide the most basic care and services for participants—we were in survival mode. NAIG has created some wonderful op-

portunities to conduct business. You have come together to network and share expertise gained through your research into Aboriginal Sport—and that is very exciting. As long as I have been in this business, witnessing the lonely struggles of our small organization, it is easy to think of yourself climbing the mountain alone. And a forum like this is an eye opener. It is proof that there are many people out there carrying the same passion—it is very inspiring.

## Background to the Aboriginal Sport Circle

---

Now, with the time I have I will try to provide you with the ‘Cole’s Notes’ version of the history behind the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) and our birth as more than just a national multi-sport organization, but an emerging national sport system.

Almost thirteen years ago today, I sat quietly by myself in the bleachers at Mooney’s Bay track and field facility in Ottawa. It was just after one of my most dismal performances at a national championship. I was reflecting on my career, facing the fact that at the ripe old age of 22 my body could no longer take the wear and tear of training and competition and my career as a middle distance runner was quickly coming to a close (I was pretty much feeling sorry for myself). Loe and behold, Alwyn Morris, Gold Medallist in canoeing at the 1984 Olympic Games, takes a seat beside me.

Alwyn had come over from the adjacent canoe club where he had been training, and watched my race. After doing his best to console me, we got onto the topic of the national sport system and our experiences with national team programs. This led us to sharing our opinions on why (between the two of us) we could only come up with fewer than a dozen names of Aboriginal athletes who were on national teams.

Knowing the pool of incredibly talented athletes in our communities, it was obvious to us that there were some real problems with Canada’s system. Aboriginal athletes were not getting the same opportunities afforded others. So before the end of our conversation, Alwyn shared with me his vision of creating a national organization that would work to address the shortcomings of the sport system in Canada. And sure enough, within a year and a half of our conversation, Alwyn called me and invited me to a meeting of Aboriginal sport leaders in Toronto, where we discussed the concept of creating not just a new national organization, but a comprehensive structure that would be responsible for Aboriginal sport throughout Canada.

Strangely enough, thanks to the opportunities created by Ben Johnson and the scandal that launched the Dubin Inquiry and the Ministers Task Force on Sport, we were able to convince Sport Canada and the mainstream sport community that Aboriginal peoples were stakeholders in sport, and that their system had simply not provided enough opportunities for Aboriginal peoples and so we should establish our own ‘complementary’ structure. Admittedly, our goal of establishing an entire system was lofty, but we all shared common *values, vision* and *principles*. Simply put, we

knew something had to be done and we were not going to wait around for someone else to do it for us. We met more formally over a five-year period, and as the circle of support grew, we gained credibility and acceptance. This was the birth of the ASC. We incorporated in 1995 and became operational in 1997.

Identifying the key ingredients that led to our formation, first and foremost was the belief in moving forward as a collective. We knew that in order to be effective, there had to be a shared sense of ownership to our creation. It was not going to be a 'top-down' approach. As well, the structure had to function as a result of grassroots or community direction. The relationship had to be as follows: Community—Regional Body—National Body. We agreed that the Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies (P/TASBs) would function autonomously. They are in place to respond to community needs, and in turn they come to the national table to prioritize issues and develop strategic, innovative programs that provide national opportunities to their communities. This view led us quite early in our development to establishing a few foundational principles:

**Principle of Mandate.** We agreed that if we were to serve our communities and provide a legitimate national voice, we needed a mandate. First, this meant that those at the table needed to seek individual mandates. Anyone who came to the table had to be recognized as speaking on behalf of the Aboriginal peoples of their Province or Territory. Second, the collective sought the support of the national political organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), Metis National Council (MNC), Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP).

**Principle of Inclusivity.** Whether First Nations, Metis, Inuit, or non-status, the ASC served the interests of all Aboriginal peoples. Surprisingly enough, with all of the layers of politics and competing agendas at play, we were able to stick together and keep united in our approach and Government simply could not ignore us.

## The Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC)

---

With those guiding principles, we developed four general areas of focus:

**Athlete Development.** The ASC operates the National Aboriginal Hockey Program, which includes an annual National Aboriginal Hockey Championship and a High Performance Hockey Camp (HP Camp).

**Coaching Development.** The ASC operates the National Aboriginal Coaching and Leadership Program that oversees the development of a National Aboriginal Coaching Manual. Additionally, the ASC hosts a Coach Mentorship Program that operates in conjunction with our HP Camp.

**Recognition of Excellence.** The ASC is the steward of the Tom Longboat Awards and the National Aboriginal Coaching Awards.

**Advocacy.** The ASC plays a lead role in advocating for Aboriginal sport development. This involves working to develop partnerships with Governments and the mainstream sport system. A recent example of this partnership approach is our ongoing work with Federal, Provincial and Territorial (F-P/T) governments to create a funding framework for the NAIG and our new partnership with the Esteem Team to support their launch of an Aboriginal Role Model Program.

Without going into a lot of detail on each of these initiatives, it is important for me to stress one thing—understanding basic traditional teachings and being able to apply those to the design and delivery of our programs is of fundamental importance. This is quite complex when you think that the ASC brings together a diverse group of cultural perspectives. To establish and maintain this delicate balance, we focus our attention on those teachings that are shared and accepted by the greatest number of groups represented at our table.

One primary teaching is that of the Medicine Wheel. In everything we do we attempt to provide a balanced or holistic approach that provides far more than just physical preparation. Our objective is to offer mental, emotional, cultural and spiritual support for the athletes and coaches involved in our programs. From my experience this is what makes our programs so unique compared to mainstream sport—our work is more about instilling values and principles and developing life skills than training a young person to become a national team athlete. We promote both individual and community well being through sport. I strongly believe this approach (offered to us through traditional teachings) is the ingredient missing from the mainstream model.

## Shortcomings

---

Now, with all of our successes, there remain serious weaknesses in our structures. Since 1997, we have grown in leaps and bounds. Regardless of the fact that we have more than quadrupled our annual budget and established mandated Aboriginal sport bodies in every region throughout Canada, we have only begun to scratch the surface of having a meaningful impact at the grassroots level. Our structure has grown out of an incredible need that we as a collective, in our current capacity, cannot adequately support.

Unfortunately, in many cases community sport and recreation is treated as a luxury rather than as a basic human need. Many of our communities lack access to the most basic of facilities, equipment and expertise. Our Chiefs, Councils, and elected community leaders are so incredibly focused on important issues such as self-government, treaty rights, land claims and basic community infrastructure, that sport and recreation is not generally seen as a priority.

Those communities that have sport and recreation programs are shaped largely by what I call the ‘tournament mentality’, where programming revolves around seasonal events or tournaments rather than on sound, sustained training and competitive programs. Make no mistake, tournaments have their place and they help promote the social aspect of sport. Yet, on their own, they cannot

offer a balanced approach and they do not support the day-to-day sport, recreation, and active living requirements a community needs.

When these shortcomings are added to the fact that our community based sport infrastructure is so lacking, our P/TASB's and the national office tend to have to shoulder the weight. Unfortunately, the national office cannot carry all of this responsibility. If the ASC develops a program, no matter how sound the planning, preparation, and delivery, it will not have the broad-based effect that we desire because, ultimately, it all depends on community awareness, support and involvement. There are fourteen P/TASBs (2 in Saskatchewan), many of which operate with one or two staff. They cannot provide for the over 700 Aboriginal communities that form our constituency across the country.

## What Should We Do?

---

This raises the question, what should we do? In my humble opinion, we need to focus more attention and resources on building the base. We cannot have a stable and lasting structure without a solid foundation. Our communities, as delivery agents, need greater support. Certainly increased F-P/T government investment in Aboriginal sport is necessary. And, to be frank, the support in some regions is abysmal.

Still, we are making some headway. The ASC has presented to the Ministers of Sport at their last three meetings and they seem to be listening. Aboriginal sport has been established as an ongoing item on their agenda. They endorsed the eleven recommendations on Aboriginal sport development the ASC presented to them over three years ago. They have tasked their government representatives to work with us to achieve those objectives. Most seem to be sincere in their support and we continue to push for increased funding.

The time has come for the ASC to make a concerted effort and to focus our energies on our own community leaders. We need to engage our Aboriginal political structures. We, as a national organization, have not been effective in attracting Aboriginal political leaders to our cause. It is interesting to note that if you study the backgrounds of more prominent leaders you will find that many of them were outstanding athletes. I think their experiences in sport had a lot to do with their leadership skills. Very often they have an immediate personal connection to sport. We need to remind them of the preventative power of sport and recreation, meaning sport is a direct means to achieve positive social change. We need to insist our leaders get involved and champion our cause to ensure that provisions are made within their structures to adequately provide for the delivery of community-based sport and recreation programs. They also need to stand with us in our efforts to increase F-P/T government support for sport and recreation. In my experience, with the support of key political leaders, things tend to get done. And the 2002 NAIG is a prime example of what can be achieved when everyone works together.

## We Need to Work Together

---

I would like to leave you with this thought or challenge. From my perspective, we (all of us) need to network. The 2002 NAIG Research Symposium is a wonderful forum to make connections between you as academics and those, in our organization, 'working in the trenches'. There are very practical applications for the important research you do and we need to tap into that wealth of information to further our cause. The bottom line is: We need to support each other in order to effectively address the critical issues within Aboriginal sport. So, let us find a way to work together.

## Does Sport Belong in the Medicine Chest?

Susan Haslip  
University of Ottawa

Victoria Edwards  
University of Ottawa

### Introduction

---

According to Ontario's Aboriginal Sport Circle, the 2002 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG or Games), the fifth such Games held in North America dating from 1990, will be "the largest Aboriginal multi-sport and cultural gathering in Canadian history."<sup>1</sup> Steadily increasing interest in the NAIG is important for a variety of reasons. First, sport is "deeply rooted in the cultural history of indigenous peoples"<sup>2</sup> and directly related to the cultural experiences of Indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup> The NAIG, therefore, provide a venue for Indigenous athletes and cultural performers to express and enhance their cultural heritage through a variety of "living practices."<sup>4</sup> The NAIG also provides "incentive and focus for community sport development and leadership participation for Indigenous athletes and community sport leaders."<sup>5</sup> For those athletes with the potential to compete at a high performance sport level, the training and competition at the NAIG provide an opportunity to improve skills in readiness for selections at other major Games, i.e., the Canada Games or Olympics.<sup>6</sup>

The increasing participation of Aboriginal peoples in the NAIG is also noteworthy given the importance placed on sport by Aboriginal sport leaders. Aboriginal sport leaders such as former Olympic gold-medalist Alwyn Morris, for example, a *Kanien'keha* (Mohawk) man from Kahnawake Territory (via Québec) have championed sport as a mechanism to address "many of the social ills facing Aboriginal people"<sup>7</sup> and the "heightened health risks"<sup>8</sup> faced by many Aboriginal youth. Morris has also likened sport to "the strongest type of medicine" because of its "preventative nature."<sup>9</sup> Aboriginal youth have also recognized sport as a preferred mechanism to address issues facing youth.<sup>10</sup>

In view of the importance of sport to Aboriginal peoples, and the fact that sport is deeply entrenched in and culturally connected to Aboriginal peoples, we were both surprised and concerned to find that Aboriginal peoples are generally under-represented in the Canadian sport system.<sup>11</sup> We therefore sought to explore mechanisms that could provide Indigenous peoples with leverage in addressing the underlying issues that account for this under-representation. One such mechanism that we investigated was the possibility of a 'right' to sport. We asked ourselves whether a contemporary interpretation of the medicine chest clause that appears in Treaty Number 6 (in written



form) and in Treaties 7, 8, 10 and 11 as an oral clause would support a right to sport and, if so, what would such a right look like?<sup>12</sup> The answers to these questions form the basis of this paper.

Prior to continuing, however, we wish to clarify what we mean by ‘sport.’ Sport has been described as “one part of a physical activity spectrum that includes play, fitness activities, recreational sport, organized competitive sport and high-performance sport.”<sup>13</sup> The definition of sport used in this paper extends to include all these activities. A concern with adopting this spectrum, however, is that it may be interpreted as excluding cultural activities. This is particularly problematic in the context of Aboriginal peoples since the government has generally viewed the latter activities as not worthy of “substantial government support.”<sup>14</sup> This is problematic and not a desired outcome. Therefore it is our position that sport – in all its permutations – is itself part of a larger sphere of what Paraschak has described as “living practices” and that a contemporary interpretation of the medicine chest clause would encompass these practices.<sup>15</sup>

We also wish to acknowledge at the outset that there are several limitations inherent in our approach. First, a ‘rights-based approach’ is itself problematic since it is contingent on another party, in this case the government, having not only an obligation in response to that right but also a positive duty to act in view of that obligation. Second, a rights-based approach is also problematic since a right without a remedy is essentially meaningless. Assuming the existence of an Aboriginal right to sport, a mechanism to enforce this right is the Canadian court system. This route, however, is problematic since it was imposed upon Aboriginal peoples and is not reflective of the interests of Aboriginal peoples. Third, since the medicine chest clause appears in only five treaties, the existence of a treaty right to sport would create a patchwork that would seem to privilege certain communities over others.<sup>16</sup>

In acknowledging these limitations, however, we are of the opinion that a consideration of a treaty right to sport is worthy of consideration given that arguments in favour of such a right may assist in addressing underlying reasons for the under-representation of Aboriginal peoples in sport. Further, such arguments address issues faced by Aboriginal people who wish to participate at the NAIG. To this end, this paper is offered in the spirit of remembering the underlying reason for the Games and the importance of the Games for Aboriginal youth.

## Interpretation of the Medicine Chest Clause

---

The medicine chest clause as outlined in Treaty No. 6 provides that “a medicine chest shall be kept at the house of each Indian Agent for the use and benefit of the Indians, at the direction of such Agent[.]”<sup>17</sup> The issue for the purposes of this paper is whether a contemporary interpretation of that clause and, in particular, interpretation of ‘medicine chest’ in that clause, would support the inclusion of the physical practices of sport and recreation. We embark on our consideration aware of the sacred nature of treaties to Aboriginal peoples. It is not our intention to be disrespectful of the

sacred nature of treaties in general and, in particular, of Treaty Nos. 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11. Any misinterpretation is our own. The writers welcome further dialogue in the area of connections between physical practices such as sport and recreation and the area of ‘medicine.’<sup>18</sup>

### *Health, Healing and Medicine*

From a fragmented western perspective, ‘being healthy’ meant, and generally still means, being free from physical illness. Even when the concept of ‘health’ is broadened to include mental health, the emphasis is generally on ‘the human organism and its symptoms of dysfunction.’<sup>19</sup> This understanding, however, differs from the understanding held by many Indigenous peoples who view health as holistic and integrated and not something that can be compartmentalized.<sup>20</sup> This understanding stems from traditional teachings that give equal weight to the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of individuals; these aspects are seen as interdependent.<sup>21</sup> Balance and harmony among these factors results in well being and continues to represent ‘health’ – and it is this conception of ‘health’ that is essential ‘to live and grow.’<sup>22</sup> To the extent that sport contributes to this balance, both individually and collectively, it is an element in the health equation.

During the course of our research we have come across reference to the healing properties associated with games. Lacrosse, for example, has been described as one of the “most healing” games.<sup>23</sup> Reference is made to lacrosse being played “to thank the Creator, to honour members of the community who had made exceptional contributions, and to assist in healing the sick.”<sup>24</sup> Materials released in conjunction with the 1997 NAIG in Victoria describe the “healing power of sports and culture.”<sup>25</sup>

During our research we also discovered that sport is frequently referred to as ‘medicine’ by Aboriginal peoples. Alwyn Morris, for example, has said that

*... sport in our communities is often referred to as medicine, the strongest type of medicine because it is preventative medicine that has the power to rid our communities from many of the social ills facing Aboriginal people.*<sup>26</sup>

Sport and recreation have also been described as a form of “preventative medicine for the social dilemma”<sup>27</sup> faced by Aboriginal youth, and as a primary mechanism for community wellness.<sup>28</sup>

### *Principles of Treaty Interpretation*

The foregoing discussion suggests that an Indigenous understanding of medicine includes the physical practices of sport and recreation. The fact that an Indigenous understanding of medicine may include these physical practices is important in light of the principles identified by the Supreme Court of Canada in the context of treaty interpretation. The starting point for the interpretation of a treaty clause is the wording of the clause itself.<sup>29</sup> The fact that an Indigenous understanding of medicine could have included physical practices is integral to an argument in favour of a treaty right to sport.

The Court has also clearly stated, however, that an understanding of the terms of a treaty is not confined to the meaning of those terms at the time the treaty was signed.<sup>30</sup> The Court, for example, has said that treaty rights are to be “liberally construed”<sup>31</sup> and that a treaty clause that is doubtful is to be “resolved in favour of the Indians.”<sup>32</sup> Treaties are to be interpreted in a “flexible and evolutionary” manner and not in a narrow and rigid fashion.<sup>33</sup> Further, treaties are to be applied in a contemporary context.<sup>34</sup> Thus even if the physical practices of sport and recreation would not have fit in the medicine chest clause of 1876, the issue becomes whether a contemporary interpretation of the medicine chest clause could support such an interpretation.

### *Legal Interpretation of the Medicine Chest Clause*

While the Supreme Court of Canada has had a lot to say in terms of treaty interpretation, the Court has not, to date, had occasion to interpret the medicine chest clause. Lower courts, however, have interpreted this clause. There are seven reported cases in Canadian law that have either dealt directly with the interpretation of the medicine chest clause or that have made reference to the interpretation of this clause. A review of these cases reveals two very distinct approaches to the interpretation of this clause. It is important to keep in mind when reviewing these cases, however, that those cases favouring a narrow interpretation of the medicine chest clause were decided prior to the Supreme Court of Canada decisions that identified how treaty clauses should be interpreted.

Initially, the medicine chest clause was interpreted liberally. In a 1935 Exchequer court decision, Justice Angers found that “all medicines, drugs or medical supplies which might be required by the Indians of the Mistawasis Band were to be supplied to them free of charge.”<sup>35</sup> This finding by the court was significant since the Crown had taken the position that it could pick and choose those medicines, drugs or medical supplies for which it would reimburse the band.<sup>36</sup> This broad interpretation was broadened further still in 1965/66 by a lower Saskatchewan court in *Johnston*.<sup>37</sup> In that case the magistrate said that a proper interpretation of the medicine chest clause would not only include medicines, drugs and medical supplies but also hospital care.<sup>38</sup> The Crown, however, appealed this decision, arguing that the phrase ‘at the direction of the Indian agent’ meant that the Crown should be able to be selective about the medical provisions it covered. The Saskatchewan Court of Appeal agreed with this argument and in so doing served to significantly narrow the scope of the medicine chest clause.<sup>39</sup>

The medicine chest clause came up for consideration a fourth time in the *Swimmer* decision—a case decided between 1968/1970.<sup>40</sup> The judge in the *Swimmer* case favoured a wide interpretation of the medicine chest clause as had the lower court in *Johnston*. It was open to the lower court in *Swimmer* to do so since the appellate court comments concerning the interpretation of the medicine chest clause in *Johnston* were *obiter*; i.e., outside the actual main decision of the court, and thus were not binding on the lower court. The Crown appealed this decision as it had done in *Johnston* and, as in *Johnston*, was successful on appeal. However, the decision of the ap-

pellate court in *Swimmer*, unlike in *Johnston*, was the main holding of the case and therefore would have been binding on lower courts.

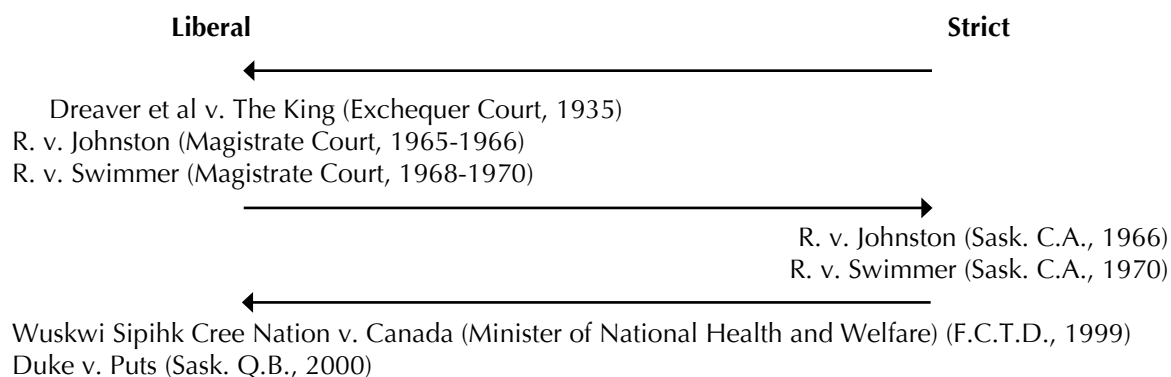
Following the 1970 decision of the Court of Appeal decision in *Swimmer*, the medicine chest clause was next referenced in *Wuskwi Sipiik Cree Nation v. Canada (Minister of National Health and Welfare)*.<sup>41</sup> In that case, Prothonotary Hargrave had the following to say concerning the meaning of the medicine chest clause:

*Mr. Justice Angers took a proper approach in his 1935 decision in Dreaver, reading the Treaty No. 6 medicine chest clause in a contemporary manner to mean a supply of all medicines, drugs and medical supplies. Certainly, it is clear that the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal took what is now a wrong approach in its literal and restrictive reading of the medicine chest clause in the 1966 decision in Johnston. In a current context, the clause may well require a full range of contemporary medical services.*<sup>42</sup>

Since the issue before the court did not actually involve the interpretation of the medicine chest clause itself but rather a motion, the case itself cannot be relied upon to support a broad interpretation of the clause. The decision, however, is persuasive.

Finally, in March of 2001, a judge of a lower court in Saskatchewan had occasion to refer to the medicine chest clause.<sup>43</sup> In this case the court acknowledged that the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal had been critical of the broad interpretation given to the medicine chest clause.<sup>44</sup> The court noted, however, that following the introduction of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982, government policy had favoured “the generous provision of medicines, drugs and medical supplies free of charge.”<sup>45</sup> Here again, the interpretation of the clause itself was not an issue that was before the court and thus the court’s decision is not binding. The court’s comments, however, reflect not only the contemporary philosophy informing the interpretation of this provision but also hint at a return to the broad interpretation of this clause favoured by the lower courts in *Johnston* and *Swimmer*.

### *Judicial Interpretation of the Medicine Chest Clause*



*illustration: V. Edwards, 2002*

## Treaty Right to Sport

---

To the extent that a contemporary interpretation of the medicine chest clause could support a treaty right to sport, how would one go about constructing such a right? The Supreme Court of Canada has considered this question in the context of cases involving hunting and fishing rights. The reasoning of the Court in those cases could be applied to argue that access to Aboriginal coaches,<sup>46</sup> the existence of sport facilities<sup>47</sup> and the ability to travel to participate in sport and recreation opportunities, including the NAIG,<sup>48</sup> are reasonably incidental to a treaty right to sport. We have decided to focus on these three areas since they inform the under-representation of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian sport system and might also impact upon the Aboriginal participation at the NAIG.

### *Incidental Rights at the Supreme Court of Canada*

In *Côté*, for example, the concept of incidental rights arose in the context of the right to fish. The Supreme Court of Canada found that the right to fish included the incidental right of educating Aboriginal youth about fishing:

*[I]n the aboriginal tradition, societal practices and customs are passed from one generation to the next by means of oral description and actual demonstration. As such, to ensure a continuity of Aboriginal practices, customs and traditions, a substantive aboriginal right will normally include the incidental right to teach a practice, custom and tradition to a younger generation.*<sup>49</sup>

When the reasoning in the *Côté* decision is applied in the context of a treaty right to sport, the right to coach sport could be seen as reasonably incidental to the right to sport. — In the *Sundown* case, the nature of incidental rights was considered in the context of the right to hunt.<sup>50</sup> The Court found that a form of hunting shelter that evolved from a “carefully built lean-to” to a tent and then a small cabin was ‘reasonably incidental’ to the right to hunt.<sup>51</sup> When the reasoning in the *Sundown* case is applied in the context of a treaty right to sport, the construction (and arguably maintenance) of sport facilities could be seen as reasonably incidental to the right to sport.

In the *Simon* case, the Court found that “the right to hunt to be effective must embody those activities reasonably incidental to the act of hunting itself, *an example of which* is traveling with the requisite hunting equipment to the hunting grounds (emphasis added).”<sup>52</sup> We wish to emphasize that the facts in the *Simon* case concerned the ability to carry the hunting equipment rather than the ability to travel. It would, however, be open to argue that a meaningful right to sport must include, at minimum, the ability to participate with other communities in that sport. To the extent that this is so, the right to travel to those communities in order to participate in that sport is reasonably incidental to the right to sport. The remote location of some communities, frequently owing to federal government relocation initiatives, makes travel to and from such communities and events such as the NAIG challenging and costly.

## Conclusion

---

Sport has been identified by Aboriginal sport leaders as a strong form of medicine that can assist Aboriginal peoples, particularly Aboriginal youth. A contemporary interpretation of the medicine chest clause may support a treaty right to sport. The content of that right could be crafted to allow for increased participation of Aboriginal peoples in sport. Whether the medicine chest clause should be interpreted to support a right to sport and the contents of that right must be determined by Aboriginal peoples themselves.

## Endnotes

---

1 The Ontario Aboriginal Sport Circle estimates that between 8,000 to 10,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis athletes, 3,000 cultural performers and 5000 volunteers will participate at the 2002 NAIG (<http://www.oasc.net/naig.html>). The website for the 2002 NAIG notes that participants in this year's Games represent all provinces, territories and states in North America. ("Sports", North American Indigenous Games—Official Site, <http://www.2002naig.com/english2/general.html>). A total of 16 sports are represented at the NAIG—3 of which are 'traditional' Aboriginal sports and 13 of which are 'non-traditional' sports ([www.2002naig.com/english2/general.htm](http://www.2002naig.com/english2/general.htm)) The three traditional sports include 3-D archery, canoeing and field lacrosse. The non-traditional sports include: athletics, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, golf, rifle shooting, soccer, softball, swimming, tae kwon do, volleyball and wrestling. (Ontario Aboriginal Sport Circle, <http://www.oasc.net/naig.htm>). The first NAIG Games were held in Edmonton, Alberta in 1990; the second in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1993, the third in Blaine, Minnesota in 1995, the fourth in Victoria, British Columbia in 1997 and this year's Games in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The 1993 NAIG commenced what was anticipated to be a biannual cycle for the Games; however, this cycle was interrupted in 1999 when games organizers in Fargo, North Dakota initially postponed, and subsequently canceled, the Games over concerns with having the capacity to host the Games.

At the 1990 NAIG in Edmonton, Alberta, an estimated 3,000 athletes participated in 7 sports (archery, baseball, canoeing, rifle shooting, soccer, swimming, track and field) and a rodeo was featured. The next NAIG in 1993 in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan saw 4,400 athletes participate. The following Games held in 1995 in Blaine, Minnesota (USA) saw some 8,000 athletes in 17 sports (archery, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, canoeing, golf, lacrosse, rifle shooting, soccer, softball, swimming, tae kwon do, tennis, track and field, volleyball and wrestling). An estimated 4,000 athletes and 3,000 cultural performers participated in the last NAIG held in 1997 in Victoria, British Columbia. There were seventeen sports featured: archery, athletics, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, canoeing, golf, box lacrosse, rifle shooting, soccer, softball/fastball, swimming, tae kwon do, volleyball and wrestling (<http://www.oasc.net/naig.html>).

Prior to the invasion of North America by settler populations, however, Aboriginal peoples held games throughout North America for thousands of years ("History", North American Indigenous Games – Official Site ([http://www.2002naig.com/english2/about\\_history.html](http://www.2002naig.com/english2/about_history.html))).

- 2 Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, *Sport: The Way Ahead—Report of the Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy* (Ottawa: Minister of State, Fitness and Amateur Sport, 1992) at 153. (*Task Force Report*)
- 3 A. Morris, "The Olympic Experience: An Aboriginal Perspective" 9-11 at 9 in T. Taylor, ed., *How You Play the Game: Papers from the First International Conference on Sports and Human Rights* (September 1 - 3, 1999) (Australia: Human Rights Council of Australia, 2000) (ISBN 1 8636 566 2).
- 4 V. Paraschak, "Fin de Siècle Native Sport: The 'Traditions' Continue." North American Society for Sport History. Annual Convention. (May 1999). (College Park, Pennsylvania).
- 5 Aboriginal Sport Circle, *Aboriginal Sport Development—the Role of Coaching Development*, The North Ameri-

- can Indigenous Games and Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies (Alberta and Ottawa: Aboriginal Sport Circle, 1998) at 7-8.
- 6 Ibid.
  - 7 A. Morris, *Aboriginal Sport Circle Presentation* (Corner Brook, Newfoundland, 1999) (Aboriginal Sport Circle Presentation).
  - 8 Ibid. at 2.
  - 9 Ibid. at 9.
  - 10 Neil Winther, Leanne Nazer-Bloom and Virginia Petch, "A Comprehensive Overview of Sports and Recreation Issues Relevant to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada" (Ottawa, 1995) at 23 (citing Cheska, 1979). The Winther paper was prepared as part of the Research Program of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Aboriginal youth in the Interior and Sto:lo Nations, for example, have expressed a desire to not only incorporate "more sports and recreation into their lifestyles" but also to learn to incorporate "a more traditional way." A. Morris, *Aboriginal Sport Secretariat (Circle), Proposal to Create an Aboriginal Sport Secretariat* (Kahnawake, P.Q., 1992) cited by N. Winther, *supra* note 10 at 24. The federal government is also on record as having recognized the "fundamental importance" of sport to the "social fabric and survival of indigenous peoples." *Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, Task Force Report, supra* note 2.
  - 11 See, for example, *Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, Task Force Report, ibid.* and A. Morris, *Aboriginal Sport Circle Presentation, supra* note 2 at 2.
  - 12 Treaty No. 6 is entitled, "Between Her Majesty the Queen and the Plains and Wood Cree Indians and other tribes of Indians at Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt and Battle River." (Ottawa: Queen's Printer). The terms of the treaty itself provide that Treaty No. 6 was concluded on August 23<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, and September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1876. Youngblood Henderson refers to this as a "Victorian treaty." (J. [sáké] Youngblood Henderson, "Empowering Treaty Federalism" (1994)) 58 Sask. L. Rev. 241 at 267. For reprint of treaty please see R. A. Reiter, *The Law of Canadian Indian Treaties* (Edmonton: Juris Analytica, 1995) at Part III. Since similar verbal clauses form part of Treaties 7, 8, 10 and 11, the analysis offered would extend to other treaties. Report of an Interdepartmental Working Group to the Committee of Deputy Ministers on Justice and Legal Affairs, *Fiduciary Relationship of the Crown With Aboriginal Peoples: Implementation and Management Issues—A Guide for Managers* (October 1995) at 13.
  - 13 *Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy, Task Force Report, supra* note 2 at 22.
  - 14 Paraschak, *supra* note 4 at 6.
  - 15 Ibid.
  - 16 At the time of writing, Susan intends to consider arguments in favour of an Aboriginal right to sport during the course of her doctorate research at the University of Ottawa starting in the fall of 2002.
  - 17 See, for example, Reiter, *The Law of Canadian Indian Treaties, supra* note 12 at Part III.
  - 18 Susan Haslip may be reached at: [sjhaslip@barexpress.net](mailto:sjhaslip@barexpress.net).  
Victoria Edwards may be reached at: [victoriaedwards@canoemail.com](mailto:victoriaedwards@canoemail.com).
  - 19 "The Belief in Interconnectedness" in, [www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/Vol3Ch3s1.5tos2.1.asp](http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/Vol3Ch3s1.5tos2.1.asp).
  - 20 Ibid.
  - 21 Ibid.
  - 22 Ibid.
  - 23 *R. v. Nelson*, [1997] M.J. No. 654 (Man. Prov. Ct.) at para. 178.

- 24 J. Barnes, *Sports and the Law in Canada* (2d ed.) (Toronto: Butterworths, 1988) as cited by Winther, *supra* note 10 at 3.
- 25 <http://firstnations.com/naig97/background.htm>. I am mindful of Cardinal's caution to non-Aboriginal peoples vis. a vis. not misinterpreting Aboriginal stories.
- 26 A. Morris, Aboriginal Sport Circle Presentation, *supra* note 7 at 9.
- 27 *Ibid.* at 2.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Justice Binnie, writing for the majority in *R. v. Marshall* noted that "[t]he starting point for the analysis of the alleged treaty right must be an examination of the specific words used in any written memorandum of its terms." (*R. v. Marshall*, [1999] 3 S.C.R. 456 at para. 5)
- 30 *R. v. Sparrow*, [1990] 1 S.C.R. 1075 at 1093.
- 31 *Nowegijick v. R.*, [1983] 1 S.C.R. 29 at 36. See also *Simon v. R.*, [1985] 2 S.C.R. 387 and *R. v. Badger*, [1996] 1 S.C.R. 771 at para. 41.
- 32 *Nowegijick*, *supra* note 31.
- 33 *Sparrow*, *supra* note 30 at 1093, 1099 and *Badger*, *supra* note 31 cited in *Marshall*, *supra* note 29 at para. 14.
- 34 See, for example, *Sparrow*, *supra* note 30 and *Marshall*, *supra* note 29.
- 35 (1935), 5 C.N.L.C. 92 (Can. Ex. Ct.) Available online at: <http://library.usask.ca/native/cnlc/vol05/092.html> [previously unreported]. The Exchequer Court of Canada was the predecessor to the current Federal Court of Canada. The *Dreaver* decision was cited by Culliton, C.J.S., writing for a unanimous court in *R. v. Johnston* (1966), 56 D.L.R. (2d) 749 (Sask. C.A.), March 17th, 1966 at 751.
- 36 *Dreaver*, *supra* note 35.
- 37 Information concerning the precise citation of the lower court decision in *Johnston* is unavailable as at the time of writing (August 2002). The appellate court decision in *Johnston* (*supra* note 35) does not identify the date of the magistrate court's decision, citation information and/or the name of the magistrate hearing the lower level decision. Since the date on the information in the *Johnston* case, however, is 22 March 1965, and the date of the appellate court decision in *Johnston* was 17 March 1966, the magistrate court's decision must have issued between March 1965 and March 1966.
- 38 Culliton, C.J.S. in *Johnston* - Court of Appeal, *supra* note 35 at 751 quoting Magistrate's court decision in *Johnston*, *supra* note 35.
- 39 *Johnston* (Court of Appeal), *supra* note 35 at 754.
- 40 As was the case for the lower court decision in *Johnston* identified above (*supra* note 37), information concerning the precise citation of the lower court decision in *Swimmer* is unavailable as at the time of writing (August 2002). The appellate court in *Swimmer* (*R. v. Swimmer* (1970), [1971] 1 W.W.R. 756 (Sask. C.A.)) does not reference the date of nor provide any citation information for the lower court decision in *Swimmer*. Culliton, C.J.S., writing for the appellate court in *Swimmer* identifies the Magistrate Court judge as Policha P.M. (*Ibid.* at 756). In view of the date the charges arose in *Swimmer*, (May 13th, 1968), and the date of the appellate court decision (December 4th, 1970), the magistrate court's decision must have issued between May 1968 and December 1970.
- 41 [1999] F.C.J. No. 82 (T.D.).
- 42 *Ibid.* at para.14.



43 *Duke v. Puts* [2001] S.J. No. 156 March 2001 Sask. Q.B.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.* In all due respect to the judge in this case, it is not at all clear that government contributions could be termed 'generous' in light of what we believe is a fiduciary obligation in the area of health care owing to Aboriginal peoples. More specifically, Aboriginal organizations have been critical of the federal government for the failure to increase the amount of transfer payments for First Nations and Inuit communities – despite growing populations in those communities.

46 There are a number of barriers that face Aboriginal people who want to coach. Barriers to Aboriginal coaching development include difficulties accessing the National Coaching Certification Program, a coaching curriculum that does not necessarily address the reality of Aboriginal peoples, the remote location of some Aboriginal communities and the under-representation of Aboriginal course conductors. (Aboriginal Sport Circle, *Aboriginal Sport Development: The Role of Coaching Development*, supra note 5 at 5-6.)

47 Morris, *Aboriginal Sport Secretariat (Circle), Proposal to Create an Aboriginal Sport Secretariat*, supra note 10 at 35. Where arenas and related facilities exist, the costs involved for ongoing maintenance of these facilities is often unrealizable.

48 Funding is often inconsistent and done on an ad-hoc basis following intense negotiations with various levels of government. (*Ibid.*) A significant weakness to the existing system is that the infrastructure of Aboriginal Communities is, with rare exceptions, not comparable to that available to other Canadians. (*Ibid.*) There is also a need for increased funding to Aboriginal sport bodies. *Sport–Leadership, Partnership and Accountability–Everybody's Business* (Ottawa: House of Commons, 1998) at 129.

49 [1996] 3 S.C.R. 139.

50 [1999] 1 S.C.R. 393.

51 *Ibid.* at paras. 28 and 29.

52 [1985] 2 S.C.R. 387 at 403.

## Abbreviations

---

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| C.C.C.     | Canadian Criminal Cases   |
| C.N.L.C.   | Canadian Native Law Cases   |
| C.N.L.R.   | Canadian Native Law Reporter  |
| D.L.R.     | Dominion Law Reports  |
| Ex. Ct.    | Can. Exchequer Court of Canada (predecessor to the Federal Court of Canada) |
| F.C.T.D.   | Federal Court Trial Division  |
| F.T.R.     | Federal Trial Reports   |
| M.J.       | Manitoba Judgments  |
| Prov.      | Ct. Provincial Court  |
| QL         | Quicklaw  |
| Sask. C.A. | Saskatchewan Court of Appeal  |
| Sask. Q.B. | Saskatchewan Queens Bench   |

|          |                           |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Sask. R. | Saskatchewan Reports      |
| S.C.R.   | Supreme Court Reports     |
| SKQB     | Saskatchewan Queens Bench |
| W.W.R.   | Western Weekly Reports    |

## References

---

Aboriginal Sport Circle (1988). *Aboriginal Sport Development — the Role of Coaching Development, The North American Indigenous Games and Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies*. Alberta and Ottawa: Aboriginal Sport Circle.

Barnes, J. (1988). *Sports and the Law in Canada* (2d ed.). Toronto: Butterworths.

Interdepartmental Working Group to the Committee of Deputy Ministers on Justice and Legal Affairs (October 1995). *Fiduciary Relationship of the Crown With Aboriginal Peoples: Implementation and Management Issues — A Guide for Managers*.

Minister's Task Force Report on Federal Sport Policy (1992). *Sport: The Way Ahead — The Report of the Minister's Task Force on Federal Sport Policy*. Ottawa: Minister of State, Fitness and Amateur Sport.

Morris, A. (2000). "The Olympic Experience: An Aboriginal Perspective." 9-11 at 9 in T. Taylor, ed., *How You Play the Game: Papers from the First International Conference on Sports and Human Rights (September 1-3, 1999)*. Australia: Human Rights Council of Australia.

Morris, A. (1999). *Aboriginal Sport Circle Presentation*. Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

Morris, A. (1992). *Aboriginal Sport Secretariat (Circle), Proposal to Create an Aboriginal Sport Secretariat*. Kahnawake, P.Q.

Paraschak, V. (1999). "Fin de Siècle Native Sport: The 'Traditions' Continue." North American Society for Sport History Conference, College Park, Pennsylvania.

Reiter, R.A., (1995). *The Law of Canadian Indian Treaties*. Edmonton: Juris Analytica.

Winther, N., Nazer-Bloom, L. and Petch, V. (August 1994). *A Comprehensive Overview of Sports and Recreation Issues Relevant to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Ottawa: Fitness Directorate of Health Canada, 1995.

Youngblood Henderson, J. [sáké]. (1994). *Empowering Treaty Federalism*. Sask. L. Rev., 58, 241.

## Case Law

---

*Dreaver v. R.*, 5 C.N.L.C. 92 (Ex. Ct. Can.). <http://library.usask.ca/native/cnlc/vol05/092.html>

*Duke v. Puts* (2001), 204 Sask. R. 130, 2001 SKQB 130.

*Nowegijick v. R.*, [1983] 1 S.C.R. 29.

*R. v. Badger*, [1996] 1 S.C.R. 771.

*R. v. Marshall*, [1999] 3 S.C.R. 456.

*R. v. Johnston* (1966), 56 D.L.R. (2d) 749, 56 W.W.R. 565, 6 C.N.L.C. 447, 49 C.R. 203 (Sask. CA).

*R. v. Nelson*, [1997] M.J. No. 654 (Prov. Ct.) (QL).

*R. v. Sparrow*, [1990] 1 S.C.R. 1075.

*R. v. Swimmer* (1970), [1971] 1 W.W.R. 756, 17 D.L.R. (3d) 476, 3 C.C.C. (2d) 92, (1970) 6 C.N.L.C. 621 (Sask. C.A.).

*Simon v. R.*, [1985] 2 S.C.R. 387.

*Wuskwi Sipiik Cree Nation v. Canada (Minister of National Health and Welfare)* (1999) 164 F.T.R. 276, [1999] 4 C.N.L.R. 293 (F.C.T.D.).

## Websites used

---

<http://firstnations.com/naig97/background.htm>

<http://library.usask.ca/native/cnlc/vol05/092.html>

<http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/Vol3Ch3s1.5tos2.1.asp>

<http://www.oasc.net/naig.htm>

<http://www.ql.ca>

[http://www.2002naig.com/english2/about\\_history.html](http://www.2002naig.com/english2/about_history.html)

<http://www.2002naig.com/english2/general.html>

## Women's Participation in Sport, Games, and Physical Activity in Samba K'e, Northwest Territories

Audrey Giles

University of Alberta

In her aptly titled article "Invisible but not absent", Paraschak (1995) finds that "[a]cademics, along with the public in general, know very little about the experiences of Aboriginal girls and women in physical activity" (p. 71).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gravelle (1985) identifies a dearth of information about Aboriginal women's involvement in traditional games. Indeed, it seems that the only easily obtained fact one can find in the literature concerning Aboriginal women's involvement in sport and games is that it is a contentious issue, with historical investigations netting interesting, and sometimes conflicting, results. A perusal of *Dene Games: A Culture and Resource Manual* (Heine, 1999) suggests that the vast majority of Dene games did not have female participants. Nevertheless, Paraschak (1999) states that "First Nations sport culture ... reflect[s] ongoing shifts in gender relations between Native and non-Native communities, and within Native communities" (p. 164). In fact, in some regions of the Northwest Territories (NWT) there is a movement towards encouraging the participation of Dene women in Dene games—especially the Dene Games portion of the Arctic Winter Games (AWG). This is a movement that is not without its opponents. In this paper I offer preliminary findings from the first three months of my doctoral fieldwork, which investigates Dene women's participation in sport, traditional games, and physical activity in a small Northern community. These findings suggest that attempts to represent all Dene women's experiences in and of such activities as homogeneous fails to capture the richness and complexity of both past and present participation in traditional games.

In general, Canadians' knowledge of Aboriginal peoples is incredibly limited: knowledge of Aboriginal peoples' involvement in sport is no exception. Paraschak (1996) points out that "our knowledge of sport is really a knowledge of white, male, elite or professional athletes, involved in mainstream, modern 'sport' activities. We know little of other races, of women athletes, [and] of non-mainstream sports ... who equally compose the sport world" (p. 111). Indeed, we know even less about those who live in isolated communities. Samba K'e, or Trout Lake as it is also known, is a Dene community of about seventy people located in the southwest corner of the NWT just above the northeast corner of British Columbia. Samba K'e, a community accessible only by air, is, like many other Northern communities, a place that has seen a great deal of change in a rela-

tively short period of time. And, although it is a community that still closely identifies itself with the “traditional way of life,” it is also a community where the elders lament the fact that they can no longer speak with some of their grandchildren without the aid of an interpreter, where the once strongly separate worlds of men and women often collide during a volleyball game or a swimming lesson, and where you are more likely to see a game of soccer being played in the mini-gymnasium than axe throw being played outside.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) note that “[c]onstructing explanations of the world is a human activity. And yet, knowledge production has been organized in a way that excludes many people from ever participating as either producers or subjects of knowledge” (p. 95). This research project is informed by constructionist epistemology. According to Crotty (1998), constructionism is the view that *“all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and the world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”* (p. 42; his emphasis). When people bestow cultural meaning on certain items, at the same time they lead us to ignore other things and alternative meanings. Using constructionism, therefore, means that I will ask residents of Samba K’e to reflect upon their own social context, meaningful symbols, and their ensuing behaviour, enabling a new richness in understanding participation in sport, games, physical activity to emerge.

Undoubtedly, some would argue that my privileged position as a middle class, Eurocanadian graduate student calls into question my ability to conduct research *on* Aboriginal women that is of any significant use, value or merit. For example, Nkululeko (1987) asks, “[c]an an oppressed nation or segment of it... rely on knowledge produced, researched and theorized by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressor nation” (p. 88)? My response is that I am not conducting research *on* the community members of Samba K’e, but rather research that is *“by, for, and with them”* (Kirby and McKenna, 1989, p. 28). Prior to entering the community, I gained permission from the Chief and Council, I obtained a NWT research licence, and I also met the requirements set by my own university’s ethics committee. Once in the community, I met with the elders and received their permission and even their encouragement to go ahead with this research. All participants have given informed consent and were and are free to remove their contributions to this research at any time.

This research project has several benefits for the community. The community will receive copies of all of the material produced, which includes the papers generated from this research, a community photo album, and a collection of typed interviews with the community’s elders. Economic benefits from this project include an influx of money into the community from honorariums given to those interviewed, as well as the employment of two research assistants. Finally, I have also donated my services as a lifeguard, swimming instructor, and CPR instructor by running waterfront and CPR training programs as a volunteer. Thus, far from being a relationship of exploitation, this

research project has been a collaborative process in which all parties have knowingly and willingly helped each other.

The research that I am currently conducting with Sambaa K'e community members focuses on women's changing involvement in traditional games, and how certain traditional practices influence contemporary sport, game, and physical activity practices. Of particular interest is the current debate surrounding Dene women's participation in Dene games. According to Heine (1999), Dene games were heavily influenced by the connection between travel and life on the land. Strength and endurance were necessary for travel on the land, while endurance, speed, and accuracy were needed for hunting and were often practiced by playing traditional games (Heine, 1999). In the 1980s, the Dene Games Association formed to create a multi-community festival in which Dene communities in the NWT would compete against each other in games ranging from axe throw to tea boiling. Regional Dene Games were held on an annual basis between 1981 (Erasmus, 1981) and 1999 (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2001). Since then, funding for the Dene Games has changed and communities are now encouraged to use designated funding to develop Dene games within each community by holding workshops or small scale festivals rather than multi-community events.

Dene Games have also been played at the Arctic Winter Games for over a decade. However, unlike the mixed sex events at the regional Dene Games, these events have been restricted to men. Recently, the Mackenzie Recreation Association wrote a letter to the Arctic Winter Games International Committee asking that women be allowed to participate in the Dene Games component of the Arctic Winter Games for the 2004 Games in Northern Alberta (S. Thompson, personal communication, July 15, 2002). Concurrently, a new group called the Denendeh Traditional Games Association formed, a group that has banned women from participating in hand games at events sponsored by the Association (Kay, 2002). Here we find a division, a fracture line in the imagined community of Northern sport and recreation.

In a recent article in *News/North*, a NWT newspaper, Michael Vandell, the president of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association said, "We should focus on the traditional way of doing it. It's respect for our elders. If... [women] don't understand that, then we don't have room for them" (Kay, 2002, p. B4). The desire to hold onto traditional ways and to form a community of people who share these ways is understandable. Iris Marion Young (1992) aptly states, "In a racist, sexist, homophobic society that has despised and devalued certain groups, it is necessary and desirable for members of those groups to adhere with one another and celebrate a common culture, heritage, and experience" (p. 302). Certainly, decisions about women's participation in the Arctic Winter Games, and more specifically hand games, would be much easier if Dene culture and people's experience of what constitutes culture and tradition were uniform, leading to a shared vision of an ideal sport and recreation community. This, however, is not the case. Thus, the urge

to represent traditional cultural practices as uniform and beyond debate has the potential to muffle or silence dissenting voices.

Appeals to 'tradition' and 'culture' are often made in an effort to resist change. However, "tradition" is a problematic term, one laden with notions of static, historicized practices (Paraschak, 1983). Notably, Riphenburg (1997) states:

*Culture is not static but is constantly changing: it is dynamic, perpetually adjusting to fit the current needs of the people. Moreover, culture does not exist independent of material factors but develops in response to a particular social and material environment. When this environment changes, culture, too, must adapt. The problem is that people do not agree on exactly how it should be adapted. (pp. 45-6)*

Though small in population, the residents of Sambia K'e have a large number of differing opinions on what constitutes traditional cultural practices in sport and recreation and how they should or should not be changed. Elder Julie Punch has few memories of women playing games:

*I never really tried to play in that kind of games. We never had time to sit back. We were always keeping ourselves busy with moose hide, and moose meat, and the camp... Working on moose hide, we never had time to [play games], just the men who really didn't have much to do in the camp, they'd just go out and compete in the axe throwing. Back in the day, they had hand games. It was strictly for the men and the ladies just sit back and watched. But now that there's money involved, it attracts mixed categories and they do have hand games quite a lot, and they have mixed categories. In the past, only the men were allowed.*

When asked if she thought that hand games should remain a game only for men, she responded,

*I don't know. It's going to be very hard to do that because... it's changed a lot today for the women... It seems like it's going to be hard to change it back to what it was before. In everything, the women take over everything, it seems like the men are being left out and the women are taking over hand games... It's going to be hard to keep it the way it was.*

Another elder, Emily Jumbo, said that she would agree with banning women from hand games. With respect to other traditional games, such as stick pull and axe throw, she believes that if women compete, they should only compete against other women.

Strong feelings can be found amongst the younger generations. One female baby boomer said, "Hand games and drum dance, it's strictly for the men... It has something to do with spiritual legends and... it's always said... that it was for the men. So I think they should just keep the women out of it." One generation Xer, Norma Jumbo, gave voice to the tensions that exist within her concerning this topic:

*I don't think it's fair. I don't think it's fair... I don't know how should I put it, but, I mean... I can't see why – why are they going to ban [hand games] for women?... Just like what they said [in the article]... they said it's to respect our elders. And us, we're still traditional. All of us here. Women, men, we're all still traditional, living in our traditional way of life. And*

*so, half of me is right there, and then they're saying that Native women shouldn't join the Dene Games. It's like, I'm just like half and half. I'm in a spot where I can't agree with one of them. I agree with both. Half and half. One for the elders, for our elders, right? For our elders in the past. Through our ancestors, what they taught us, it's still with us. But what they're trying, what they're probably trying to do is ... trying to bring all the traditional ways back to life again.*

According to the *News/North* (2002) article, the Denendeh Traditional Games Association “said it [was] important for people to understand they are forming a traditional association which will follow the ways the games were played in the past” (Kay, p. B19). One woman explained her feelings on the attempt to bring back traditional practices:

*Things [have] changed now, you know. Nobody lives solely by the traditional way of life anymore, so things change ... [and] women should be allowed to play. Like back then there were certain reasons why women couldn't play certain things because it's like the way of life, the way people live, the traditional way of life. If women participated in certain things it brought bad luck or nobody got any good luck or anything like that. But now nobody lives like that anyway ... so why bring [back] everything traditional when nobody lives like that now?*

Along the same lines, one other younger woman said concisely that banning women from hand games “would kind of suck.”

Most of the women interviewed acknowledged that menstruation had an impact on their involvement in traditional games, and many feel that issues surrounding menstruation are implicated in the debate over women's involvement in such games. Though most of the women interviewed had at some point in their lives heard that women should not play hand games, most of the women interviewed that were forty years of age or younger had played anyway. All of those who had played said that playing hand games was much the same as drum dancing and fire feeding, that one should not participate while menstruating. One woman explained, “they say women can easily overpower men if they're not careful. I don't know, [they're banning women] just to keep the men safe, I guess.” Other women explained that if a man was to come in contact with a menstruating woman that it would have a negative impact on his hunting ability. Indeed, menstrual traditions are still very much a part of Samba K'e, with some women choosing to confine themselves to their home when menstruating, while other women strictly avoid going anywhere they do not need to, as well as not eating fish, birds, or berries. Menstrual traditions extend into childbirth, after which women in Samba K'e confine themselves to their homes for a month. One woman recalls a visitor to the community who failed to follow this custom, and how people “freaked out” as a result.

When asked if women should participate in the Dene Games component of the Arctic Winter Games, many of the women who do not support banning female participants came up with another solution, one that appears to draw on the separate but equal line of reasoning. They believed



that women should be allowed to play, but that they should only play against other women, a division which Elder Emily Jumbo supports:

*Separating them... that's how it's done in the past. That's how I've seen it done... If the women are going to compete, they usually separate, women gather in one section and compete against each other, and the men gather in a different section and compete against each other. That's how it's been done in the past.*

While having separate teams would appear to appease some, the issue of participation in traditional games during menstruation, especially during hand games that involve a drum, proved to be a somewhat more perplexing situation with which to grapple. Many of the women believed that substitutes would be appropriate for menstruating team members, though one woman felt that substitutions would have certain drawbacks, especially when money is involved:

*If it were for money they would have no choice, they would have to play, right? It all depends on how good the player is, too. Like if the player wasn't so good then maybe they'd have a back up or whatever, a substitute, two, three substitutes, and that other person will take over, but it all depends on how good the person is too, because some people are really good, and some people are not. If the person's really good, [you] can't really [substitute them] if it's for big money, you won't substitute them for somebody who isn't as good.*

While there may not be 'big money' involved in the Arctic Winter Games, the opportunity to travel and to participate in an event that draws competitors from several countries is indeed a valuable one. When I asked Brenda Jumbo for ways that organizers at the Arctic Winter Games might deal with the issue of menstruating participants, she replied somewhat facetiously, "I guess they're going to have to have something like drug testing!"

While something like drug testing is unlikely to win praise from female participants, the voices of the male and female residents of Sambaa K'e show that a solution that pleases everyone is unlikely to be found. This research project has been particularly useful in disrupting the artificially produced uniform subject position of "traditional Dene woman." Assuming that all self-identifying traditional women support the same practices ignores the hybridity that exists between and within Dene women. As a group, Dene women occupy multiple subject positions and, individually, each woman has multiple subjectivities. As Weedon (1987) states, "the experience of individuals is far from homogeneous" (p. 79). Thus, while there are some women who believe that part of adhering to tradition involves refraining from playing hand games, there are others who believe that, as long as they respect menstrual traditions, hand games can be an important way for them to preserve and enjoy their culture. As one woman said:

*Well, here for instance, [women] play hand games and all that. But we know we're not supposed to, like, touch a drum. So our people here, they know that when they're on their cycle and that, they don't go anywhere. They stay at home... Like, the women here, they know what they're doing, especially for the traditional games.*

Though the debate concerning women's involvement in traditional games will no doubt continue to rage, I believe that there is wisdom to be found in Nagengast's (1997) words. She writes:

*'Culture' is not a homogenous web of meanings that a bounded group creates and reproduces and that can be damaged by change, but, rather, ... 'culture' is an evolving process, an always changing, always fragmented product of negotiation and struggle that flows from multiple axes of inequality... Further, people who share [signs and practices]... may not view them in the same way, give them the same meanings, or hold them in precisely the same reverence. (p. 356)*

If nothing else, the process of struggle and negotiation over Dene women's involvement in traditional games shows us that Dene culture continues to be vibrant, exciting, and very much alive, and that traditional games are an important part of making sure it stays that way.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 This research was supported by grants from Aurora Research College, C/BAR, and the Northern Scientific Training Program.

## References

---

- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. London: Sage.
- Erasmus, R. (1981). *Letter to Rick Butler*. Yellowknife: Author.
- Government of the Northwest Territories. (2001). *Dene Games 2000/2001 contributions*. Yellowknife: Municipal and Community Affairs.
- Gravelle, F. (1985). *Traditional games of the Dogrib and Slave Indians of the Mackenzie Region N.W.T.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
- Heine, M. (1999). *Dene Games: A culture and resource manual*. Yellowknife: The Sport North Federation & MACA (GNWT).
- Kay, C. (2002, June 17). Tradition gains the upper hand. *News/North*, B19.
- Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press.
- Nagengast, C. (1997). Women, minorities, and indigenous peoples: Universalism and cultural relativity. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 53, 349-369.
- Nkulueko, D. (1987). The right to self-determination in research: Azanian Women. In C. Qunta (Ed.). *Women in Southern Africa* (pp. 88-106). London: Allison and Busby.
- Paraschak, V. (1983). *Discrepancies between government programs and community practices: The case of recreation in the Northwest Territories*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta, Canada.
- Paraschak, V. (1995). Invisible but not absent: Aboriginal women in sport and recreation. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 15, 71-72.

Paraschak, V. (1996). Native Canadians in sport: A clash of cultural values. In L. U. Uche (Ed.). *North-South information: Culture trends in global communications and research paradigms* (pp. 99-113). Nigeria: Longman Nigeria.

Paraschak, V. (1999). Doing sport, doing gender. In P. White & K. Young (Eds.), *Sport and gender in Canada* (pp. 153-169). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

Riphenburg, C. (1997). Women's status and cultural expression: Changing gender relations and structural adjustment in Zimbabwe. *Africa Today*, 44, 33-55.

Weedon, C. (1989). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Young, I. M. (1992). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 300-320). Routledge: New York and London.

## ‘Culture to Coaching:’ Traditional Aboriginal Sport Coaching Resources

Chris Szabo  
Government of the NWT

Michael Heine  
University of Manitoba

### Introduction

---

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) supports maintaining the cultural heritage of the traditional aboriginal sports and games of the north.<sup>1</sup> In recognition of the unique place that traditional games have in the NWT, the Government of the NWT has been providing support to Inuit and Dene Games programs and events such as the Arctic Winter Games, where these sports and games are played, since 1970.

There have been various efforts made to document Inuit and Dene Games and research and record the history of these games beginning in the the 1970’s and continuing to this day. These efforts have included the following:

- Workshops with elders in 1976 in Fort McPherson and Fort Franklin (Deline), and in 1985 in Tuli’ta (Fort Norman).
- Masters Thesis work in 1985 by Francois Gravelle that produced “Traditional Games of the Dogrib and Slave Indians of the Mackenzie Region”.
- Doctoral thesis by Michael Heine: “A History of Gwich’in Athapaskan Games”. A side project to this work was “Traditional Dene Games, A Resource Book”, published by MACA in 1995.
- A master’s thesis by James McAra on the traditional games of the Sahtu, entitled, “Traditional Games of the Sahtu Dene of Fort Franklin,” completed in 1997.
- Gwynneth Butler, Joe Karetak, the Keewatin Inuit Association and the Department of Education (GNWT) collaborated on the development of a book on Inuit Games that was published in 1979, and last reprinted in 1989.
- The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs and Aurora College working with the NWT Arctic Sports and Wrestling Associations hosted a Traditional Games Symposium for Arctic Sports, Dene Games and Inuit-style Wrestling in Inuvik in March of 1999 to gather further information on the traditional activities.

- Aurora College explored the idea of housing a Centre for Aboriginal Sport at the Inuvik campus, in 1998/99.
- A workshop for officiating in Arctic Sports was hosted in Iqaluit in September of 2001. Information from this workshop was included in the second edition of the Arctic Sports manual.

It was also recognized at Direction Conferences in 1983 and 1991—these are policy planning conferences held at regular intervals by the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, GNWT—and by the Arctic Winter Games International Committee that these traditional sports and games were important for the northern aboriginal people and that resources to preserve them needed to be developed.

In 1995 the Government of the Northwest Territories, in partnership with the Governments of Yukon, Alberta and later Nunavut, the Arctic Winter Games International Committee, Aurora College, Sport North, the Mackenzie and Beaufort Delta Sahtu Regional Recreation Associations, the NWT Arctic Sports Association and the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic initiated the development of the *Traditional Aboriginal Sport Coaching Resources* series. These resources, consisting of a printed manual, an instructional video, and a multi-media CD combining the two, are intended to connect northern aboriginal traditional games to the area of sport coaching and instruction.

## Series Overview

---

The series consists of five manuals, three of which have been completed; the remaining two are to be released within a year. The manuals cover the areas of Arctic Sports (Inuit traditional games), Dene Games, Inuit Style Wrestling, Snowshoeing and Dog Sledding. The manuals consist of several sections that break down into two core units, one describing the role of the activity in the traditional culture, the other outlining possible linkages between the activity in its traditional setting, and the area of coaching and performance training at the level of the Arctic Winter Games.

In all of the manuals, an explicit attempt is made to base the first core unit as much as possible on oral history sources; that is, elders' stories. These stories are complemented with information from archival sources, relevant ethnographies, and historical and archival photos. Core section 2 is usually designed in consultation with coaching experts in the respective activity areas.

## Series Contents

---

The development cycle for each resource extends over several years. Each is developed with the assistance of a committee of content experts. In the case of Arctic Sports it has been the NWT Arctic Sports Association and a few other experts in Arctic Sports. In the case of Inuit Style Wrestling it has been the NWT Wrestling Association and in particular the efforts of the late Rick Tremblay. In the case of Dene Games it has been representatives from the Mackenzie Recreation Association in

the NWT as well as representatives from the Yukon and Alaska. The resources have been modeled on the National Coaching Certification Program.

The two core units of each manual break down into two to five sections. In section one, the place of games in the traditional culture and their importance for survival on the land are described. Secondly, traditional values are described that are important for the way in which the games were played in the old days and should be played today. Many of the games were played spontaneously and in an unstructured way. Rules were basic and often varied from region to region. Winning a game was not as important as the sheer fun and enjoyment of playing (Butler and Karetak, 1979: 10). The traditional games were connected to life on the land and survival, they were used for the education of children, and they were played as part of the sharing and celebrations that took place when different groups gathered together (*ibid.*, pp.1-5). The traditional spirit of sharing and cooperation is reflected at the Arctic Winter Games, where it is common for coaches from one team to assist athletes of other teams. The notion of doing one's best and competing against oneself first, and only then against another team or athlete, is also common.

Section two consists of 'how to' descriptions of the traditional games. A wide variety of games are described. The descriptions include instructional 'pointers' for coaches, teachers and instructors who want to introduce participants to the various games. Many of the games are described in a format applicable to more structured competition. With the advent of the Arctic Winter Games and regional Traditional Games events, a whole new set of rules, standards and techniques have been established in order to determine a winner and maintain a record keeping system. The manuals advise the reader to be mindful of the spirit of fun and spontaneity expressed through playing the games. Participants need not get tied down to rules, so that determining a winner becomes less important than participating and enjoying oneself (Butler and Karetak, 1979:10).

Section 3 makes the connection between traditional games and sport coaching and instruction. It advocates the use of coaching and instructional methods that are based on the traditional values and ways of doing things described in section 1. In addition, technical information on training, planning and nutrition (including northern nutrition) is provided. Basic sport anatomy and physiology is provided where appropriate. This information is based on the 3M National Coaching Certification Program.

Section three of the Dene Games manual and section four of the Arctic Sports manual provide a step-by-step movement description of the traditional Inuit or Dene Games played at the Arctic Winter Games. These are also illustrated on the video that accompanies each manual.

The videos have been developed so that teachers, coaches and instructors can provide visual information and demonstrations on how to play the games used at the Arctic Winter Games. The visual and narrative information provided through the videos constitute an effective learning tool.

## Intended Uses

---

A number of uses were envisioned during the planning stages for these resources, and the books were designed to address the following areas:

- 1. Culture:** The manuals advocate a strengthened traditional games culture by making links between traditional games and the area of sport coaching and instruction. Technical information from the coaching area is used in a program that advocates traditional values and ways of doing things. Development of these types of resources will hopefully also stimulate further research into traditional games so that they can be documented and used in the communities.
- 2. Health:** The resources advocate healthier lifestyles based on regular physical activity (traditional games) and on better eating habits that include traditional northern foods as much as possible.
- 3. Outdoor recreation:** The resources promote the use of traditional games in on the land camps and during outdoor events (spring games, northern games).
- 4. Schools:** These resources are intended for use in the school environment to introduce students to traditional games of the north and to teach them how to play the games based on traditional values and knowledge.
- 5. Athletic performance:** Where appropriate, the resources describe ways in which certain traditional games can be trained as performance sports. This information is designated for coaches and athletes who want to participate in the Arctic Winter Games. This is relevant for disciplines such as Arctic Sports, Inuit style Wrestling and Snowshoeing.

## Response to and Use of the Manuals to Date

---

The response to the development of these resources has been very positive and they are being used in a variety of settings.

Copies are made available to participants, coaches and officials at each Arctic Winter Games.

- The Governments of Alberta, NWT, Nunavut, and the Yukon each have been provided with a quantity of the resources to distribute within their respective jurisdictions. Sport North is responsible for distribution within the NWT.
- Copies have been provided to Provincial/Territorial Coaching Coordinators in each Province/Territory, members of the Arctic Winter Games International Committee, the Coaching Association of Canada and the Aboriginal Sport Circle.
- Schools in Canada and the United States have requested copies for use in classes. The resources are provided to each school and library in the NWT, Yukon and Nunavut.
- Organizations in Manitoba and British Columbia who are developing their own resources have requested copies of the resources.

- Academics from around the world have requested copies of the resources.
- MACA has entered into a distribution agreement with the Canadian Intramural Recreation Association (CIRA) to ensure that the resources are available across Canada.
- The Government of the Yukon has recently developed posters for use in schools. These posters can be put up on gym walls and illustrate how to play the Arctic Sports.
- Northern Quebec was introduced to Dene Games at the AWG, and used the resources to train a Dene Games team for the 2002 AWG. Russian athletes used the resources to train for Arctic Sports at the Arctic Winter Games.
- Organizations from Quebec are investigating the feasibility of translating the resources into French.
- The Dene Games Organization being founded by the indigenous people of Greenland uses the Dene Games Manual in their own program development.
- These traditional games have appeared at Canada Games as demonstrations as early as 1975 and most recently at the 2001 Canada Summer Games in London, Ontario. Both Dene Games and Arctic Sports were demonstrated. In some respects these traditional games have been treated as less legitimate and somehow different from mainstream sport. Demonstrations will also take place at the 2002 NAIG in Winnipeg but here, as well, they will occur as a cultural event as opposed to a competitive event.

## Conclusion

---

The rich history of traditional northern aboriginal sports and games is being documented and preserved for use by interested educators, instructors and coaches in northern communities. Seven years of extensive consultation, research and development work have gone into the development of these resources, extending earlier research work. Currently the Dene Games and Arctic Sports resources are available. The remaining two resource manuals (Snowshoeing and Dog Sledding) are to be completed within the next year. These resources are being provided to all NWT, Yukon, Nunavut and northern Alberta schools and communities to encourage the use of traditional games among children and youth. Player development camps are also being hosted in the Yukon, NWT and northern Alberta to promote the Games.

The intention in the future is to take this information and develop coaching programs for each of the five sports based on the 3M National Coaching Certification Program and incorporating supplementary material being developed by the Aboriginal Sport Circle. This will put these activities on a more equal footing with mainstream sports.

The NWT and the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic continue to lobby to get some of the games on the sport calendar for future North American Indigenous Games and the 2007 Canada Winter Games that will be hosted in Whitehorse, Yukon. As these are large national and



international multi-sport gatherings, we feel that these types of sports should be featured on the sport calendar and not just as a cultural exhibition. In regard to the Arctic Winter Games, we hope that the development of these resources will continue to strengthen participation in the traditional sports and games events.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 We would like to acknowledge the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, Government of the Northwest Territories, who took the leadership role in ensuring that the resources were developed in a consistent format. The Arctic Winter Games International Committee and the partner Governments of the NWT, Yukon, Nunavut and Northern Alberta have provided the political and financial support necessary for this work to be completed. Sport North needs to be recognized for managing the projects and also providing financial support. The NWT Arctic Sports Association, the Coaching Association of Canada, Health Canada, Sport Canada, the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic and the national Aboriginal Sport Circle have also provided various levels and types of support.

## References

---

- Butler, Gwynneth and Joe Karetak. (1979). *Inuit Games*. Yellowknife, NT: Department of Education GNWT. [reprint ed.: Keewatin Inuit Association, 1989.]
- Gravelle, Francois. (1985). Traditional Games of the Dogrib and Slave Indians of the Mackenzie Region, NWT. An Exploratory Study. Unpublished M.A. thesis. University of Ottawa.
- Heine, Michael. (1995). Gwich'in Tsi'in. A History of Gwich'in Athapaskan Games. Unpublished Ph.d. dissertation. University of Alberta.
- Heine, Michael. (1999). *Dene Games. A Culture and Resource Manual*. Yellowknife, NT: Sport North Federation and MACA (GNWT).
- Heine, Michael. (2002). *Arctic Sports. A Training and Resource Manual*. 2nd edition. Yellowknife, NT: Sport North Federation and MACA (GNWT).
- Heine, Michael. (2003). *Inuit-style Wrestling. A Training and Resource Manual*. Yellowknife, NT: Sport North Federation and MACA (GNWT)
- Heine, Michael, Ruth Caroll and Harvey Scott. (1995). *Traditional Dene Games. Games the Dene Elders Remember from the Old Days*. Yellowknife, NT: MACA, GNWT.
- McAra, James. (1997). Traditional Games of the Sahtu Dene of Fort Franklin, N.W.T. Unpublished M.A. thesis. University of Alberta.

# Creating Space for Traditional Values in Contemporary Society: The Origins of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association

Joe Bailey

Advocate for Aboriginal Sport

## Introduction

---

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the origins of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association and to illustrate the challenges facing such an establishment in contemporary society. This paper gives an overview of the current sport and recreation system in the NWT and why it is necessary to have the Denendeh Traditional Games Association organize itself as an independent entity. The goal of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association is to establish itself as a pan-territorial organization to resurrect the traditional games of the Dene. There is a growing movement among the Dene to once again re-establish traditional games into everyday community life. On a broader perspective, the Association represents yet another medium for the advancement of equal acknowledgement and recognition of the traditional practices of the Dene by mainstream society.

In this paper, references are made to various sport and recreation agencies that belong to the current sport and recreation system. The Department of Municipal & Community Affairs (MACA), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is responsible for sport and recreation. Sport North is the governing body for territorial sporting organizations (TSO's) and is mandated and funded by MACA and was established in 1976. They are also responsible for major games including the Arctic Winter Games. The Aboriginal Sports Circle of the Western Arctic (ASCWA) was formed by MACA in 1999 and is responsible for all aboriginal sport in the NWT including the North American Indigenous Games.

## Background

---

The traditional games of the Dene have been practiced and played for centuries. According to the Elders, traditional Dene games have been around for many generations. This great tradition has been kept alive through the story-telling process and the actual practice of playing the games. When the various tribes would meet they would spend days socializing and playing games. The main game at that time and one that continues to be one of the most popular of all the different Dene Games is the Hand Games. Dogrib elders have told me stories about how some Hand

Games lasted as long as three days, with players taking breaks only to eat. Recently, Hand Games were played as part of the Dene National Assembly held in Fort Simpson July 8<sup>th</sup> to July 13<sup>th</sup> 2002, and in keeping with tradition, one tribe (North Slavey Indians) played against another tribe (Dogrib Indians). During the Games, as many as fifty players were playing at one time! The Arctic Winter Games version of the Hand Games only allows for four players per team.

Since the arrival of the white man over the past 150 years, the traditional games of the Dene have been impacted and influenced by the introduction of a non-aboriginal way of life. The Dene and their traditional games have faced outside influences and endured many obstacles over the years, yet the Games continue to survive. One of these obstacles is the stagnant recognition of Dene traditional games' cultural and spiritual values by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community. There are a few reasons for this. One is the adoption of a southern sport system to the North, where the sport and recreation decisions-makers have always held a non-Aboriginal membership majority. This includes MACA and Sport North, the main proponents for allocating sport and recreation funding in the NWT. When you have this kind of membership it is only natural that the membership would advance its own interests, those being non-Aboriginal. I could go further and explain this as a result of a more pervasive concept, eurocentrism.

"Eurocentrism is the imaginative and institutional context that informs contemporary scholarship, opinion and law. As a theory, it postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans."<sup>1</sup> I prefer to think of eurocentrism in my own terms. I am currently researching material for a project called 'The Native American Doctrine'. In it, I put forth the presupposition that being Indian is a spiritually-based existence. When my non-Aboriginal colleagues ask me how they can begin to understand the Aboriginal way I say to them, 'First, you must abandon the very thought processes you were raised with and try to think in terms of everything having a spiritual association; then and only then can you begin to appreciate the aboriginal way.'

"The system (sport and recreation) must reflect the demographics and the respective values of all members of the community".<sup>2</sup> The demographics of the NWT are 51% Aboriginal and 49% non-Aboriginal.<sup>3</sup> You would think that an effective sport and recreation program would reflect the demographics it serves; such is not the case in the NWT. Furthermore, with respect to the Arctic Winter Games International Committee<sup>4</sup>, each contingent is allowed two representatives on this committee. The NWT, with a 51/49 population split of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal people, has never had an aboriginal representative on the committee; the NWT has never had a woman representative either. To some, this is a clear indication that 'the old boys' club' mentality is still alive and well in the sport and recreation community of the NWT.

There have been a few 'token' efforts that have been undertaken. The *Dene Games Manual* is one such example. Although the *Dene Games Manual* is a significant contribution to the advancement of the Dene Games, it only represents the tip of the iceberg. Another effort, the establishment

of ASCWA, allows the GNWT to informally declare the issue of aboriginal sport in the NWT as having been addressed. Initially, ASCWA was a good idea, but it has since become a case study of how having the wrong individual in the right position is enough to influence the entire organization. The three-year ASCWA experiment in the NWT has failed the traditional interests of the Dene community. Another reason why the traditional Dene Games have suffered in the NWT is the lack of action taken by Aboriginal peoples themselves. But then again, the system they are working in is not theirs. I am sure there are some aboriginal individuals who have tried to do something before, but subsequently succumbed to the frustration of working within a system that is non-Aboriginal. Before ASCWA was formed, there has never been a territorial organization established specifically for traditional Dene Games. Why? Simply, the traditional values of the Dene Games are not recognized as such in the non-Aboriginal definition of sport and recreation. One system focuses on the advancement of the individual, the 'elite' athlete concept and the high performance program, while the other system focuses on the games as a means of bringing the community together in a fun and friendly environment.

## Autonomous Entity

---

Due to this difference in philosophy towards sport and recreation between Sport North and the Denendeh Traditional Games Association, the Association would be better positioned to attain its goals and objectives as a separate, independent entity. As the Association evolved, the Founding Members concluded that current Sport North policies and funding criteria do not recognize the traditional aspects of Dene Games. It has been determined that operating under the 'umbrella' of the Sport North Federation as a regular member TSO, the Denendeh Traditional Games Association would be significantly limited in accessing funding in comparison with other member TSO's.

Sport North, first and foremost, caters to competition and sport as evidenced by the fact that their funding criteria is structured to encourage the development of the elite athlete and the promotion of the high performance athlete program. As an example, Sport North rewards those TSO's (through a point system) that send athletes to nationally sanctioned competitions. This is not necessarily a bad thing; as a matter of fact, Sport North is adequately serving the needs of one sector of the sport and recreation community. However, there is another sector that is not getting the same recognition or resources; those who play the traditional Dene Games. The Association's intent is not to send athletes out (has there ever been a national Hand Games championship?), but to preserve the tradition and bring individuals and communities together through traditional games. Unfortunately, there exists no TSO dedicated specifically for Hand Games of the Dene people. As a matter of fact, since Sport North's inception some 26 years ago there has never been such a TSO included as part of its federation of TSO's.

The quasi-traditional TSO's of snowshoeing and canoeing have been established, but unfortunately while under the 'umbrella' of Sport North both have failed. The Denendeh Traditional

Games Association, as a new organization, will work towards establishing itself as an autonomous, independent governing body that will encourage, promote and maintain the development of traditional Dene Games in all NWT communities. The Association will exist as an independent body whose goal includes, among others, conducting its operations in a concerted effort with other sport and recreation partners in the NWT. Some may ask. 'Why not join the recently established ASCWA, or Sport North, in developing programs for traditional games in the NWT?' These are understandable suggestions; however, the Association seeks independence in part because since its inception, ASCWA has failed to conduct an effective and sustained Dene traditional games program in any community. As a matter of fact, one could say Dene Games have taken a back seat to contemporary sports such as basketball and hockey. Still, others might suggest joining forces with the NWT Arctic Sports Association (a Sport North TSO that governs the traditional games of the Inuit). One response we could offer would be, 'Why doesn't the NWT Hockey Association join forces with the NWT Figure Skating Association?' Such an amalgamation is highly unlikely and would never happen because although both serve the common purpose of sport, and both involve skating, they serve two distinct interest groups. These facts demonstrate the need to establish the Association as an independent governing body.

The governance structure of the Denendeh Traditional Games Association is designed to have equal representation from each of the five Dene regions of the NWT. There will be a total of ten Directors who will serve as the Association's Board of Directors. Two Directors are nominated and appointed by the governing body from each of the following Aboriginal regions: Akaitcho Territory Government; Deh Cho First Nation; Dogrib Treaty 11 Council; Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Sahtu Dene Council. Unlike any other sport organization in the NWT, the Denendeh Traditional Games Association has included an Elders Advisory Council as an advisory body to the Association. The role of the Elders Advisory Council is to advise the Board of Directors on any and all matters of the Association, particularly on the traditional aspects of the games. This governance structure maximizes the rich traditions, history and resources of those who know the games best. The recently published *Dene Games Manual* gathered much of its information from Elders and is just one example of the vast expertise that is available from within these five aboriginal regions.

## Tradition and Culture vs. Modern Influences

---

The forces of assimilation are taking their toll on the true meaning of the Dene games. As I once stated in *Windspeaker*, "... for us sport and recreation is physical, emotional, mental and spiritual."<sup>5</sup> To the Dene, traditional games represent more than the raising of the heart rate past a certain level or the declaration of a winner. They represent a way of life: a life of harmony with each other, with the land and with the spirit world, a way of life before the white man. Recently, the Association was challenged by others on its decision to maintain the traditional aspects of playing the games. More specifically, the issue was the decision to not allow women to participate in certain traditional

games. The Association, on the direction of its Elders Advisory Council, decided to focus on the preservation of traditional aspects of the Dene games knowing full well that mainstream society will not readily accept such a position. As a result, the Association is developing a promotional strategy on who and what the Association is and what they hope to achieve. Many people in the NWT, including aboriginal peoples, are not fully aware of why things are done the way they are.

For example, men and women occupied specific roles within the family and within the community. These roles extended into the games where in some instances only men played a certain game, in part, to provide entertainment to the women. Other reasons such as medicine power and 'gifts' from the spirit world go much deeper than entertainment. The way the Elders explain this is that traditionally men were the providers and the women looked after the camp and the family. In doing so the men were given certain hunting 'gifts' or had a special medicine power. These powers had to be nourished and respected; otherwise they could be lost. More specifically, women were not allowed to touch any of the men's hunting gear or his drum. The men provided drumming for drum dances and for the Hand Games. If the women touched something they weren't supposed to, such as a spear or the drum, then a man's 'gift' or power could be lost or diminished, thus meaning that he wouldn't be as proficient in providing for his family. Women knew this rule; they knew the value of observing, and the implication of violating, these traditions. These practices need to be explained so people can understand and appreciate the traditional aspects of the games. Until this is done, some will continue to discredit the Dene Games Association with accusations of sexism.

## Conclusion

---

In *Towards a Better Tomorrow*, the Members of the 14th Legislative Assembly committed themselves to working to improve the health and well being of all people of the Northwest Territories" (GNWT, 2000, p. 2) This is the opening sentence in a recent discussion paper, *Recreation and Sport in the NWT*, released by the then Minister responsible for Sport and Recreation in October 2001. Coincidentally, here is another excerpt:

*The NWT Sport community provides all northerners with broad based opportunities to maximize their potential, regardless of age, race, gender, financial situation, geographic location, or physical ability; whether they are athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, sponsors or spectators; whether they play pick-up basketball or are striving for an Olympic medal. (GNWT, 1991, p. 7)*

This statement was part of a document entitled, *Northwest Territories Sport Direction 2000*, released by the then Minister Responsible for Sport and Recreation in the early 1990's. Here is yet another excerpt:

*The Sport and Recreation Division of the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), is dedicated to the development of sport and recreation programs, services, facili-*

*ties and leadership skills which contribute to the well being of individuals and enhance the quality of life of residents in the NWT. (GNWT, 1991, p. 2)*

As you can see, in each of these statements you see words like 'dedicated', 'committed', 'opportunities', '... all people of the Northwest Territories', '... all Northerners.' Unfortunately, although the commitment to a better life has been promised to all Northerners on more than one occasion, the sport and recreation infrastructure needed to do this has never existed. A thriving sport and recreation community dedicated solely to the development and maintenance of a contemporary, non-Aboriginal sport and recreation system, exists. At the same time, the traditional games of the Dene continue to struggle for similar recognition and support. There is a desperate need to have a 'made in the North' sport and recreation system, for the benefit of all residents, not just one sector.

More disturbing is the fact that these quotes give a clear indication of the philosophical differences I speak of between the Dene concept of sport and the non-Aboriginal concept of sport. The statement "... whether they play pick-up basketball or are striving for an Olympic medal", speaks directly to the individualism of the non-Aboriginal definition of sport.

The reality is, here we are in the year 2002 and only now is a territorial-wide Dene Games organization getting established and doing so with limited support from government-sponsored funding agencies. The Association does however have the full support of the aboriginal community and that's the only real benchmark for success. The challenge, now, is creating space for traditional values in contemporary society.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Marie Battiste, James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, (2000), p. 21
- 2 Joe Bailey, "Sport System Works Against Aboriginal Athletes" *Windspeaker* (December 2000), p. 6.
- 3 [www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Stainfo/Census/census%2001/Ethnicity.xls](http://www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Stainfo/Census/census%2001/Ethnicity.xls)
- 4 The Arctic Winter Games International Committee, made up of representatives from the participating contingents (two members each), governs the Arctic Winter Games.
- 5 Joe Bailey, "Sports System Works Against Aboriginal Athletes", *Windspeaker* (December 2000), p.6.

## References

---

Bailey, Joe. (December 2000). "Sport System Works Against Aboriginal Athletes". *Windspeaker*. p. 6.

Battiste, Marie and Youngblood Henderson, James, eds. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd.

Government of the NWT. (October 2001). *Recreation and Sport in the NWT: A Discussion Paper*. Yellowknife: Sport and Recreation Division.

Government of the NWT. (1991). Northwest Territories Sport Direction 2000. Yellowknife: Sport and Recreation Division.

Government of the NWT. (1991). Partners In Action: Sport and Recreation Direction for the Nineties. Yellowknife: Sport and Recreation Division

[www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Stainfo/Census/census%2001/Ethnicity.cls](http://www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Stainfo/Census/census%2001/Ethnicity.cls) (population by aboriginal identity and community, NWT 2001 Census).



# The 'Bright Side of the Road:' The Strengths Perspective in Nain, Labrador

Sheldon Baikie  
University of Windsor

## Introduction

---

We live in a beautifully wonderful world.<sup>1</sup> A world that is full of wonder, full of amazing people, and full of gorgeous and majestic surroundings. Despite our many blessings there is an ideology present in our society that begins by criticizing. This ideology states that there is a problem and that there is an appropriate solution to said problem. This line of thinking stems predominately from the medical world. It begins with identification of the ailment/sickness/ disease/problem, and is followed by an appropriate treatment. In the social setting, like in recreation, this means that problems are identified within recreation and then people go about trying to 'solve' or 'cure' these problems. But the social world is not that simple. Antidotes, solutions, cures often do not work in all social situations. Cultural differences having to do with relationships, power, and social control make it impossible for people working in social situations to administer a cure or vaccine to all situations. A new way of thinking is emerging in the social sciences. This way of thinking is based on peoples' and communities' positive attributes, based on peoples' and communities' strengths and based on trust and honor. It is called the Strengths Perspective and originates out of the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas. I have adapted this work for the field of recreation, specifically, recreation in native communities.

## Strengths Model

---

Many practitioners use problem, deficits or pathology models while working with individuals and community groups. The main idea behind these types of theories is that the client (i.e., person, group or community) is flawed and the person becomes (is) the problem (Saleebey, 1997). For example, a person who has schizophrenia is labeled a schizophrenic. One of the main problems with this way of thinking is that it often leads to negative, pessimistic thoughts towards the client (Saleebey, 1997). Social construction plays a role in the development and continuation of the deficits view. Saleebey (1997) says: "The language of pathology and deficit gives voice to particular assumptions and leads to certain ends" (p. 3). Some academics and practitioners, opposed to the

deficits models, attempted to formalize a strengths theory of social work that could better serve individuals and communities. One of the most promising models is the strengths perspective out of the University of Kansas' School of Social Welfare. An explanation of the strengths perspective and a plan to apply the perspective to recreation follows.

According to Saleebey (1997), there are six assumptions on which the strengths perspective is based. The first assumption is for social workers to *respect client strengths*. Respect is a foundation in the building of this model. This model also suggests going beyond just respecting, to include caring. Caring, and believing in the attributes and experiences of the client are integral parts of the strengths model. The second assumption is that all *clients have many strengths*. Often these physical, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, social, and spiritual energies, resources or competencies are untapped. If discovered and used, these strengths can lead to hope and personal growth and transformation. The third assumption insists that *people are more likely to continue autonomous development when it is based on attributes, knowledge, and skills that have been successful*. Saleebey goes on to say that the fourth assumption is that the *social worker is simply a collaborator, and the client is the expert*. Social workers can bring their education, training and experience to the clients, but it is the clients, in the end, who can best understand their own situations. The fifth assumption states that when using the strengths perspective *it is very important to avoid using the 'victim mindset'*. Many social work theories identify social problems within individuals. Once the problem is identified the researcher then goes about identifying differences between the 'inflicted' individual and the general population. In these cases the *differences* create the problem. It is the individual traits that are the differences, therefore, the problem; thus the person becomes a victim. The final assumption of the strengths perspective is that *any environment is full of resources*. In every situation, there are individuals, groups, and institutions that may have something to give to the greater community. Often these resources are untapped and unsolicited.

These assumptions are the foundation of the theory. From this base, Saleebey (1997) states that there are six key concepts of the strengths perspective. The first of these, *empowerment*, means that the strengths model attempts to help people discover the power inherent in every individual and collective. The job of the social worker is to create and facilitate chances for people who are marginalized to influence the decisions that affect their lives. This requires a deep belief in true democracy free of paternalism, which is defined as the opposite to empowerment. The second concept is what Saleebey terms *membership*. We are all members of a species entitled to dignity, respect and responsibility. Unfortunately, many people feel that they are not a part of this membership. Social workers must help build links to membership through strengths and abilities. *Regeneration from within* is the third concept of the strengths perspective. This states that healing and health begins from within one's self. The power of individuals who are fostered by caring communities, connectedness, and expiation is the starting point for the healing process. The fourth concept of the strengths perspective is *synergy*. This means that the total is more than just the sum

of its parts. The complex relationships of a community create new and unexpected resources. There are many more resources in a community than most people believe. The concept of synergy also suggests that the definition of resource is much broader than its use in traditional thought. In addition, resources in the community are often thought of as limited, but Saleebey suggests that many resources are actually renewable. As well, any community has the possibility of synergy. The social worker's job is to help communities realize this synergistic potential. The fifth concept is *dialogue and collaboration*. Dialogue is more than just speaking with people. It actually confirms the importance of the other person in the conversation. It includes empathy, identification with and inclusion of other people. This dialogue is founded on love, humility, faith and it becomes a horizontal relationship based on trust. This type of relationship breaks down traditional paternalistic oppressed/oppressor relationships. Collaboration means that social workers become stakeholders in what the clients are accomplishing. The social worker must really listen to what clients are saying and help them through whatever it is that they are going through. The bottom line is that the social worker becomes emotionally involved in the progress of the client. With this emotional involvement comes a more trusting, healthy, productive relationship. The last concept is the *suspension of disbelief*. The adoption of the scientific model to the field of social work has led to the thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of clients being considered invalid and often discounted or disbelieved by social workers. The strengths theory says that this cannot be the case. To create relationships with clients that are helpful, clients' contributions must be believed and valued.

## Research Methodology

---

Qualitative research can be completed in a number of different ways and depending on a number of factors, certain methods will be more appropriate than others. For this work, my personal opinions and the utilization of the strengths perspective approach led me to choose a research method proposed by Kirby and McKenna (1989) in their book *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods From the Margins*. The concept of the strengths theory and the methods proposed by Kirby and McKenna go hand in hand. Both ideas are based on the theory of social construction of reality. Social construction means that people create our social world, our facts and truths. Both perspectives also state that it is often only the majority-based truths that get created and replicated. Minority groups of people who may live different lives and have different truths are not represented in many ways. This causes a marginalization of different people and often as a result they are further exiled in social contexts. Both the strengths perspective and methods from the margins attempt to empower and give voice to people who have been marginalized. Both try and break down established conventions and attempt to replace these ideas with new alternative views that more fully represent groups on the margins.

Personally, the strengths perspective and the methods from the margins speak to me in an honest way. They both celebrate and encourage diverse experiences and do not dwell on research,

theories, or academics. They base their assumptions and values firmly in experience and practice and for me, this makes sense.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) state that knowledge is constructed by people; all people have motivations, biases, attitudes, assumptions and opinions. These opinions cannot be just turned off when someone starts the research process. These attitudes and opinions shape everything about the researcher and how they research. The researcher's opinions affect the subject of the thesis, how that question is posed, the methods used for data collection and how the data is analyzed. All of these aspects of a research project and more require the researcher to make a choice. If research is thought of as a series of conscious choices, then the assumptions, opinions, experience and attitudes of the researcher become very important because researchers do not objectively report the 'truth'. In *Experience, Research, Social Change*, researchers become active participants in the research process by writing and explaining their attitudes, assumptions, opinions, and experiences in the form of conceptual baggage. This baggage can be likened to an Inukshuk. Traditionally, an Inukshuk is a way of communicating for the Inuit. It is used to transmit various messages in a land that is often void of landmarks. Inuksuit often point the way home, warn travelers of dangers or are there to mark hunting areas, just to name a few purposes. In the same way that Inukshuks marked the physical land of the north, conceptual baggage marks the social landscape of the researcher. Conceptual baggage leaves no questions of assumptions, opinions or attitudes unanswered, and gives readers a firm knowledge of the researcher's social landscape. The researcher as well as the readers can make use of conceptual baggage. For example, imagine that you are standing next to one of your assumption Inukshuks on a vast tundra. Someone approaches and begins building their own Inukshuk twenty-five feet away from yours. You say, 'Hey you do not need to build that, I have mine right here.' They reply, 'But that is not one of my assumptions. This is where I think it would go best.' After a short time, there may be dozens of Inukshuks all around you, all of them with slightly different characteristics and assumptions. Now how does this relate to anything? The point of the strengths perspective and of the research methodology is to understand and accurately represent what other people are going through. On this tundra of assumptions, the researcher would have to go to the peoples' Inukshuks and see what the tundra looked like from each one. There are many differing points of view on this tundra and it is important to understand as many as possible. The original researcher's Inukshuk can be used as a touchstone and can help give meaning to other peoples' landmarks. The researcher's Inukshuk is dynamic and emergent and can be modified and changed as the researcher views other Inukshuks. Once these assumptions, attitudes and experiences are identified and the researcher acknowledges the social constructions that shape him or her, research can begin in an open and honorable way.

Kirby and McKenna (1989) state that research is an emergent process. The selection of topic, methodology, questions asked and interpretation of the findings are all part of this emergent process. During this emergent process, situations change and these are accounted for within concep-

tual baggage. Throughout the whole research process, researchers record notes about the findings of the study but they also take notes on the process. They document how they went about doing the research. Conceptual baggage does not stop at the beginning of the project. Thoughts, feelings, and assumptions concerning the findings and the process are continued throughout the duration of the project and are an additional form of information.

An integral part of my research methodology is participant observation. I was a volunteer within the community for the recreation department, the local school, and other local groups that needed assistance. I also participated in as many recreational opportunities as possible. The only way I can accurately describe what is going on in Nain is to participate, and once I have done this, I have a reference point from which to draw upon throughout my research and analysis processes. Field notes outlining my observations and reflections will be used in the analysis of the total project.

To ensure that the research question will be answered in the richest possible way, triangulation will be used. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods of data collection to gather information on a topic (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). When a number of data collection methods are used, the probability that aspects of the topic were missed decreases. In this case, participant observation, unobtrusive recording, personal interviews, group interviews and photo descriptions will be used to paint a full picture of recreation and community health in Nain, Labrador.

## Identified Strengths

---

The recreational strengths identified in Nain are numerous and varied. They range from organized sport to organized community events to impromptu games of chance and sport. The sport of hockey is a huge strength identified by individuals within the community. A number of people mentioned the importance of the boys hockey league during the winter months. A big strength that accompanies this is the SportsPlex that houses an indoor rink on which much of the hockey is played. Hockey is also played on an outdoor rink and on almost every road in the community. These are all signs of a vibrant, growing boys hockey program in the community.

Another sport that would be considered a tremendous strength would be BAT. BAT is a version of baseball played on the street, since they have no ball field. This in itself is a great strength, adapting and bending the 'rules' of a North American game to fit within the community of Nain, Labrador. The young people who primarily play the game describe the rules and strategy with such vigor, it is not hard to tell that they think of the game as a strength.

Community events like Community Feasts and Easter Games are also described with love and longing by people from Nain. I was making my reservations to fly back to Nain for the Easter Games, which is a whole week of activities during Easter break, and the ticket agent that I was speaking to was from Nain. I told her I was going to Nain to participate and volunteer for the week and she admitted that she was very jealous of my attending. She described how much fun the week

was and told me all of the events that I must not miss. I could tell that this time of the year was very important to her. The whole community echoed these feelings. The Community Feasts, that are held approximately four times a year, are examples of the strengths perspective in action. The modern day community feasts were established a couple of years ago when the community was going through a particularly rough time. A group of concerned citizen got together and decided to have a feast celebrating all that was good and right with the community. Community members sing the praises of such gatherings every chance they get and the whole community comes out to attend or help out.

## Further Research

---

Data gathering has not been completed and this paper is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the data that has been gathered up to this point. One area that needs to be addressed is the strengths of women and women's recreation in Nain, Labrador. I would like to gather more information on this subject before data gathering is complete. I also hope to more fully explain the strengths identified in my preliminary findings. I may discover that these early findings are just a scratch on the surface. The findings that have been reached so far primarily contain data that applies to young males, which is what I am. Through a thorough interviewing process I plan to access both males and females of various ages groups (elders in particular), as well as special interest groups.

## Conclusion

---

Optimism, the pessimists may say. But the optimist, according to Webster's Dictionary (1993), is someone who believes this world is the best possible world, or puts the most favorable interpretation upon actions, or anticipates the best possible outcome. Strengths theorists do not believe that the world is the best possible world. We believe that building on strengths and positives is the best way to make the world, individually and collectively, a better place to live. Working from a strengths perspective does not mean sugar coating problems. The strengths theory recognizes problems of everyday life but does not focus on these issues. Instead, strengths theorists look at current and past attributes and use these successes as the foundation for a brighter future. Is the strengths perspective just an avoidance of problems? In some ways it may be considered avoidance. Is self-improvement avoidance? Is trying to make the world a better place avoidance? If we begin building for a better world from our strengths we have an increased chance of success that leads to increased confidence. Which leads to more success and more confidence. Our problems seem to take care of themselves.

When utilizing the strengths theory in community capacity building you are not starting from scratch. Just imagine going into a South American, or African community and attempting to teach the people of that community hockey. It wouldn't make sense. You would start by doing more of

what they are good at. Or at least that is what I would do. You start from a very successful base and build from there. Expand program enrollment, including special populations within successful programs. You do not have to recreate the wheel.

The strengths theory chooses to construct reality in different ways. All communities, not simply native communities, can utilize this way of thinking to help make substantial and positive change a reality.

## Endnotes

---

1 'The bright side of the road' — inspired by the song of the same name by Van Morrison.

## References

---

Kirby, S. & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods from the Margins*. Toronto, Ontario: Garamond Press.

Saleebey, D.(ed.) (1997). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. New York: Longman.

*The New Websters Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language*. (1993) Danbury, CT: Lexicon Publications, Inc.

# Regional Approaches to Development and Delivery of Recreation and Sport Programs in the NWT

Shane Thompson  
Government of the NWT

## Who am I?

---

Hello, my name is Shane Thompson. I am an indigenous non-aboriginal person from the South Slave Area. What does this mean? Well, it means that I was born, raised and educated in Hay River, Northwest Territories (NWT). For the past fourteen and a half years I have worked within the NWT's Municipal Government structure in a cross-cultural environment, at both the Community (Hamlet) and Government of the NWT (GNWT) levels in the Recreation field. Presently, I am employed by the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (GNWT) as the Senior Recreation Development Officer for the Deh Cho Region. At different periods in time during the past ten years, I have been the prime government contact for all the nineteen communities in the Mackenzie region. Presently, I am the Government's prime contact for the Deh Cho Region. Why is this important? What is being presented to you is based on my personal experience working in this field.

## Introduction

---

On February 17, 2000, I had the opportunity to attend the National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal Peoples in Hobbema, Alberta. During this meeting, one of the sessions was the good practices workshop. The Province of Manitoba did the first presentation. They did their presentation on the problems they were having dealing with recreation issues. Some of their problems were: the limited exchange of information and networking between communities; integrating delivery systems; addressing youth needs in the communities/region; support of volunteers; ongoing recreation practitioners' development (directors and maintainers); and flexibility of programs. They came up with the idea of trying to host regional meetings in an effort to solve some of these problems.

After their presentation, I took the opportunity to brief the group on what we are doing in the Mackenzie Region. I explained that in the Mackenzie region I work with nineteen communities officially and unofficially depending on the personnel available. For the past seven and half years



we have been holding biannual spring and fall Workshops for the Recreation Coordinators/Community representatives. As well, we try to host at least two regional training events for the Facility Maintainers.

I explained that the communities worked hand in hand with Headquarters Staff and myself (the Regional Recreation Development Officer). We have formal discussions, make decisions related to regional programs, training, initiatives (youth games, youth conferences, regional swimming meets) and set priorities for regional Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) Sport and Recreation Programs (Inter-Community Sport Competition, Sport Skills, Dene Games, Aquatics and Leadership) related budgets. This process assists the communities in working more co-operatively together in meeting needs and allows for better communication and co-ordination. As well, we work with other partners in the system such as Health and Social Services, Sport North, Aboriginal Sport Circle, Education and Friendship Centers. I also explained that the communities have formed the Mackenzie Recreation Association and registered as a Society. The Association has taken the first step in developing a CD-ROM for the history of what we have done in the region.

After my presentation, a number of the provinces/territories (New Brunswick, Yukon, BC, Saskatchewan, PEI, Manitoba and northern Quebec), Sports Canada and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association asked for copies of this CD-ROM and a brief outline on our budgets and what we have been able to do with these budgets.

Later on that year, I attended the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Annual General Meeting and Conference in Lake Louise (October 21 - 24, 2000). I took part in a session put on by the City of Winnipeg that talked about piloting innovative programs in its own facilities, developing partnerships and focusing efforts on programs that support families and youth. After attending this session, I realized that we had the model people were looking for, whether it be community, region or territory/province based. So here is our success story, as straightforward as I can make it.

## History of the Regional Association

---

The Mackenzie Region, also known as the Fort Smith Region, consists of nineteen communities: two Towns (Hay River and Fort Smith); one Village (Fort Simpson); three Hamlets (Fort Liard, Fort Providence and Rae Edzo); one charter community (Wha Ti); one Community Council (Fort Resolution); one Settlement Council (Enterprise), and ten Bands (Dettah / Ndilo, Hay River Reserve, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Lutsel K'e, Nahanni Butte, Rae Lakes, Snare Lake, Trout Lake and Wrigley).

In the 1980's and early 1990's the region would host informal Recreation meetings once a year. There would be one meeting for the larger communities (more than 300) and one meeting for the smaller communities (fewer than 300). Each of the above communities was invited to attend the appropriate meeting. These meetings consisted of discussing and making regional decisions on

various issues pertaining to sport and recreation including the Arctic Winter Games (AWG) Regional Trials, Winter Regional Games, Mackenzie Youth and Dene Games.

When I started as the Recreation Development Officer, I wanted to build on the positive previous experience I had as a Recreation Coordinator for the community of Kugluktuk and as a member of the Kitikmeot regional recreation team. In the Kitikmeot region, the philosophy was to bring all the communities together, regardless of the community size, to share ideas, to build on each community's strengths and to help one another with their weaknesses. As well, we worked on common regional issues that would help develop the region as well as the communities. Some examples of this were the Northern Fly in Sports Camp, distribution of funds and the AWG Regional trials.

When I presented this vision to my colleague, we agreed that we would bring the communities together to see if they would buy into this vision. As well, with the development and operational support of facility infrastructure through the Government of the NWT (Department of Municipal and Community Affairs) these different programs<sup>1</sup> were developed for municipal and settlement government to help build and maintain the facilities. The development of human resources for Recreation Professionals and Volunteers was also encouraged through other programs<sup>2</sup>; thus, we felt that it was the opportune time to bring both the small and large communities in for one large regional meeting. The first true regional recreation meeting was held in the fall of 1992 in Fort Simpson. During that meeting, the communities discussed the need to change the meeting from annual to biannual, including a Spring and Fall Workshop. This occurred in 1993 and has continued to this date.

Some of the major strengths of having the 19 communities coming together were their ability to share ideas (successes and challenges), resources and working towards a common vision. It was amazing watching everyone come together and share information and provide recommendations on how to deal with issues. Small communities were able to provide very good advice to the larger centers and vice versa.

During the first two or three years of these meetings, my colleague or I would develop the agenda in consultation with the communities. After the meeting was completed, my colleague or I would develop a report that would be mailed out to the communities within the month. This report would basically highlight the major issues discussed and any recommendations brought forth. As the region developed, a more formal way of minute taking was followed, which included motions being made and recorded. In the past three years, we have been able to hire a secretary to take on this task. Presently, the region is working on developing a job description so they can hire a part time Executive Director.

Over the course of the ten years, the region has developed a number of Policies, Agreements, Procedures and a Games Handbook<sup>3</sup>. A good example to illustrate why we needed to develop

these documents would be the Games Handbook. Previous to the development of the Handbook, issues were dealt with in a variety of ways, with no real consistency. The point really hit home during the 1993 Arctic Winter Games regional trials, when one team appealed the eligibility of another team after losing the final game. The appealing team already had the information and waited until after the final game was over and everyone headed home to contest the results. With nothing in place, this situation was dealt with differently than we normal would have. Plus, as a region we were dealing with the development and growth of the communities' involvement in games, sports and recreational activities, in light of the increased competitiveness between the communities it was felt that the development of an official *Mackenzie Regional Games Handbook* was desired to improve the delivery of the games. Throughout the process, we worked closely with all the partners involved in the delivery of the sport and recreation system to ensure a standard and fair process for dealing with the Games. This handbook has been very useful and we have been able to deal with the potential issues fairly and in a timely manner.

As the region developed and took on more responsibilities, the time came for the region to be recognized as a distinct identity and equal partner in the system, which meant forming an association. After a number of draft constitutions and bylaws, the group was prepared to take the next step and become a society. On January 8, 2001 the regional association was incorporated as the Mackenzie Recreation Association and became a recognized society.

As the system within the region evolved, the members always stressed the importance of working closely with the other partners in the system. They were: Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic, Sport North Federation, Territorial Sport Organizations, Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA), Beaufort Delta Sahtu Recreation Association, the nineteen community governments and the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. As a partner in the recreation system, the region bought into the strategic planning process and still uses it today. Mind you, it has been modified to meet our needs.

An example of working closely together would be the spring meetings. We worked with the Beaufort Delta Sahtu Recreation Association and the NWTRPA to ensure we host the meetings in the same location. This way, we can have joint regional sessions that include inviting the other partners to the table to make a presentation or discuss issues. It also provides an opportunity to host training sessions for all the communities in attendance. After the regional meetings are completed, then both regional associations make an effort to attend the NWTRPA meetings and AGM.

In this next section of the paper, I will address some of the challenges we have faced and how we have dealt with them. We never felt there was a challenge facing us, just an opportunity to learn from and succeed in. It is surprising how each challenge has made the region stronger and helped with the development of additional resources.

## Funding

---

When I started working in this position, my colleague was looking at implementing the idea of having the community Recreation Coordinators provide input into where they felt the money should be directed in certain program areas. As we started implementing this idea during the second year of meetings, I noticed that the group would work together to ensure the resources were shared equitably. An example of this was the Minor Additional Recreation Facilities and Open Play Space Program. The communities would submit their proposals for consideration and the Department would review them. After reviewing them, we would work with the communities who submitted proposals and agree on two or three major budgets and four or five minor projects for the year. What was amazing was the fact that communities would agree to postpone their projects for a year so another community could complete their project that year. This was the rule instead of the exception. After witnessing this success, we started sharing our other programs with them. These programs included: Traditional games, Aquatics, Sport Skills and Intercommunity Sports Competitions.

As the Association grew, the department started looking at ways to give them funding to help them develop. This included a move from conditional funding to unconditional funding. Along with this funding, they received funding from the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic and Sport North (Regional Sport Development Program and Regional Arctic Winter Games Trials). In the past three years, the Association has seen their budget go from \$47,213.00 to \$201,500.00.

Along with the increased funding came the responsibility to account for the funding more professionally. The Department and the other partners want to see such things as audits done by a recognized accounting firm, insurance for board members and justification for the need to hire a part time Executive Director. These all cost money, which gets taken away from the regional program areas. These are necessary evils to insure the Association is running smoother.

Another challenge in this area is like every other jurisdiction. The three bears—Papa (Health & Social Services), Mama (Education) and Baby (Justice)—take up a huge portion of the resources and do not leave a lot for recreation. Recreation Coordinators have to spend a lot of time to fund-raise, which takes them away from the programming area. This was another way the regional Association was able to help the communities. On a positive note, the GNWT has recognized this as a problem and has developed a new policy that will give the communities additional conditional funding to help meet some of the communities' needs.

## Turnover

---

In the past ten years, there has been a huge turnover of Recreation Staff in these nineteen communities: We are looking at just over 131 Recreation Coordinators to date. With such a huge turnover, it was agreed that there was a need to develop some sort of corporate history that could be

accessed readily. Developing a regional CD did this. As with most things, the first draft was done all right, but we realized that a lot of the material was missing, therefore the creation of a second regional CD was needed. This CD meets our needs, however like anything electronic it is getting to be outdated. So we are working on developing the third edition. As well, we are presently working on getting a web page up and running, so the new staff members can have access to all our forms, minutes and community contact information.

With the number of people leaving, we have been fortunate the new members coming into the fold have been very open to what the region has been doing. They are also willing to share their ideas with the group on ways to improve how we do things. As well, the other members have been very friendly and welcomed the newcomers with open arms. The only challenge is that they are new and it takes them a while to get adjusted to the terminology, the programs, the forms and the speed in which things happen. Some figure it to be too fast and others figure it to be too slow.

Personally, I have developed an orientation binder that introduces the new person to the partners in the system, the region and other relevant information they need to get started. After about two weeks into the job, the new person and I take a trip to Yellowknife to meet all the partners (Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic, Sport North, NWTRPA and Municipal and Community Affairs – Headquarters) in person. This allows the person to meet the individuals they would be working with, putting a face and a voice to a name. It also allows them an opportunity to ask questions of the person/partner.

## Geography

---

With the region covering three areas (Deh Cho, North and South Slave), we have some of the nicest scenery in the world. Unfortunately, with this large portion of land mass we do have a challenge coming up with an appropriate travel policy that is fair to everyone. Presently, we fund travel in certain programs such as Mackenzie Youth Summer Games and the Mackenzie Regional Swim Meet at 100%; some other programs such as Super Soccer we only partially fund. It is difficult to come up with an appropriate travel policy that will be beneficial and equitable for all the communities. We are working on this for the fall meeting.

## Autonomy of the Mackenzie Recreation Association from the Department

---

As the Association has developed, we are still in a situation where the Recreation Development Officers (RDOs) develop the agendas in consultation with the communities and deal with the day-to-day business. The problem has been that the community representatives do not have the time to deal with the regional business because they are busy enough with their own work. As well, the communities rely on the RDO to do tasks that could lead to a conflict with the department.

In dealing with this challenge, we are working on developing a job description that will be reviewed at the fall meeting; we hope to hire an Executive Director soon after. Then the RDO roles will be what they were meant to be, and that is an ex-officio member helping the Association to grow and supplying advice. In this next section of the paper, I will briefly provide you with a number of successes that have been achieved.

## Major Accomplishments

---

Some of the more successful programs have been the Mackenzie Youth Summer Games, Mackenzie Regional Swim Meet and the Deh Cho/Mackenzie Youth Conferences. As well, as we continue to try and train the Recreation Coordinators and Facility Maintainers, the regional Association has been willing to work as a partner in the system and address challenges head on. For further information on these, please contact me.

## Conclusion

---

As I started this paper, I spoke about the pleasure of attending the National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal People. During this meeting I had the opportunity to meet Noel Starblanket (Former Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations) and listen to his keynote speech. The most important messages stressed in his speech were:

- The importance of understanding and respecting each other's culture and differences.
- **\*\*ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE, DO SOMETHING!!!!\*\***—He stressed it is important to do things instead of arguing or being political.

I believe we do these two things very well. In the Mackenzie Region, we have a number of different Dene bands and non-aboriginal people living together. Working together, trying to understand one another's needs and helping one another, are all small steps in the right direction towards success. As well, we are *doing positive things* for the youth, staff and communities.

So my advice is: Start where you are, take your time and don't expect success right away. Always keep your eyes on the vision never on the obstacles; build community support and never be too proud to share resources. In closing, I would like to leave you with two things. One is a story told to me by an elder a long time ago and it is very relevant to today:

There was a community having a lot of problems and they could not agree on how to solve the problems. They heard about a wise elder in the next village who might be able to help. So they put their money together and brought the elder in. The wise elder called all the people to the center of town and asked them one question: "What seems to be your problems?" Everybody looked at one another and looked back at the elder and said "that is why we brought you here, to tell us what the

problems are". The wise elder replied back to the crowd, "how can I help you if you do not know what your problems are?" And he left. This confused the village and angered them.

After a while, they agreed the problems were still there and they still needed help. So they brought the elder back, but this time they were prepared. They would tell him they knew what the problems were. When the elder arrived and asked the same question, they told him they knew what the problems were. He looked at the crowd and asked if they had solutions to any of these problems. Everybody looked at one another and looked back at the elder and said "that is why we brought you here, to tell us what the solutions were". The wise elder replied back to the crowd, "How can I help you if you do not have any solutions to the problems?" And he left. This again confused the village and angered them.

After a while, they agreed the problems were still there and they still needed help. So they brought the elder back, but this time they were prepared. They agreed that half the village would say they knew what the problems were and the other half would say they have the answers. So when the elder arrived and asked the same two questions, the community answered just as they planned. The wise elder looked at the crowd and said, "That is good. Now I want the group who know the problems to talk to the people who know the answers and it will be resolved". Again, he walked away. The moral of the story is:

- Always talk to one another.
- Really listen to what the other person has to say.
- Always look for a win-win solution.
- Above all else, realize that you have the necessary answers within yourself and the group to succeed.

And the second thing is the motto for the Mackenzie Recreation Association: We are committed to excellence 24 — 7 — 365!

Thank you for your time.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Municipal Capital Assistance Policy and Municipal Operation Assistance Policy for Hamlets, Charter Communities, Towns and Villages; and Settlement Capital Assistance Policy and Settlement Operation Assistance Policy for Bands and settlements.
- 2 The Recreation Leaders Program (Aurora College), Recreation Facilities Operators Program, Regional Meetings, Aquatics and various skill program training.
- 3 Documents developed and implemented within the region include the Mackenzie Regional Games Handbook, Appreciation Policy, Community Hosting Agreement, RC Workshop, Community Hosting Agreement RFOP, Harassment Policy, Hosting Policy—Games, Mackenzie Region Hosting Agreement, Policy on Gender Equity, Application forms and final reports, TV Bingo Procedures and the cold weather policy.

## 'I Quit': Aboriginal Youth Negotiate the 'Contact Zone' in Physical Education

Louise Champagne  
University of Manitoba

Joannie Halas  
University of Manitoba

### Introduction: The Potential of Physical Education

---

The National Recreation Roundtable on Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples, held in Maskwachees, February 2000, produced an official declaration affirming the delegates' commitment to improving the health, wellness, cultural survival and quality of life of Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples through physical activity, physical education, sport and recreation.<sup>1</sup> The Maskwachees declaration states that sustainable commitment and investment in active living, physical activity, physical education, recreation and sport are essential to promote health and address social issues facing Aboriginal communities across Canada. Speaking in general terms, participation in sport and physical activity does have the potential to deliver many well-recognized physical, social, emotional and spiritual benefits.

Although many initiatives have emerged over the past few years that are specifically designed to meet the recreational and physical activity needs of Aboriginal youth, too many of these programs have been short-term and not sustainable for a variety of reasons, including shifting government priorities or inadequate financial resources (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Unsustainable, ad hoc or short-term programs, discrimination, lack of facilities, and lack of financial means are some of the barriers that limit the beneficial physical, social, and emotional outcomes linked to physical activity participation for Aboriginal youth (Reid, Tremblay, Pelletier & McKay, 1994; Searle, Winther & Reed, 1994). As stated in the Maskwachees declaration, physical education presents an opportunity to address Aboriginal youths' needs for sustainable, quality physical activity.

The potential of physical education is illustrated in two studies that analyzed the experience of physical education/activity for groups of marginalized youth populations (including adolescent mothers and students attending an adolescent treatment centre). Youth participants in these studies, many of whom were Aboriginal, described how physical education could be a 'hook' that helped motivate them to attend school and, for some students, remain on task in their academic classes (Halas, 2001; Halas & Hanson, 2001; Orchard, Stark & Halas, in press). Some of the identified physical activity benefits from participation in physical education included: burning off ener-



gy, feeling good, having fun, relieving boredom and, in some cases, helping with feelings of anger (Halas & Watkinson, 1999). Students spoke of how physical education can help reduce levels of stress during the school day and contribute positively to their overall experience of school.

Of course, benefits from participating in physical education do not happen automatically; many students, especially girls and lesser-skilled students, have negative experiences in their physical education class (see for example, Bowyer, 1996; Carlson, 1995; Humbert, 1995 or Smith & Goc Karp, 1996). Inappropriate teacher practices, poor teacher-student relationships, irrelevant curriculum and alienating social climates often lead students to feel excluded, unskilled, unable and disempowered (Cothran & Ennis, 1998; Ennis, 1999; Ennis, Cothran, Davidson, Loftus, Owens, Swanson & Hopsicker, 1997; Halas, 2002). Poor educational climates can discourage all students and this can be disproportionately so for those students who are already marginalized by race and class. Given the pervasive and enduring failure of the Canadian education system for Aboriginal youth, a question arises: Do Aboriginal youth encounter quality physical education programs in their schools? Recognizing that very little research has investigated the experience of physical education for Aboriginal youth, in this paper we present the preliminary results from a three-year investigation of the quality and cultural relevance of physical education for Aboriginal youth in Manitoba.

Using interview transcripts from a series of six focus group interviews with male and female Aboriginal high school and university students, who either liked or disliked physical education, we present evidence to suggest that many students are purposefully disengaging from their school's physical education program due to difficulties they regularly experience within the program. In the following section, we briefly present three aspects of the physical education program that need addressing: changing for class, forced participation in curricular activities and access to extracurricular activities. The discussion will illustrate how, contrary to the mission of promoting "active, healthy lifestyles" (Manitoba Department of Education & Training, 2000), many physical education programs are encouraging Aboriginal youth to opt out of physical activity at their schools.

## Developing Strategies of Resistance: How Aboriginal Students Negotiate the Difficulties They Experience in Physical Education

---

### *Changing for Class*

In many of our conversations with young people, a first barrier to successful student participation in (and possible enjoyment of) physical education was related to the change room. Many students, especially the girls, simply did not like having to change for class, and although they did not always articulate their reasons why, there are ways to interpret the tensions of social comparison inherent to this school space. In a high school girls' change room where Aboriginal students are often in a minority, females must negotiate the tensions around having a 'different' body that does not reflect

the dominant commercial image of the beautiful, thin, white therefore desired female. Her skin may be darker, therefore different, and exposing more of it presents a daunting challenge that visually exposes greater difference. She may not have the same designer clothes to change out of and in to, an expected class ritual that requires students to expose their “clothes”, including undergarments, under the watchful gaze of their peers.

The changing ritual also exposes more body, and as much of the literature on teen body image suggests, girls compare each others’ bodies. Lean and muscular is valued, particularly in physical education class; to be otherwise is again to be different to what is desired.

Participant: *I find myself when we started having to change for gym, I found myself to be very critical of my own body. It was because you would see all these other girls who are thin and don't have boobs yet. You become very critical of how your body is developed and that kind of thing.*

Sexuality becomes an issue because girls look at each other in the change room. One solution is to change in the “shower area” (behind the curtains) or washroom “stalls”, but to do so, as one University student explained, may only reinforce the idea that something is wrong or shameful:

Participant: *The popular group would gang up on the not so popular group, and they could be really mean to some people, and some girls wouldn't feel comfortable changing in the locker room, they would go to the bathroom, and then people would make fun of them for going to the bathroom. What are you trying to hide?*

The following sequence illustrates how not changing creates further problems, such as losing marks or not being allowed to participate:

Researcher: So is having gym clothes a big deal?

Participant: *Yes. It is a very big deal.*

Participant: *If you don't have clothes, then they will take marks off.*

Researcher: So what do you have to have, like gym shoes?

Participant: *Runners, shorts, tee-shirts (not sweaters).*

Participant: *This one person didn't have proper shoes and the teacher kicked him out for just having those on. If you don't have runners on you can't participate.*

Participant: *But they don't tell you to leave they will just tell you to sit on the bench, so you have to sit on the bench the whole gym class just because you don't have any shoes.*

As Caroline Fusco (2002) illustrates in her analysis of a university locker room, public change rooms are not neutral spaces: they help to produce identities. For the Aboriginal student, the change room can reinforce difference and feelings of shame about one’s body. Although space limits the depth of analysis that can be carried out in this paper, suffice it to say that a first barrier to Aboriginal high school students experiencing quality physical education, particularly for female

students,<sup>2</sup> is the administrative stipulation that one must be changed for class to succeed in physical education. Rather than exploring how changing for class encourages students to fail, it seems that in many programs, students self-select “out” of the class and stop attending. Without follow-up efforts to see where these students are or why they aren’t attending the class, the change room issues remain unresolved.

### *Forced Participation in Class Activities They Don’t Like*

In many of our interviews, a negative aspect of physical education was when students were required to do activities that they didn’t like. In response, many would simply leave the class. In the worst cases, teachers never sought input from students about course content; rather, they imposed a curriculum of activity options that did not resonate with students’ desires, interests and needs. Forced into activities not of their own choosing, the students quit.

Researcher: (Following up on a conversation about student-teacher relationships) What do they yell about?

Participant: *Like to get you going and drill you to do the warm-ups, stuff that you don’t want to do and you shouldn’t have to do if you don’t want to do it. I remember me and that guy K..., I couldn’t run because something was wrong with my leg and he was out of breath and our teacher just came and started yelling at us, so we just left because we were not doing what he wanted us to do. It was either their way or no way.*

Participant: *If gym were an option, then maybe I would take it, but because it is required I don’t like it.*

Although we interviewed students who liked physical education and those who didn’t, the pervasiveness of some students’ dislike for gym was extraordinary when read as a collective response:

Researcher: How come you have never liked gym? Why do you think that is the situation for you?

Participant: *I don’t know. In elementary I always liked it. In high school I never ever attended and now it is all coming back to me and haunting me (laughing).*

Participant: *I don’t take gym because I don’t need to and I already have all my gym. But I hate gym; I don’t like it at all.*

Researcher: How come?

Participant: *Because they make you do retarded things that you don’t want to do. You should have options to do what you want to do, but sometimes they don’t have that.*

Researcher: Can you give me an example of what you think are good options?

Participant: *If you don’t want to run then they have no right to make you run, they should give you something else that you want to do.*

Researcher: So about junior high school it started? Did you enjoy it in elementary school?

Participant: *In elementary school I liked it. It was because I didn't have to run and jog. Why is gym mandatory to graduate, and at other schools there is no gym? And they give you such a hard time. You have to be there every day. And I have a baby, so there are days where I have to take off, and if I do I have to bring a doctor's note which you pay like \$10-15. I just don't like gym. It should be an option.*

If one is to respect the opinions of these young people, one has to accept the idea that enforced participation in activities not of one's choosing will encourage inactivity and dropping out. Still, a few students explained, they were willing to "grin and bear it" to get their physical education credit. They want to succeed in school and many want to participate fully in school activities. The top-down, hierarchical nature of the school makes it difficult to do so; consequently, students devise their own strategies to negotiate the tensions between themselves and their teachers:

Participant: *Right now I don't do what the gym teacher tells me to do. I stick to my own world and whatever I do in gym I will do with my friend (an aboriginal) and we just do our activities together. We won't run together, instead we will jog. We are just trying to get it done with so we can graduate.*

### *Trying Out For School Teams*

A final example of how students can be discouraged through physical education involves (not) participating in extracurricular activities. At one school, a group of boys were so sure that they would not be given a fair chance to play on a school team that they eventually stopped trying out for any of the teams. Similar to the resignation many felt about the quality of their physical education class, others have come to accept that they won't be given a chance to be involved at school, so they stopped trying and found other ways to be active outside of school.

Researcher: Maybe if we could just start off by going around and just introduce yourself and maybe just start talking about what activities you do.

Participant: *My name is C..., I like playing hockey, and also basketball in the summer time. I am not really into the school sports. I think that they really don't look at Aboriginal people for the teams. There is this guy named B..., and he was telling us a very good story the other day but he couldn't make it today.*

Researcher: That's too bad, what was the story?

Participant: *He had played hockey for all these other high schools and all these other good teams and then when he came to this school to try out they cut him right away without even giving him a good look.*

Researcher: So you feel like they won't accept you?

Participant: *Yeah, they don't look at us as being athletic.*

Participant: *My name is P..., and I don't play sports in school because there is not enough sport activity in school, so I play as much as I can after school.*

Researcher: And where would that be?

Participant: *At home.*

Researcher: Do the rest of you feel that way too, that there is not enough going on in school?

\*Group Participants: Yes\*

Researcher: OK, we will talk more about that.

Participant: *My name is L..., and I like to play hockey, basketball and other sports. I tried to join the football team the first year I came here, but he cut me right away too.*

Researcher: Did you ever get a reason as to why you were cut?

Participant: *No, he just cut me and I never knew.*

Participant: *My name is K..., and I like playing basketball and hockey. I feel the same way that B... does.*

Participant: *My name is L..., I tried out for the (school) hockey team and they cut me like the third practice.*

Researcher: Why?

Participant: *I don't know why they cut me, but I think that maybe it might have been because I have a kid. They didn't give me a chance.*

Researcher: So that is what you are feeling, that you are not getting a fair chance.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: *My name is S..., and I play basketball and hockey.*

Researcher: When you say you are playing hockey, who are you playing for or where are you playing?

Participant: *With my buddies and things like that.*

Researcher: So they are not school sports? Why not?

Participant: *Because the opportunity is not there.*

What was most apparent in speaking with this and other groups of boys (and girls) was that they wanted the chance to actively engage in school sports and activities. Yet, the school did not adequately provide access to after-school opportunities, nor did the teacher/coaches appear to communicate well with the student/athletes. With most schools offering a traditional focus on elite after-school sports, as opposed to mass participation activities, Aboriginal students did not feel the gym was a space for them. Consequently, students missed out on the physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits associated with physical activity.

### *Moving Beyond Resistance: Developing Culturally Relevant Physical Education*

For a sizeable number of the Aboriginal participants in our focus groups, the simplest way they found to negotiate the “unequal relations” of power in the contact zone between students and

their physical education teachers was to quit before they start. Avoid the change room, disengage in class activities and stop trying out for extracurricular teams. Although one can respect the willful resistance exercised by the students in the examples presented above, as Mr. Charles Wood pointed out in response to the presentation of this paper at the 2002 NAIG Research Symposium, Aboriginal youth must be encouraged to “not” give up on themselves as athletes, students or recreational participants. And those of us who believe that physical education can provide quality physical activity experiences for Aboriginal youth must not “give up” on the teachers who are responsible for running these programs.

Not giving up on teachers involves recognizing how well meaning many teachers are and acknowledging that support is required. When we live in a society that values people differently and divides them along lines of race, few are spared from internalizing racist assumptions about “others” and about themselves as inferior or superior. People often interact in unthinking patterned ways that can reinforce stereotypes and undermine self-esteem. These patterned responses are easily unrecognized and are acted out in relationships where teachers have low or no expectations of students of colour and are unable to “not give up” on them. As a result, these issues do not get addressed because of the fear we hold of being called racist, which is a great loss for both teachers and students. If anything, teachers need safe relationships to address these issues and in the next section, we close the paper with a call for more culturally relevant physical education programs (Ladson-Billings, 1994) as a means to engage students in physical activities that are meaningful and relevant for Aboriginal youth.

As a starting point, culturally relevant teachers make efforts to disrupt the hierarchical nature of the school. In all of their “contacts” with young people, they develop caring relationships and get to know their students in ways that enable them to create more responsive programs. They don’t force students to participate. They don’t punish student resistance to the class activity. Rather, they seek solutions *with* students. They talk with them and recognize that when students “quit”, “stop trying” and willfully disengage in the class activity, the physical education program needs to be evaluated. Culturally relevant teachers have the courage and determination to question their own values and assumptions about how they are delivering the class activity. They communicate high expectations for students, and never allow young people to see themselves as “lazy” or quitters.

As long as physical education teachers are willing to unquestioningly accept physical *in*activity from their Aboriginal students, the product of their pedagogy will be marginalized young people who only daydream of being active. Until the words “I quit” disappear from the lexicon of young people struggling to succeed in school gymnasiums, physical educators cannot lay claim to the stated ideals of their programs. Aboriginal youth, so engaged in events such as the North American Indigenous Games, deserve much more from a profession that has as its mandate ‘healthy, active lifestyles for all’.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 This study is supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada research grant.
- 2 Although less evident for boys, we have yet to ascertain whether this was due to changing being less of an issue, or, that boys felt less comfortable speaking about the issue. In one of our focus group interviews with adults about their past experiences in physical education, an Aboriginal male from Northern Manitoba explained how, in his community culture, there was no such thing as a 'change room'. To walk into a room with a bunch of naked men, as he said, was real culture shock.

## References

---

- Bowyer, G. (1996). Student perceptions of physical education. *JOPERD*, 67, (1), 23-26.
- Carlson, T. (1995). We hate gym: student alienation from physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 14, 467-477.
- Cothran, D. & Ennis, K. (1998). Curricula of mutual worth: comparisons of students' and teachers' curricular goals. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 17, 307-326.
- Ennis, C. (1999). Creating a culturally relevant curriculum for disengaged girls. *Sport, Education and Society*, 4, (1), 31-49.
- Ennis, C., Cothran, D., Davidson, K., Loftus, S., Owens, L., Swanson, L., & Hopsicker, P. (1997). Implementing curriculum within a context of fear and disengagement. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 17, 52-71.
- Fusco, C. (2002). 'Bent on changing?' Imagining postmodern possibilities for physical education and recreation space(s). Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute Seminar Series, November 16th, 2001, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Halas, J. (2002). Engaging troubled youth in physical education: an alternative program with lessons for the traditional class. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 267-286.
- Halas, J. (2001). Shooting hoops at the treatment centre: sport stories. *Quest*, 53, 77-96.
- Halas, J. & Hanson, L. (2001). Pathologizing Billy: enabling and constraining the body of the condemned. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18 (1), 115-126.
- Halas, J. & Watkinson, J. (1999). Everyone gets a chance: a group of 'at-risk' students describe what it is like at their active living school. *Runner*, 37, (1), 14-22.
- Humbert, L. (1995). On the sidelines: The experiences of young women in physical education class. *Avante*, 1, (2), 58-77.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Manitoba Department of Education & Training. (2000). *Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes for Active, Healthy Lifestyles. Kindergarten to Senior 4 Physical Education/Health Education*. Winnipeg.

Orchard, T., Stark, J. & Halas, J. (In press). Minimizing the maxim model? Interpreting the sexual body rhetoric of teenage moms through physical education. In Linda K. Fuller, (Ed.). *Sexual Sport Rhetoric, Vol. 1: Teaming Up Gender with the Language of Sport*. New York: Hawthorn Press.

Reid, I., Tremblay, M., Pelletier, R., & McKay, S. (1994). *An Analysis of the Impact and Benefits of Physical Activity and Recreation on Canadian Youth at Risk*. Joint Initiative of the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, the Fitness Directorate of Health Canada, and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association.

Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). Ottawa: Canada Communications Group-Publishing.

Searle, M., Winther, N. & Reed, M. (1994). *An assessment of the daily life experiences of Native youth: implications for the Northern Fly-In Sports Camps Inc.* Winnipeg: Health, Leisure and Human Performance Research Institute.

Smith, B. & Goc Karp, G. (1996). Adapting to marginalization in a middle school physical education class. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 16, 30-47.



## North American Indigenous Games: Increasing American Indian Participation (Post-Conference Submission)

Darius Lee Smith  
Regis University

### Statement of the Problem

---

Since 1990, First Nations<sup>1</sup> and American Indians have gathered to celebrate culture and sporting traditions. The North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) has taken place in 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, and most recently in 2002. The mission of the NAIG is:

*To improve the quality of life for Indigenous Peoples by supporting self-determined sports and cultural activities which encourage equal access to participation in the social, cultural, spiritual fabric of the community in which they reside and which respects Indigenous distinctiveness.*<sup>2</sup>

The motto of NAIG is “The Spirit Strong, Brave and True—empowering Indigenous People to realize their collective potential of their bodies, minds, spirits by creating hopes and dreams.”<sup>3</sup> According to the 2000 United States census, there are over 4.1 million American Indians ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).<sup>4</sup> The total number of participants at the last 2002 Games in Winnipeg, Canada was 7,369 athletes and coaches. However, only 1,747 were from the United States. In other words, 80% of the participants are Canadians, while only 20% were from the U.S.

There are several reasons why U.S. participation is underrepresented. First, there is a lack of inter-tribal coordination affecting the selection of athletes and venues. Athletes are selected randomly based on their participation in local athletic programs, community connections, or being in the right place at the right time. As a result, there are no official criteria for selecting athletes. In one case, a young man who had not physically prepared for the Games was chosen to participate with one day’s notice. While tribal officials knew in advance about the Games, there was no concerted effort to prepare their athletes, physically or mentally, for rigorous competition.

Regarding venue selection, the United States tribal communities are significantly lagging behind our Canadian First Nations brothers and sisters when it comes to organizing a multi-sport international event. Initially, the Games were to alternate between the U.S. and Canada. However, the only year the Games were held in the U.S. was in 1995. In 1999, the Games were scheduled to take place in Fargo, North Dakota. This anticipated event never occurred, due in large part to

a lack of inter-tribal coordination and fundraising. Many tribal planners are unprepared for the magnitude of the event. Planning and coordination must occur years in advance to mobilize communities to cultivate and sponsor athletes, locate venues, and generate funding.

Second, NAIG policy, which was developed mainly from the viewpoint of First Nations organizers, at times conflicts with U.S. tribal sovereignty. The NAIG mission states, in part, that it “respects Indigenous distinctiveness.” However, in 1997 a controversy erupted between NAIG organizers and the Navajo Nation when the tribe exercised its tribal sovereignty in seeking to determine the composition of its team. The Navajo Nation encompasses three states: Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Tribal organizers intended to send one team to represent the tribe. However, NAIG requires participation at the state, not the tribal level. Since no compromise was reached, no teams from Arizona, New Mexico or Utah were represented at the Games. Offended, the Navajo Nation tribal council did not send a team and withheld their financial support.

Third, there are difficulties with communication and access to information. For example, it was not until 1995 that a team from Colorado was organized and sent its first delegation to participate in the Games. Prior to this, the Games were virtually unheard of among the Denver Indian community. A chance encounter enabled a woman who had participated in the 1993 Games to share information about an ‘Indian Olympics’ with local Indian community athletes. Even today, information dissemination about the Games has been mainly by word of mouth.

Fourth, there are limited resources and financial challenges facing many North American Tribes. For example, in 2002, while traveling to the Games in Winnipeg, I was sitting next to a tribal member from a ‘wealthy tribe’ who was to participate in a track and field event.<sup>5</sup> Although he only received one day’s notice, due to this tribe’s financial resources he was directed to simply pack his bags and pick up his ticket at the airport.

Conversely, there are several poorer tribes who would not have the opportunity to participate even if they had the information. They cannot afford entry fees, uniforms, plane tickets, lodging and meals during the week long competition. The Games are not equally accessible to all United States tribes. This illustrates the polar extremes existing within Indian Country – the very rich and the very poor – and the need for unification of information and financial resources.

## Literature Review

---

The majority of information regarding NAIG comes from Internet sources since there is a lack of published information or comprehensive reviews on this subject. Fortunately, there has been a recent attempt to address the issues raised in this paper. In 2002, the University of Manitoba held an academic symposium entitled, ‘Looking Back ... Moving Forward ... Accessing the Future’. One of the individuals who presented at the symposium, Joe Bailey (Dene, First Nation)<sup>6</sup>, discussed in his essay, *Sport and Recreation in the Native Community*, the cultural significance of sport to indig-

enous people. Mr. Bailey explains, “We are the same people we were a thousand years ago, but back then it was necessary to be athletic in order to survive. Even when we celebrated we danced. Dancing for us is cultural and spiritual. For us sport and recreation is physical, emotional, mental and spiritual (p. 4)”.

Living Traditions, a website, provides a comprehensive history of NAIG ([www.virtualmuseum.ca](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca)). NAIG founders first envisioned the Games in 1970. In 1971, the *Native Summer Games* were held in Enoch, Alberta, which drew 3000 participants competing in thirteen sports. The Aboriginal Sports Circle is a Canadian organization “which brings together the interests of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples”. ([www.oasc.net/naig.htm](http://www.oasc.net/naig.htm)). This website provides tribal communities with information on preparing for future Games.

## The Methods

---

The methods used included research from interviews, websites, handouts, statistical reports, and newspaper articles. I also heavily relied on my own experiences as a NAIG organizer, coach, and athlete.

I interviewed Billy Mills (Lakota), Mo Smith (Navajo), and Michelle Jacobs (Tulalilp). Billy Mills is the 1964 Olympic Champion in the 10,000 meters. His victory was one of the greatest upsets in Olympic History. In our interview, Billy talked about the importance of inspiring young people to participate in sports as a means to building self-esteem and self-definition. He viewed sports as a means to develop future leaders. Billy Mills has also attended most of the NAIG Games as an honorary guest.

Maurice ‘Mo’ Smith (Navajo) is the Executive Director of the Native American Sports Council, a former NAIG participant and Chef de Mission<sup>7</sup>, and a 2002 NAIG keynote speaker. In 1995 and 1997, Mo competed for Team Colorado, and was a Chef de Mission in 2002 for Team New Mexico. As a former world-class runner, Mo believes in leading by example and sharing opportunities with aspiring athletes.

Michelle Jacobs (Tulalilp) is a graduate student at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and 2002 Games participant representing Team Washington. She served as an example for younger, American Indian girls. Michelle felt that the Games could be used as a forum for health issues in Indian Country.

## Findings and Analysis

---

The problems facing the NAIG must be viewed in a larger societal context. In the United States, the historical atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples by the U.S. government are well known, although not rectified. Many unresolved issues still require a great deal of tribal energy and

focus, including land controversies, health issues, and poverty. These societal problems have both a direct and indirect impact on the Games.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

---

The NAIG offers a unique opportunity for American Indians to come together to strengthen Native cultures through multi-national participation in activities promoting their pride and heritage. “Since its inception, the NAIG has grown to become the largest multi-sports and cultural youth games hosted in Canada and the U.S” (NAIG-Research Symposium, Program Guide, July 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002). Preserving and improving this invaluable cultural institution deserves ongoing and critical evaluation from both First Nations and American Indian officials.

**Increasing Inter-Tribal Coordination.** Official criteria for selecting athletes needs to be developed, while respecting tribal distinctiveness. Proposed criteria may include: medical clearance, a training schedule, and a fundraising plan that includes contributions from local organizations and personal fundraising efforts.

**Respecting Indigenous Distinctiveness.** Issues of U.S. tribal sovereignty need to be explored in an international forum to ensure participation from all tribes that want to send representatives. A redefining process is necessary to expand definitions of team composition.

**Increasing communication and access to information.** Through the development of a centralized information system, tribes could create avenues for sharing information so that large and small tribes, urban and reservation Indians receive consistent and timely information. By utilizing important resources such as the Indian Country Today newspaper, [www.IndianZ.com](http://www.IndianZ.com) (an Internet news web service), and Native American Call-In, a daily radio show for Native issues, more tribal communities could be reached. Native health forums are another way to promote information on athletic training and preparation for the Games.

Information access must be accompanied by training by NAIG officials for local organizers who wish to either send athletes or host future events. Local organizers can develop a regional representation system to share information and resources, increasing overall participation. Combined resources can lead to the hiring of regional NAIG organizers to mobilize tribal communities to participate in future Games.

**Increasing Financial Resources.** A plan must be developed to systematically equalize finances to the benefit of all tribes. In a few Canadian provinces, the government provides money to compensate for each Canadian First Nations participant to attend the Games. However, there is no such government financial support for American Indian participants. Through the development of a centralized funding system, administrative and financial resources can be combined, freeing up resources for other purposes such as international promotion.

## Endnotes

---

- 1 Canadian Indigenous Peoples refer to themselves as First Nations.
- 2 [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history\\_games\\_02.htm](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/English/history_games_02.htm)
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 2.4 million census respondents identified as 'only' American Indian, while 1.7 million identified as 'Indian with another race.'
- 5 This is the same young man referred to earlier.
- 6 Dene is a First Nations tribe in the Northwest Territories of Canada. They are related to the Diné (Navajo) of the South West United States.
- 7 Chef de Mission is a state or provincial lead coordinator for NAIG.

## References

---

<http://www.census.gov>. United States 2000 Census.

NAIG-Research Symposium, Program Guide, July 25th – 26th, 2002.

Joe Bailey (Dene), "Sport & Recreation in the Native Community". Paper presented at the July 2002 NAIG Symposium, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

<http://www.2002naig.com>. North American Indigenous Games .

<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca>. On the website, Living Traditions.

[www.oasc.net/naig.htm](http://www.oasc.net/naig.htm). Ontario Aboriginal Sport Circle.

Billy Mills. Personal interview.

Mo Smith. Personal interview.

Michelle Jacobs. Personal interview.

## Sport Leadership Panel

Moderator: Angela Busch  
Fort Garry School Division

### Panel Participants

---

1. Rick Brant, Executive Director, Aboriginal Sport Circle
2. Janice Forsyth, University of Western Ontario
3. Waneek Horn-Miller, Olympic Athlete in Water Polo
4. Jason Loutitt, 2002 Tom Longboat Award Winner, University of Manitoba
5. Christian Sinclair, General Manager, 2002 NAIG Host Society
6. Mo Smith, Associate Director, Native American Sports Council
7. Charles Wood, Founding member, North American Indigenous Games Movement

### Introductions: Angela Busch

---

My name is Angela Busch, I will be your moderator for this evening.<sup>1</sup> I would like to begin by welcoming our panel members and the audience. I thank everyone for coming this evening and before we begin I would like to ask Annetta Armstrong to come up and open the evening up by singing a song for us ...

Thank you Annetta. That was very powerful. I know myself and everyone else are quite honoured, that you dedicated that song not only to your grandmother but to our grandmothers as well, that was very kind of you. I should let you know that the theme of this particular discussion or leadership panel is going to be the past, present and future of the NAIG. As you know Annetta Armstrong from Grand Rapids First Nation just provided us with a song, which was quite beautiful. What I would like to do now is introduce the panel members one by one. It will be just a very brief introduction and then what I will have the panel members do is just address an initial opening question and maybe at that time they can introduce themselves a bit further. And I'd like to ask at this time that the comments be kept at 3 to 4 minutes in the interest of time just so that everyone gets to speak in the interest of respect, I suppose.

I will start at the end. Here we have Mr. Charles Wood, a founding member of the NAIG movement. Next we have Jason Loutitt, the 2002 Tom Longboat award winner from the University

of Manitoba and next to Jason we have Mo Smith the Associate Director of the Native American Sport Council. Next to Mo we have Waneek Horn-Miller who is an Olympic athlete in water polo. Next to Waneek, we have Rick Brant who is the Executive Director of the Aboriginal Sport Circle. Janice Forsyth from the University of Western Ontario and last but not least we have Mr. Christian Sinclair, the General Manager of the 2002 NAIG Host Society and as Annette told you he is from The Pas, Opaskwayak Cree Nation.

**The opening question we will be discussing: if the panel can simply describe their personal involvement with NAIG and maybe tell the audience and their fellow panel members: 'What it has meant to them as an individual, as an athlete, as an organizer, etc.?' So we can get a feel of the orientation that you bring to the discussion.**

**Mr. Wood:** First of all I would like to thank the Creator for allowing me to be here with you this evening. I would like to thank the original inhabitants of the territory for allowing us to come into their territory and I would like to thank each and every one of you for taking part in the discussions this evening. Perhaps I could start off by making a more or less philosophical comment if I may. I firmly believe that we are recipients of the great many gifts from the Creator and it's really up to each and every one of us to make the best use of those gifts. Not to dominate or control but to be the best that we can be and being the best we can be means that we help others to be the best that they can be. And therein I guess that is the reason why I became involved in the NAIG. Because I saw our young people struggling with lifestyles that they inherited over a period of time not necessarily belonging to our culture. And I saw an opportunity for me to become involved along with a great many others to try and help the youth. The venue that we selected back then was the venue of sport, to try and entice and motivate young people to become actively involved in sports and in so doing to seek out and pursue different lifestyles, more positive lifestyles, and that is why I am still involved.

**Angela:** Jason, would you like to introduce yourself a bit further and offer your comments?

**Jason:** Yes, I was very fortunate to win the Tom Longboat award for Manitoba last year as Manitoba's Aboriginal Athlete of the Year. My involvement with the Games right now, I am the Sports Manager for Athletics for Team Manitoba and also the coach and a distant runner competing in 3 events myself. So I am seeing the Games from multiple perspectives. This is my first Games and looking at the dates of the other ones, it is kind of funny because I was in Edmonton in 1990; I was living in Victoria in 1997. My identity with my culture is something that I grew up with and then lost track of. And it just so coincided that finding my culture again has enabled me to also find a proper way of life. I think sport as a means is going to be something that is going to be very important for generations to come. I would just like to thank all the panellists and everybody for being here. I think we need to do more of these sorts of things to get the word out and we need to share our thoughts. We need to help the kids just like Charles said, because I was one of those

kids living in Edmonton who maybe was afraid to go out to the Games that Charles was trying to reach. Maybe if I can help reach those kids the same way that would be great.

**Mo Smith:** Yes, my role is Chef de Mission for Team New Mexico and to be quite honest with you I am ecstatic, I am very excited to play this role. What does it mean for me? It gives me an opportunity to work with 9 to 14 different coaches in different disciplines to organize, to prepare for a cross culture multi-sport event that means a lot to these kids. And it just warms my heart to be part of this event for a number of reasons. I've witnessed these kids preparing bake sales, bingos, we are bringing 9 different sports, we have an archery group, that had an archery tournament for a fundraiser and the excitement from the Navajo community in New Mexico the Pueblos, Haymiss, San Faleepa, Pueblos, some of the Apache tribes they are really, really excited to be part of this and this is my 3<sup>rd</sup> NAIG. My first capacity was as a Chef de Mission as I competed in one of the Games. I'm just really excited, honoured to have this role and look forward to future participation with NAIG at whatever capacity or whatever level. I think I am a golfer in disguise, but my real role up here is just to have fun and relax and be part of this.

**Angela:** Thank you, Mo.

**Waneek Horn-Miller:** Hi, this is my 5<sup>th</sup> Games I have been to. I have participated in swimming at every Games and somebody made the mistake in thinking that I was going to be shooting, rifle shooting; they don't give me guns anymore. I have been invited to a lot of Canadian Olympic Association events and different things. I don't always go to them because my schedule is very tight and I am still a competing athlete on the Canadian National water polo team. I just returned from Italy and California where we competed. But, the reason why the Indigenous Games are so important to me in my capacity now? It is kind of weird being a role model. I used to be the one that was sitting in the audience and kind of staring at someone like me. I think that the reason for the Games is not to just stop at this level and what's made me sad is competing in my 5<sup>th</sup> Games, is that I rarely see people come back, I am the only one that comes back to compete. I believe that sport in our community is such a path especially for female athletes, for self, I guess a good self-image. We have huge incidences of teen pregnancy, all kinds of things that are going on among the women in our communities. I was talking to a friend of mine saying 'I am such an old lady.' My friend has had her 4<sup>th</sup> son and she is still going for that girl. And I am going 'damn' and I come back and I am off traveling. I was in Japan last year for world championships and I was here 2 years ago for the Pan-Am Games. When I was here and I qualified at the Pan Am pool for the Olympics and we beat the Americans. To qualify for the Olympics I think that coming back to Winnipeg, I love Winnipeg, I have been here a lot, is so important. I am not sure what people see my role as and what young people see my role as but I know that my competing in these Games is really important just to say I believe a lot in them and I hope that there is more than me being produced in the next Olympics. I'll be there; damn sure I will be there. I hope there will be more with me.



**Rick Brant:** Like Charles and Waneek I have been involved with the Games since their inception in 1990. In 1990, I was living in Saskatchewan at the time and fresh out of university with a degree in Native Studies. I was invited to serve as the head coach for team Saskatchewan's Track and Field Team. I attended those Games and in 1993, still living in Saskatchewan, I was invited to play the role of General Manager for those Games. In 1995 I had moved back to Ontario and my home, where I was invited to participate with team Ontario as a Chef de Mission. In 1997 I was called upon again to serve in the capacity as General Manager and moved out to Victoria, British Columbia and worked out there for a year and half with the Games. And you know in 2002 I am finally able to sit back and relax and witness these Games from an entirely new perspective as a spectator and as an interested individual from our communities here to cheer on the participants.

What the Games have meant to me and its personal impact on me...I was certainly at a cross-roads in 1990 having just graduated, I had gone into the field of sport administration but certainly wasn't comfortable there and didn't feel that I had found my path. The experience in 1990 really changed my life in a way that I made a personal commitment, that I was going to use my experiences in sport and the National team involvement and my knowledge of the mainstream sport system and my knowledge of our community issues and blend those to support Aboriginal sport development in Canada. So it was a life changing experience for me and set my path and has lead me to the positions I am in now.

**Janice Forsyth:** I am proud to say that this is my second Games. The first one was in 1995. I missed the Games in 1997, and now am at 2002. I am an athlete in track and field. 1995 was a momentous year for me for a couple of different reasons. First, at that time I was hoping to be a national level runner and I had sustained some pretty serious injuries that limited me from achieving those goals. It was really interesting because in 1995 when I participated in the Indigenous Games it let me reconsider, you know, my role being an Aboriginal person living in mainstream society because all my life I'd grown up in the mainstream in a small northern town and I faced all those sorts of discriminations that you hear about. And in 1995 I was at a point in my life where I was trying to hide my identity because in some cases it didn't actually help me out, so when I went to the Indigenous Games, as Rick mentioned for him it was a life changing experience, and so it was for me too. I decided that anything that could have this kind of positive impact on so many people, it had to have a positive impact on me as well, and it did. Actually from that moment on I have focused all my energies into Aboriginal sport in Canada, specifically doing research on NAIG. So I am proud to be here today and have a stronger sense of identity and to know all the people that I do know now and to see all the good work that is going on.

**Christian Sinclair:** Christian Sinclair, Cree Nation. First of all in my language of the Swampy Cree I would like to welcome each and every one of you, as the General Manager on behalf of the host society, to our traditional territory and hope that you all enjoy your stay here. I am sure you will, based on the plans that we have developed and implemented. Of course, acknowledging our el-

ders, who I consider one of our honorary elders and always an honour to be in his presence, Mr. Charles Wood of course. And of course the panel that has been invited here today. I come from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation; most of you might know it based on the fame of OCN Blizzard. Myself, I grew up in that area, Opaskwayak Cree Nation area, Swampy Creek Tribal council.

I grew up involved in sports only because the facilities that I had access to were the river systems, lakes and the dirt roads which were my running tracks. So there was just a natural progression into the sports that fitted into my lifestyle based on the influence that my parents had. From there going into the school systems, mainstream school systems, team sports, soccer, where I really got introduced into the mainstream sport system through provincials with the soccer teams, volleyball, etc. From there I graduated from high school and had the options I was pursuing or trying to pursue, a career into the Olympics. That was my goal based on another role model Alwyn Morris. On that I didn't know how to get to that step. So I went through the career awareness at school at the end of the year where they have the universities etc. and I was looking on how to get into university so I could pursue my long distance canoe racing and of course that's where they had the military poster and next thing you know I'm working in Europe and Africa.

I ended up in the military for 7 years but while I was back in Canada I got the exposure to the NAIG in 1993. I heard there was this big gathering in Prince Albert and what I heard was there were a lot of people going there. I went home for a visit for a week and found out half of my friends were in Prince Albert, which is about 3 hours away from OCN. So I jumped in my car with a group of my friends and saw a large gathering of Aboriginal people from all over. And that's when Rick Brant had seen many of them here, that was my first impact and it had an impact that has influenced me ever since in regards to sports.

From there in 1995 the Games happened but I was unable to attend due to work with the Department of National Defence. However, in 1995 I got out of the military and moved back to OCN and that is where I had the option of what career I wanted to pursue. I was offered an opportunity in the recreation department, jumped right into that, brought some programs that I was involved in the military such as rifle shooting so that's where our athletes beat Waneeek at that time. So I brought in a bunch of new programs that were originally just soccer and baseball but then archery, rifle shooting etc. These new programs that you would not normally see in the community at that time were introduced and that is how in 1997, when the Games were in Victoria, I ended up being the team manager and taking 150 athletes there and over 12 sports of the 16 that were offered. So it really enhanced our program and our diversity of the sports available.

In 1999 from a situation that could have been negative, I guess in Manitoba that the NAIG when the planning process fell through in North Dakota, we were running a tribal summer games in the Swampy Cree area and from there we were getting calls from all over Manitoba, people asking 'can we participate in your games?' So we looked at as...well let's open it up to Manitoba.

We expected 4 or 5 hundred and we got over 700 just from Manitoba to come and compete at those games, which is now an annual event. Which has strengthened our position or their bid for the 2002 NAIG and because it was the first major event of its kind in the Aboriginal community of OCN. They approached me where I served as the General Manager there to take on this project. I didn't know what I was getting into until I talked to everybody here on this panel, what the NAIG is all about and thanks to Rick's fine description and he forgot the fine print, here I am. So thank you very much.

**Angela:** I would just like to thank all the panel members. Actually, it is very useful under discussions such as this to let the audience get to know you a little bit and understand the perspective from which you are speaking. Now I have a few questions here and we won't get through all of them so I might jump around a little bit but what I think and I would like to do is start off with a question and not everyone has to answer the question, maybe just give me some sort of signal. Don't put up your hand unless you need to use the bathroom, just give me some sort of signal and start speaking. Please don't cut each other off; I don't want to keep anyone after the discussion. So, that is what we will do because you might find one question you want to comment on and another one maybe not.

**First question I'd like pose to the panel is: 'What is the process used by the NAIG Council for sport selection first of all and how do we get traditional sports like Arctic sports and Dene games treated as full sport competitions same as mainstream sports played at the Games versus being treated as cultural demonstrations?'**

**Mr. Wood:** The first part of the question on the selection process for participation. I'm from Alberta. Saddle Lake First Nation in north-eastern Alberta. I guess there are different methodologies that are used. In 1990, Alberta was more concerned about participation; in other words, trying to involve as many youth as possible in all the different sports. I know that other teams over time went with the elite type of athlete process but in Alberta we are still concentrating on participation. And from the participation process to select for team sports we can adopt or select players from other losing teams to be added to the winning team. That is one of the processes we use in Alberta.

**Angela: Would anyone like to comment on the issue of whether or not traditional sports, traditional Aboriginal games should be treated as full sport competitions within games such as NAIG?**

**Waneek:** I think that it really boils down to what's the end goal of these Games. As long as I have been involved with them it was my understanding that it was to move our athletic standards higher to the National level and to get more people in the Olympic program. However, in this country I don't think there is enough understanding and participation in our traditional games. I know myself as an Aboriginal athlete; my culture and my identity is a huge part of who I am and my power and strength as a national athlete to be able to participate on that level I am very much alone, very much by myself. So one of the things that I know that I do is talk a lot about my culture. Ask

my teammates they get sick of me. I brought along some beadwork on my last trip to Italy and a whole bunch of them sat down and I was teaching them traditional beadwork. I think that the games should not only be in our communities but also in the mainstream of Canada, which I think is really important.

**Angela:** Okay, thank you. This kind of leads into another question and comments that Waneek has made. 'How do you respond to non-Aboriginal people who wonder why Aboriginal peoples need their own games and how long will it take to have these questions no longer asked?' I am very interested in what your responses would be to this.

**Waneek:** Huge question for me, I get asked so many questions, I mean I must be the only Aboriginal contact that a lot of people have and not just in Canada and United States but also all over the world. You know people meet me and they go 'wow.' Why do we need them? First and foremost there is not enough access in an organization from the non-Native community; they are not going to come into our communities and say okay we like you, you and you. We have to promote and support our own athletes and I think there are enough interested and talented people that these Games are wanted. I think non-Native people will be shocked to see what kind of level of athletes we have but I think it is important. I also think there has to be an end result, there has to be somewhere where we are going and I think that is part of Games sort of agenda to raise. I always tell people I would love one day to have an Aboriginal Olympic team. I'd be the captain of the water polo team and I always say it is a perfect sport for Mohawk women, where I won't say the word but a whole lot of bunch of mean chicks and I think we would be perfect for that sport. So where are we going and that is what we have to figure out and where do we want to go with this? Being an athlete, everyday, for myself my goal was the Olympics. And that was my destination and so as an individual that was my destination. Collectively, what is our destination as a people? And that is a very political question as well.

**Angela:** Yes, it is.

**Janice:** Sure, I have had this question posed to me like Waneek many times before. And for a long time I've really struggled with it. I've tried to explain to people that it is a really important part of my own cultural identity and it's part of our cultural renewal, and a lot of people don't really seem to get that sort of thing. But I keep coming back to that because it is part of our histories. For many, many years we were restricted from participating in our own kind of cultural practices. There were laws that prohibited Aboriginal peoples from doing their own physical and Indigenous cultural activities and just the existence of the NAIG is a very clear example of the social, political and economic capital but also the kind of power that Aboriginal peoples now possess in mainstream Canadian and American societies. I think it is very difficult when we're talking about issues of power for non-Aboriginal people to understand how it is that Aboriginal people can have something that celebrates their own cultural identities and not just celebrating mainstream sport stuff. I mean I

understand it is very difficult for them, for many non-Aboriginal peoples to understand these sorts of things, but it is, it is a significant part of our cultural identity and I don't know how to explain it better than that ...I'm still struggling with that issue.

**Chris:** This is in regards to that question. I have been posed with that question every second day by various medias. I don't know if you guys tune into CBC. I was posed with that and my response to that and my response has always been, that I refer back to what the elders and Charles Wood had envisioned back with the late John Fletcher, Willy Littlechild and the other elders from the United States that were involved. They needed to create a forum where they could create a positive environment for the Aboriginal youth that were participating because the mainstream sport doesn't offer that right now. Just to get involved in the mainstream system is a challenge, especially when you look at the geography of the Aboriginal communities right now. A lot of them are in remote communities or if they are in a major city such as Winnipeg they are in a core and they are not able to access those mainstream systems. If they can it's very limited, the numbers that do access it.

On the other hand, the program the NAIG creates is an excellent opportunity for education. Education not only for the non-Aboriginal community but vice versa. We're learning the systems, of what the system has provided and at the same time they're being educated on the Aboriginal community.

I want to take a quote from Billy Mills in his presentations that he has talked about or what he has stated in his presentations 'unity through diversity is not only the theme of the Indigenous Games, it's the future of humankind.' And when you look at the opening ceremonies in past Games and how much you're going to see in these Games, you're going to see nations from all over Turtle Island marched in by teams and I'll use Manitoba as an example. We have six nations here just in Manitoba that people don't know about, including our own Aboriginal people, so it is an education opportunity for everybody but it is something that is needed in order to get that message out to the general public and even amongst Aboriginal people.

**Waneek:** He talked about how Aboriginal youth won't get access to mainstream. I know that, my community is right next to Montreal. My national training centre is there; we probably have the best coaches, facilities anywhere for Aboriginal people. We are very lucky, still they (the people from the community) won't often go in to compete or access (the facilities) because they're scared. It's a culture shock to go in and compete. And I always say that I remember when I first got onto the national team. Here I was, this Mohawk woman raised in a very as much egalitarian sort way of being raised, and then I got onto the National team where everything was a pyramid. You have your coach, your vets and then you have your rookies and rookies are treated like crap and it wasn't anything I was going to accept. So a lot of our young people will just say I am not going to stand for this, I am going home. And these Games I always tell people, I was so excited to come back. I was telling all my teammates 'I'm going home to participate in the Indigenous Games.' And

they would respond with ‘Well, you’re going to be swimming—you’re not a swimmer, you’re a water polo player.’ I know I am not a swimmer anymore but it’s the only time in my career that I could compete with and against Aboriginal people and it’s very, very special because I exist wholly in a non-Native world in a lot of social settings, in which I wasn’t raised to be comfortable, with which I have had to learn.

I think sport is going to teach us and if we have the support like the Indigenous Games to tell these kids okay this is what you’re going to face. I know the Aboriginal Sport Circle is doing stuff like the coaching manual to teach coaches but still you’re going to face that culture shock. Even for myself, I am lucky enough to be born with a big mouth and I tell people what I think and my coaches what I thought and that’s something that not a lot of young people from the fly-in communities are comfortable with. So anyway, that is why I think the Games are so important.

**Angela:** Some of the things you have said, some of things Chris has said kind of made me think of this other question. The question is, is it possible for kids from small northern communities with 50 or so people to achieve national or international levels of success in sport? If so, how?

**Jason:** I think just like Christian said, with having the Games as a means of access and like Waneek said, with using it as a celebration of culture that’s going to give them an initiative to start. What we need to do is work off the success of the Games and develop the Aboriginal sport systems within the communities. We have to have access. We are not going to convince all the kids on the reserve to go into Montreal. We are going to have to have some of those facilities available for them. Some of those coaches, which we are working on right now, but we need to get that access more localized and also work on it by introducing them into the mainstream society at the same time. I think that they will be able to integrate by being seen in such an event such as NAIG and I think with that you will see athletes develop over time. Getting an Aboriginal sport body in conjunction with the National Sport Centre and starting from there and working with it backwards into the community, probably would be a good idea.

**Janice:** In addition to what Jason was saying, it is really important not to forget about Aboriginal youth who do live in the mainstream because not all the youth of course live on reserve. In mainstream society there are number of barriers that appear there as well which we are really just beginning to understand. Many of those issues having to do with race, class, gender and what not, and we need to understand those issues fully in order to create a system where Aboriginal peoples both in mainstream and non-mainstream are accepted as athletes, period.

**Waneek:** I think the whole reason why I made a really big effort to be here tonight was it ties in with this question. I faced something this year that was really hard for me this last year. I was in a battle with my coaches and six of my teammates quit the National Team and there was a huge, huge uproar in media over treatment of players, treatment of athletes and we charged our coach with harassment and abuse and mental abuse. It was something that was going on in my sport

for quite awhile and we wrote to our national federation water polo candidate and to mediate this situation and they never did and it was an on-going and a well known thing this was happening. So it got out of control and what I find as an Aboriginal athlete is that when things are going well everybody wants to be near you, everybody wants to be seen with you. When things aren't going well, people run for the hills. I approached the Assembly of First Nations countless times to get a letter of support, I approached Denis Coderre the Minister of Sport. I approached a lot of people and all I wanted to hear was that you can't treat Aboriginal athletes this way, you can't treat athletes this way period.

My community, I was really lucky, my band council with help from Alwyn Morris wrote a letter asking for clarification, asking for why this happened. I needed a lawyer, I was trying to find money, I couldn't find money, these are things I never thought I would face as an Aboriginal athlete and how many times did I want to say, 'I'm going to quit.' And what happened was they were trying to kick me off the team and I wasn't ready to go and neither were six of my teammates. So, if I was coming from a fly-in community where, with number one I'm faced with culture shock, this is a whole different thing, you aren't used to that. If I didn't have my family right there with me I would have never gotten through that. And I did and I am still only one of those six athletes that still remain on the team. And how many times did I stand back and go. The reason why I stayed going is because I knew that number one I hadn't achieved my goals, my ultimate goals as an athlete. And number two and what would it show young people if I headed for the hills too and I said I'm not going to do anything, I'm not going to deal with this because I really didn't want to deal with this. I must have cried a river when everything was happening and I was called an Indian Princess and all kinds of stuff and it was really, really hurtful. Now in the wake of that happening I just got back from a trip and there was a lot of healing going on and I've had to, you know, I understand my part and the whole thing happening. But can they gain international recognition? Not if we don't stand behind them and that's at every level.

You can't let people, I mean it's not just an Aboriginal thing; you don't let coaches mistreat athletes, that's one thing. I remember it was me saying 'you don't deserve to be treated like that' to my teammates and they are going 'what' and I said 'you don't, you don't deserve it, you deserve to be spoken to with respect, being called like you're stupid, being called that you're dumb; you're not stupid, you're not dumb, you're engineering students.' You know, these were the things I was saying but in return as co-captain of the team it was my role to say that kind of stuff. I'm not quite sure; to be perfectly honest I was very, very hurt without getting support from my community other than from my immediate community. What are we going to do about that? We have to support everybody from point one right to the finish, the good, and the bad and ugly. I always said I would be there for anybody, if anybody needs me, anybody faces the same thing you come to me I've been there, done it, I have jumped through so many hoops and am still standing and think that is one thing we have to teach our young people to do that and I think I'm the only one, only Aborigi-

nal person on a national team, I think. We have a couple that went to the Olympics and these are some of the things they will face and we have to do something about it.

**Mo:** She covered it. Well, first to convey to team Mexico they have practice their “eh’s” when they get up here, so. This is really interesting and I have one perspective; it goes back and I don’t mean to digress. It talks about, you had posed a question about traditional sport verses mainstream contemporary sport. One of the things I would like to point out is you have four sports, archery, distance running, lacrosse and canoe that has its origins in traditional origins, that are traditionally Indigenous sports. When you look at contemporary mainstream sports, sometimes those are often delivered and taught and coached in communities as a modern sport. I know what we have to do and I know my brother has exemplified this in a Denver community, is that he took the tradition of lacrosse and which is in my understanding considered the Creator’s game, they taught it in that way and they took ownership of that particular game. I think there are a few sports that have its traditional origins. So I just wanted to bring perspective that maybe a first board is shooting for the Mohawks, rifle shooting; you said it, I didn’t.

I was thinking about what is contemporary, what is traditional, what is a modern Olympic sport? I think NAIG is, with the 14 or 15 sports that they do conduct within the communities, are sports. I don’t know what the process is of selecting those particular sports but I know with team New Mexico we are bringing 9 different sports. We have an archery team and archery is a traditional sport of the Jemez Pueblo. The Pueblo tribe one of 19 Pueblos they are known as the Towa tribe and archery is the traditional Indigenous sport of that particular Pueblo and so we have 9 to 12 archers that are coming up in a sport, in a discipline that has its traditional origin and they are going to compete at the Indigenous Games in a venue. Where at one point you’re saying it’s a contemporary sport, maybe 3-D archery, yes there’s the transitional sports. In fact, the coach that is leading the archery team missed making the Olympic team by 1 point and he had only been engaged in the sport of 3-D archery for 6 to 9 months if I am not mistaken.

So I have to agree with a lot of what the panel is saying such as what Waneek is, that the talent, the drive is evident in some of these Indigenous communities. The question is how do we take those skills and translate them into sports that offer whether it’s a Pan American sport, an Olympic sport or an Indigenous Games? Anyway, I just wanted to add a perspective to what is considered traditional, what is modern.

**Rick:** Yes, I am glad Mo brought that back up because it is certainly an issue that I would like to comment on, this whole aspect of traditional versus contemporary and where the NAIG are going with this. We struggled with this around the table, the Council table, the Circle table a number of times. And the difficulty for us as the Games are moving into the more competitive, elite focus is that the balance in providing competitive opportunities that were laid across North America and when you look at the area of traditional sports, a lot of times they are very specific to various re-



gions. It's very difficult to create an international competition around traditional game or sport that is enjoyed in one area and not known in another. So if traditional sports can be brought in and that's why and I know many of you are offended that the fact that traditional sports are relegated to the cultural festival as a display rather than a competition. There wasn't any offence meant to that, it was somehow to display those talents and create awareness but there was no intent to push aside traditional sports or games. I guess the challenge is for the Council and governing structures behind NAIG to get real creative in how they approach traditional sports and not just display them but provide competition, because it is a learning opportunity for all our cultures to gain a better awareness and understanding of each other and traditional sports can be that path.

I also want to make a quick comment on the question whether a young person or an athlete from a very small community can ever make it to the National/International levels and I say 'absolutely yes,' but there needs to be an incredible amount of desire and commitment on behalf of that individual because they have almost everything going against them. If they're Aboriginal and from a small community, which typically lacks any basic infrastructure, sport facilities, typically lack facilities, just in general the opportunities are incredibly limited. So that individual first has to be committed and we need to focus as Aboriginal sport leaders on trying to provide the expertise to that individual in a very creative inventive way and placing that expertise right in the community where they can draw on that. The fact is that if they are going to make that jump to the international levels they are going to have to ultimately leave that community and that is a reality. You cannot develop as an athlete in isolation; athletes do not will themselves to the podium. —There was a kid once quoted as saying: 'If they are willing and they have the ability, what we do will have, and what we have to support them with is expertise and opportunities, but we have to provide support for that transition.'

Ultimately, at some point they have to leave the community to typically a larger urban centre. And a lot of the discussion around our table was 'how do we provide them with supporting that transition in a very comfortable, culturally relevant environment' and that was what a lot of the discussion around our table has been focused on. Focusing on developing those high performance training centres for those athletes from our communities to gravitate towards where they can still pursue their education, have cultural support in that environment and also allowed to pursue their training in competitive goals, so we have our work cut out for us. But with everything going against that individual coming from that community, ultimately yes, they can get there, it's just how do we support those pursuits.

**Jason:** I just want to interrupt here; I think those means are already there. I think the access programs that they have at the universities are there now. You already have those means of retaining the culture and giving them a comfortable means to work with. I just think the Sports Circle needs to work those groups out of the universities and, boom, create that elite program right from there and I think that will be the best way.

**Waneek:** I also just want to add a quick note to that. I think there is a gap for the elite athletes. We're focusing a lot of our intentions and they should be focused on creating the grassroots level of sport and hopefully build towards that but what about those people who are on the verge of or just right there? I know, in talking to Billy Mills and talking to Mo, that in the States they find sponsorship, they find support. I think there is a need, if you would have asked me as a National athlete what do you need to succeed? Well I don't need to worry about money; I don't have to selectively choose what I'm going to eat, be a Kraft dinner athlete, you got to be able to eat right. Physiotherapy, massage, sports psychology and a sport psychologist that will understand you, coming from that community, coming from your reality. I would love to meet an Aboriginal sports psychologist, that would be my dream and I have worked with a lot of very, very good sport psychologists. These are all things that mean, I think it is a slow process and maybe I won't see them in my athletic career but maybe we will see it in the future. And giving them access to this right when you see the talent in these communities and going and getting these kids, seeing them play. I think Ted Nolan is doing that with his hockey program and that is something that is really important, taking them over to Sweden and taking them to see this competition.

I remember the first time I walked into, when I walked into the Pan American Games opening ceremonies and being here and getting to walk in with Aboriginal people right by my side. It is so funny 'cause we are all lining up to go in and a bunch of these dancers and stuff came running out to me and said, 'you're that Mohawk girl' and I said, 'Yeah I am' and they walked in with me and just that unbelievable experience. We have to show our kids that and show them that could be their potential and there would be a lot more people with the will and want and ultimately it is, it comes from within here. You have to have really thick skin and a really strong heart and a really strong mind and I think, judging from our past, judging from our experience as a people as a whole I mean we come from strong warriors, we come from a strong people. We have so much knowledge in our communities I always tap into; that my warrior culture in the Mohawk culture is something I really drive.

My experience at Oka, seeing our men and our women stand up very strongly. I drew from that experience and say, you know an Olympic game, an Olympic game against the States is nothing compared to what I've been through, I think we have to teach our kids that, it's true; try dodging bullets when you're handling the ball. It's something that is our own type of sport psychology. It's something that I don't think people are taught and I think when people ask me what is that, how do you do that and I draw on that and it's teaching our young to draw within themselves beyond the pain, beyond the hurt to somewhere deep inside, somewhere, where I think we're made up of the experience of our ancestors and that strong will. We have survived so long, now take that experience, translate it into something that can propel you to the top of the podium at the Olympics and I think that is something we are going to work with.

**Charles:** Maybe I'll go back to the 'why' the Indigenous Games movement is very important. Before coming here this evening I spoke to my grandsons because some of the things that were being

tossed around this afternoon was that the Indigenous Games have to do more of this and become more like these types of Games and the response from my grandsons 'why' these are our Games. I think it is up to us to mould them and I would like to perhaps take off from there.

The 'why' in the beginning. I just want to take a few moments of your time because I really think it is important as to why the Games came about. It came from certainly a few people who had a vision—a dream some people call it—but I think that dream emerged from their concern and their love for Aboriginal youth. They saw, I guess, opportunities for them to do something. Certainly to address the issue of developing and enticing youth to seek out alternative lifestyles and even to this day in my community you know I am reminded as to why I must continue to remain involved in the Indigenous Games. When I see a young person in a pine box you know that we have lost through alcohol or drugs, that is one of my major motivations to continue to remain involved. Suicides, teen pregnancies and all the other things some people don't want to make mention of, but they are there and why are they there? That's where I correlate the question of why, one of the reasons why we need to continue. What about the issue of education? Most of our young athletes, they will remain active and participate in sports until they are about 14/15 years old or grade 8/9 and then they drop out, they don't continue. So I think that we need to find ways and means of tying in their education to their recreation athletic participation, to use that as a motivating factor.

Originally, we were also concerned about what we perceived to be the loss of culture, Aboriginal culture, even amongst our own people and equally as important was we were of the opinion that we were not doing enough as Indigenous people to showcase our own culture. So we used the Indigenous Games in 1990 as an opportunity to showcase some of those values that are so important to us; values of caring, sharing, love, respect, honour and truth, understanding. We need to create those types of awareness on the values that we have now.

Certainly Waneek mentioned the issue of participation. You have to remember that the early 70's and even in the early 80's there is little or no participation in mainstream sport by our people, for various reasons; certainly they did not have the same type of facilities, equipment, the training opportunities etc, etc. So they tended to shy away and stay away from mainstream competition. So we thought and I believe that we are right that if we worked to develop our own Games and to motivate our young athletes to use those as a stepping-stone to mainstream competition and we have succeeded in that.

What about 'legacy'? Amongst our communities and our society we are so very slow in recognizing the achievements of our own people, very slow. In the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame there is some of our people there but do we have an Aboriginal Sports Hall of Fame? Saskatchewan has had theirs for a period of years and a few other provinces. But I would like to see some day a Canadian Aboriginal or Indigenous Sports Hall of Fame and even

North American Sports Hall of Fame. 'Why'? Because it is important that we give due recognition to our own people and so that we can use the Waneeck Horn-Millers as role models, Alwyn Morris, Billy Mills—a purpose for them.

'Barriers' of course, all kinds of them, some of them were made mention of. We need to continue to ascertain that these Games belong to us, they are ours, it is up to us to mould them and to remain focused on the original purpose and intent. Certainly we want to motivate our young people to enter into mainstream sport. But if we can decrease the statistics of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse I think that we deserve to put ourselves into a Hall of Fame and therein lies one of the major challenges. We have to deal with the issue of commitment, not to lose focus, be leery of personal agendas. What about apathy, hopelessness in our communities, barriers like dependency syndrome, not created by our own people but by the imposition of mainstream society through the welfare system.

We have to break that, somehow, and I make special issue of that to see that of all the Games that I have been involved in we go with our hat in hand and I am not trying to be facetious or try to offend anyone, we have to go hat in hand to some other foreign body, 'please give us the money so we can do this for ourselves'. Why can't we take that challenge ourselves and create our own funding arrangement? We are capable. There are several hundred thousand Aboriginal people, Indigenous people in Canada, complimented by say the States. I think we can affect some policy change in that, like in the lottery movement.

Now, the Canadian government is allowing our communities and our organizations to set up their own casinos. Well, one of the things that we might perhaps want to suggest to the decision makers is as part of the issuance of this license they must dedicate a certain percentile of their proceeds too, and why not. You have to remember the original purpose and intent of the lottery foundations in this country was to support mainstream sport, amateur sport. Not like what is happening in Alberta, where they are allowing the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames to develop their own lottos and stuff like that. My God, you know these people are making millions of dollars! One of those guy's salaries would support two Indigenous Games. What's happening here?

The other thing that we need to be cognizant about is the imposition of government legislation, policy, programs; we do not have any opportunity other than those we create for ourselves for ownership. The Tables, the Roundtable on Aboriginal sport, who controls that? We were invited as an afterthought, the Aboriginal people; we were an afterthought. Had we developed that table ourselves, controlled it, I think we would be further ahead today than where we are. See, right now we are at the discretion and pleasure of the people who control the purse strings and I find that very sad; we have to try and get away from that.

Achievements? Well, prior to 1990 how many activities can we claim as true achievements? I only want to say, concentrate after 1990; certainly we had five Indigenous Games from 3700 par-

ticipants to... what it is going to be? Close to 10,000 participants in Winnipeg? Sixty-five hundred? And Waneek, how big are the Olympics? Eleven thousand. But compared to the many countries against the two countries that we involve, I think the level of achievement is that much greater... what we have been able to do. We now have provincial, territorial, state organizations; they weren't there before. There were spasmodic groups of development but no consistency. We have a national organization now. Mo here is involved state side, Rick is in Canada and they have found a way to work together, that is what the Indigenous Games are all about.

The other thing that has happened is for a change, now mainstream society organizations have started to accept us. Canada Sports Council—there is a number of seats that we can occupy at the Provincial level; at the State level there are seats we can occupy. What would have happened if there had been no Indigenous Games? Well, I don't know, your guess is just as good as mine on that. But I would like to believe that because we organized ourselves as well as we could we forced the issue to be recognized and we must maintain that participation and recognition.

In Alberta, for instance, in provincial competitions it is very hard for our communities to get involved even to this day, because for some nebulous reasons your team cannot be involved because of this type of thing. So we offered an alternative, suggesting to the Alberta Sport Council: create zone 9. And they asked us, 'What is zone 9?' Zone 9 will be made up of Indigenous Albertans. Well, it is going to upset the scheduling. 'Come on, there are professional schedulers that can cope with something like that' and one of them made a slip during our debate and they said zone 9 will be too strong for the rest of Alberta. Ironic isn't it? And I told them... what is wrong with the Aboriginal people winning once in awhile?

We still have to deal with a lot of racism, discrimination; you make mention of it, it is still there. So another reason why we need to continue to build on the Indigenous Games is to motivate and teach techniques to our young athletes on coping skills. How do they cope with discrimination? In my hockey-playing career, just to use as an example, we were trying to get into the senior league and we played the league champion. They gave us some rules and regulations by which to play the game. Two minutes left in the game, the game was tied and one of the rules that they had was everybody on the ice had to have a helmet. Two minutes before the end of the game one of the guys jumped off their bench, took a loose puck without a helmet and went in and scored. And I am the captain of the team so I argued the point and the response from that referee was, 'Get out of here you f...n Indian.' That's reality. I saw red and that poor zebra was lying on the ice with his feet twitching because I knocked him out cold. I was barred for 99 years from hockey but I went to the hearing and spoke for myself as to why I did that. The referee's credentials were taken away.

We have to protect ourselves, defend ourselves in these types of coping skills. I don't think that we should become complacent to accept apathy and what it is we do for ourselves. I maintain that we are as intelligent and as capable as anyone else out there. I refuse to accept from someone else

to tell me that they know what is good for me and for my people. I would rather take that from our own people and we have the talent, we have the skills amongst our own rank to do exactly that. One of the hidden things that we have been doing, and Rick can say that, we entered into an arrangement with Ted Nolan to bring some skilled hockey talent together. Ted took those players to Europe and did very well; won 4 games straight. In the 5th game they had to play a team from United States and you know what the United States did? Hey, it was a group of Canadian Native hockey players. They are winning all the games and the coach up there ... and Ted can tell you this, the coach up there got on the phone and brought across young hockey players that were already playing in a National Hockey League to bolster the American team and our kids lost 5-3. A very close game, do you see? —We have the talent; we have the talent to do those types of things. We need to leave our own legacy. Future growth I see as a responsibility that we have to continue and sustain growth, we cannot become complacent...

I am sorry I am taking so much time because I really feel it is important to get the message out there. We need to look at standards, certainly guidelines, but our own. The Games should never become just like these other Games. I think we have to have that control. How can you have someone else come to dictate to you and say, for instance, the presentation that Joe made on hand games, somebody else come ... 'And by the way, here are the rules that you must play your games with.' Not possible, we have to establish those types of rules ourselves.

I get really emotional and really into the purpose and intent of the Games because there is so much that needs to be done. Programming—I think we have the capability to do our own programming, our own training techniques. I think it's there. For once in our lives I think that we have to believe in ourselves, in our own people and trust the youth to do the right job so long as we give them the proper ammunition to live the lifestyles that we envision them to live. Important! And recreation. Athletic participation. Involvement is one of them. To be the best that they can be through sports and recreation. Not to control or dominate but just to be best. And you know what? Once they find that, a lot of people walking around this earth looking for a purpose in life and I make mention of it and my own autobiography, perhaps, just perhaps the purpose of life is to live a life of purpose and for me to help somebody else, in the best way I know how. Therein, I think, in my humble opinion, this is the purpose and intent of the NAIG. Something I am very proud of. I never figured for one moment when we first put it together that it would be like what it is today. The success, the achievement is ours. It belongs to us, and the Games are ours, so keep them that way! Thank you for your time.

**Angela: One last question, I would like to ask the panel, if you could keep your answer brief... what role does physical education in the school system have to play into developing young Aboriginal athletes?**

**Chris:** I want to share a little about my experience in that process in leading up to what we have in this forum today. Physical education, when I grew up, was a key part of the component of the education system, having gone to a school in a non-Aboriginal community. And sport programming was always a part of it, which is how I got involved a lot with it, based on what I grew up with my traditional sports and trying to blend the two of them and how to make them work with each other. With that being said, education is what I was going to add into the points a lot of the members have made already. When we talk about youth being challenged coming from remote communities... Terrence...I think is the most recent example and perfect example of personal will, drive and determination. I was working when he was a hockey player in the Opaskwayak Cree Nation Blizzard. When the team finished training, working out in the gym I was in there with them. When the team left, there was one kid still there—that was Terrence Tootoo. Fifteen years old, doing an extra half-hour of work to an hour working out by himself and he was there everyday like that continuously. And when you talk about a kid coming out of a remote community in this case Rankin Inlet, the first Inuk to be drafted into the NHL and now in the Hall of Fame as well, how do they adjust into mainstream sport? His family used to ship him caribou meat and that was the way of being able to keep their identity and still be able to eat their traditional foods so he would be in the change room eating caribou meat, raw eyeballs he would be sharing with his teammates. That was an educational opportunity for his teammates but he got to live his life by bringing it with him and his family supported him in that endeavour.

On that note, he is in the NHL or drafted into the NHL now, which is a perfect example of personal will and drive and determination at 15 years old. Like they said, that personal will and that drive that individual has to be there and they will make it work whatever means they have at their disposal such as what Waneek had said.

In regards to the educational part of that process it's in the systems now and has to be in the Aboriginal communities where a lot of them now have their own educational facilities. With the NAIG here we were posed with the idea of what can we do with this program. Bruce Miller, along with members from University of Manitoba and education committee for the province, sat in a forum like this and said what are we going to do with the Games? It stopped there after that one meeting and there was no action followed on it until I met Bruce Miller again and said what can we do with this? And he said let's put a program together, research some symposium. I never heard of what a symposium was before. I don't have grade 12. I failed grade 6 twice. So with that we started working together. We formed the ad hoc committee with academics from the University of Manitoba and started putting ideas/elements together and that education group is where I got exposure to the University of Manitoba. 'Okay, what systems do you have that can work with our program that can support you and vice versa' and with that, this is what we have today which is a new element of the NAIG. And I think it has brought a whole new perspective of the Games in a forum form that can help support the movement. They have definitely helped us and supported us

in our development of our overall programs so I think it is very key, right now, as Charles Wood has stated; education is here right now for everybody involved with the fallout of the '99 Games.

Our community ... a co-worker and myself tossed the idea around and said, 'How do we do it'? We went to visit our brothers and sisters in Saskatchewan, came back, took some of their models, adjusted it to our community because we work side by side with the Metis community. We created a budget, I went to my chief and council and they said 'okay here's a \$100,000 proposal we have.' Basically they said 'okay you can do it but we are not supporting you financially, you have to create those ones yourself and if you don't your job is on the line.' So we took that challenge on as co-workers and said okay we are willing to sacrifice that for the benefit of our youth. So we went through an educational process with Saskatchewan and I think we have a great model...that is working right now in Manitoba.

From that we talked about remote communities. One of the red flags we raised out of that program was Winnipeg, which has the largest Aboriginal community in North America. There was not one athlete from Winnipeg in those Games and we red flagged that. As a result of that, a study was done and now we have the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre, which is probably the most powerful urban city program in Canada, which you guys will be seeing tomorrow if you haven't seen it already today. You will have exposure to that and see what it's done for them. It's given them an identity, it's an education process for the kids within their own Aboriginal community, plus they're involved in a mainstream type system of sport in the city of Winnipeg and it's working wonders right now. So it's definitely a lot of job determination; you have to be committed to the program and education is definitely a key in whatever way you approach, whether it is from the grassroots or from the highest level of academia if you will.

**Waneek:** He talks about education. I think that what it really boils down to is, I think our young people, whenever I speak to them, I talk about balancing your life and having a balanced life is having physical, mental, spiritual and I think you have to have that in your life. And I went to Carleton University because they had a water polo program but my coach told me you're not here to play water polo, you're here to get an education and that comes first and I think that the reality of sport for particularly a water polo player is that you don't make any money so what are you going to do with it after? I've used it as a vehicle to travel the world, meet a lot of people, learn from my teammates; education not only happens in the classroom but happens from my teammates. I'm proud to say I have a pretty good comprehension of French and loved learning from my teammates because you can only understand the power and importance of your own culture if you respect those of your teammates. I think that is something I learned, teamwork and educating my teammates on my culture and not forcing it down their throats but using it as a tool to empower them is really important. I think education in and out of the classroom is so important.



Physical activity is part, is so important. They're banning it, cutting it out of programs all over the place, maybe in Aboriginal communities, I don't know but I know in Quebec and all kinds of places. They are not making it part of the curriculum. You're going to kill kids, that's their only access they have to sports so I think it is really important.

**Angela: Can we get some questions from the audience before we close?**

**Audience:** I would like to just congratulate all you guys on your successes and thank Charles for his words and...autobiography. I have a few questions, like Waneek, I believe I would like to see our own team. I believe I would like to see an Aboriginal franchise; I've been working on it since then and in the process founded the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships. But Rick Murphy, he is the local NHL president in Yellowknife, he was born and raised in Yellowknife and he played in the NHL, a few games but he made it. He's talking to Ted about is it possible to pursue an Aboriginal franchise? They're asking how are you going to fund it George? From the States and Canada and with all our fans, the casinos.

Success in sports in Indian country and that's for Mo, I like that, Indian country. It's a home grown system, our own system. I think we have come a long way in a short time with success stories such as yourselves and there's no doubt we have the role models, the resources, the technical expertise and national awareness at an all time high. Is it realistic to form our own system? Is there an Aboriginal Sports Centre in Canada? Is there a National Indian Sports Centre in the US? If one of you guys could just explain to Mo quickly what the National Sport Centre is.

**Waneek:** The one I trained at is in Montreal. They exist across Canada, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg has one. A high performance program. They try to attract teams to train at these centres, they offer you programs like massage, physio, sport psychology, nutrition. We're based out of Montreal...and trains at my training centre. Alexander... the diver trains at my training centre and so they try to create a little environment where it supports to a certain level.

**Audience: Is it realistic to have our own national sport psychologist? Is it realistic to have our own national Aboriginal junior team, Aboriginal team?**

**Mo:** I would like to answer your question. The delivery of and the developmental pipeline of sports, sports development encompassing is different, quite different in the Lower 48 as it is in Canada, although, as Indigenous people we are the same people with the same dreams and visions. The Native American Sports Council, we're a group member of the US Olympic committee. The US Olympic committee has three Olympic training centers—Chula Vista, Colorado Springs, Lake Placid—and an Olympic Education Centre in Marquette, Michigan. Each of those training centers has residence programs with high performance centers, sports science and technology. Colorado Springs as being the hub, Marquette, Michigan they have a residence for boxing and a few other sports. Lake Placid is winter sports and Chula Vista, which is right out of San Diego, plays hosts to most of the volleyball and so forth.

Our group membership has a multi sport community based organization in the Olympic committee is that we act like a national government body. We can access any training center so to answer your question 'yes' it is realistic. What we have done is we have created in the Lower 48 exercise and sovereignty.

When we first applied for group membership by the Olympic committee they kind of shunned to it and the reason was why is because they were concerned about the African American caucus. They were concerned that if we give you preferential treatment then we have all these ethnic groups. But what we did was we educated them on our government relationship and right to exercise sovereignty and that is a word that's really been exercised in Lower 48 because without the sovereignty and without our customs and our language and rights we don't have sovereignty. So what we did was we exercised that sovereignty and then they looked at us as a nation collectively.

So to answer your question 'yes' and we do have high performance program training camps we are accessing. What you saw for those that attended the keynote, that boxing developmental camp you saw there was at the Olympic training center with Olympic coaches utilizing, accessing a trainer. In addition to answering your question 'yes,' there is potential for that, I think in terms of an Aboriginal or Indigenous team competing in the Games I think that time is coming but I think there are some strategies and ideas that we can learn from each other to improve in the high performance area but one thing I would like to point out to this panel and to those who are sitting here is share a little perspective of the Lower 48 of the Indigenous Games. Just a couple comments here. First of all Indigenous Games is perceived as 'the Indian Olympics'; people get excited about it. I was driving through Crow Reservation and this kid said 'hey, where you going'? Going up to Winnipeg... 'Is that that Indian Olympics'? So the perception from the Lower 48 is that the Game are the Indian Olympics and whether the Games offers contemporary sports, maybe demonstration of Indigenous sports, whatever evolves, that's great. The Lower 48 embrace that.

The other perception though is that it's a Canadian organized event and when you think about it and looked at it, it is really held close to the Council here. And look and listen to the questions... not once has there been a question that has included American Indians. All the questions have been Aboriginal. And yet it says NAIG and you are including us but the Lower 48 feels that we are invited.

I think one clear message I would like to echo to the NAIG Council is that we need to look at strategies to involve tribal leadership from the Lower 48, tribal organizations that have a standing record such as the National Indian Athletic Association, the Native American Sport Council, Tribal communities, because there has been some questions that have been posed that in fact my brother can attest to, one where tribal leaders are saying, 'How come we haven't been invited?' And so that the understanding the government, the sovereignty, the government to government relationship and how tribes are perceived by the state, there are some issues there. But I think one of the

things, as the NAIG legacy continues, is that I think you have to look at, how do we engage and create awareness in the Lower 48 to create infrastructure? And if you talk to people like Billy Mills, one of the things, the perception about the Indigenous Games and Lower 48 is, we don't have the infrastructure to engage all of the States. You look at, if California is not here, Oklahoma is not here, Minnesota is not here, Arizona is not here and those are four States that are on a top six of Native American, American Indian population in the Lower 48.

So one of the things I would like to echo to this community, to the NAIG Council is that this is a wonderful vision, this is a great event, and I wouldn't miss it for the world. I was sharing with many people that I was at Sydney watching Waneek compete. I've competed, I have seen many sports but this is the one thing that I take pride in and get excited. And so we can look for strategies and ways to engage and create greater participation from entities, organizations, tribes and communities and Lower 48; whatever those strategies are, then I think you will see more participation from the Lower 48. Because there are perceptions, there are things and just the feeling here it's like Mo you're from the US and so I think there might be an opportunity to look at strategies and involve American Indians because it is not just, if you say it is NAIG then the Aboriginal people are equal as the American Indian. Our constitutional definition is American Indian, Alaskan Natives, which is fine, which would be the equivalent of referring to Aboriginal populations. So those are a couple of comments how I think as a National Executive Director for an organization that works with tribal communities in a national capacity and how we can look at this and say, 'Wow,' because tribes and tribal leadership want to be a part of this. But we need to work in that area.

**Angela:** Thank you, Mo.

**Christian:** Yes, just on that note, I strongly believe personally that we can develop anything we want as Aboriginal people and I referred to us as the third order of government in Canada and in the same respect to the US as sovereign nations. They are that already and practicing that and have been for a few years. I think from the host society here probably in the history of NAIG we were the first and we were the first to go down to the National congress of American Indians and display ourselves as the 2002 Host Society to their leadership to get the word out that we are coming, that we are happening. How do we get our brothers and sisters from Lower 48 to the Games and we did acknowledge them in our literature and as the way we described Aboriginal people as First Nation, Metis, Inuit and Native Americans, including them in this process which was never done before and we have acknowledged that.

And I strongly believe what has to happen first of all is an education exercise has to happen with our Aboriginal leadership in the US and Canada. Waneek Horn-Miller for example goes to the AFN and she doesn't get the support that she was seeking. They should be right at the front and centre backing her up on any issues from legal support to political support whatever it may be and that has to happen both in the US and Canada. I don't look at that border separating our

countries, I call them the brothers and sisters to the south and you know this is the NAIG. It's not the Canadian Indigenous Games or US Indigenous Games, it's our Games and we have to educate that not only amongst ourselves as Aboriginal people but leadership. They have to know what they are investing in and at the same time we have to educate our governments and a lot of those leaders we have at that table right now representing Canada and US don't know what treaties are. They have to be educated on what that means and we got to send that message to them through our political leadership.

Once that is done, it is going to be understood and it's got to be shared with the general public to know why we are doing what we are doing other than just that limited education perspective and why do you guys need your own set of Games? I have been posed with that many times and I responded with what Charles Wood has said in regards to why it was done. But it can go another level, \$8 million that we have invested right now...our partners from the government but I personally feel right now it should be a minimum of \$25 million easy, compared with the numbers we have based on Canada which is ranked number three in the world of living standards. They should be investing in our peoples as Aboriginal peoples and with the same with the Americans investing in this program just as equally if not stronger.

**Mo:** I applaud what Chris is saying but one of the things you have to realize is that there's two. He represented the NAIG Host Society, so when he mentions that the NAIG Host Society went down to promote and create awareness at the National Congress of American Indians, that's great. But where the change has to really come is from the NAIG Council, okay, because that's what is going to be ongoing. So I applaud your efforts and you're right philosophically. Chris and I are bad golfers, okay, but philosophically Chris and I are on the same page on what needs to be done to address on those issues. But where the real issues lie is going to go with the NAIG Council because that's where it's going to be ongoing and continue. That's where the awareness and engagements have to happen to create that infrastructure. So I applaud you, you are right; you were down there but however you have to get to the issue, it's ongoing from the NAIG Council, from the Lower 48 side.

**Rick:** If I could provide a Canadian perspective and get back to the question of, 'Can we create this separate structure and system'? I honestly believe that, first of all I am cautious with our government officials and partners here because when we created the Aboriginal Sport Circle...the question posed to us was, 'Are you creating a parallel system?' Because if you are then there was a lot of hesitancy in getting involved and supporting this. And as we sat around our table of Aboriginal sport leaders we said we want to create something that is uniquely ours that addresses our own issues, designed by us. I honestly believe that the framework is there. If you look around us we have the collective, the Aboriginal Sport Circle, as a system of National and Provincial/Territorial bodies, a lot of weakness there but I think when we talked about even your territories and issues there, I think the framework is there.

You look at an international event like NAIG, you look at the fact that we're producing our own high performance camps, we are producing our own coaching manual and coaching material and creating our own expertise based in our communities. You look at the fact we have developed our own National Aboriginal Hockey Championships now and the intent and the goal of those championships among others is to field an all Aboriginal male and female team at the Canada Winter Games. But first we understand that there is a proving process first to draw out the talent in the communities, provide the support for them through national championships, identify the best of them, provide a stepping stone of a camp and a high performance experience and then provide national and international opportunities for them. So I think the framework is in place we talked about, and I know what the comment was; we have the universities as a transitional support mechanism for education in sport. But we have always talked about trying to create our own centre based on our own unique needs and in our own terms and drawing on our own expertise, whether it is coaching, physiotherapy, the sports sciences, that's always been the vision. And again we're cautious of suggesting parallel systems but the reality is the way we're moving right now is we are providing for our own people. The note to that is if we are going to develop centres like that the money isn't going to come from government and we can't be dependent on that. We have to create and seek those partnerships with the corporate community that will support our vision and our movement within our own communities.

**Angela:** Well thank you very much, I think we are going to have to end there.

**Waneek:** The thing is, I heard a lot of talk just in the last couple of minutes, well they didn't invite us, and the tribal leadership, and the NAIG Council and I am just sick and tired of political posturing. Because you know what gets lost in that is the real reason why we are all here and that's the athletes, that's giving opportunity. And I mean if you are going to wait until somebody offers you 'please come to ...' and 'please, please ...,' no you got to go and find it. Why? Because there is all these kids depending on you, depending on you to go out and find these opportunities for them and this is here and if we have to wait to make everybody happy in a political sense we will be waiting until the time.

You know we are such diverse people but one thing we have in common is our young people and the similar social problems that we have and the fact that sport and this type forum will give them so much opportunity and if we don't take the initiative and of course there is going to be bickering but let's swallow that a little bit and let's get going 'cause I'm just going to freak out if I hear more about politics.

**Mo:** Is that directed to me? (laughs)

**Waneek:** That's directed towards anybody who would rather put a political agenda before the needs of why the NAIG and why the Indigenous Games are here.

**Mo:** I would like a quick response to that.

**Angela:** Okay, 10 seconds to Mo or I am going to have my teacher voice and I am not kidding... (laughs)

**Mo:** I agree with her absolutely and I think that is why I assembled team New Mexico and gave money out of my pocket because I believe in the Games. And I am here and I demonstrate that because again I agree with you, it comes with the kids but at the same time you have to respect the tribal leadership and the Lower 48. And what I was trying to echo was that to engage in the process is that you have to involve them and I am just being respectful and speaking on their behalf because they are tribal leadership and the only way they are going to learn and know exactly what you feel and you speak from your heart and you're very passionate about it, is to understand the protocol and the rep and that particular leadership. But I agree with you and I think that is why we are all here.

**Chris:** Just on a note that Waneek had said and I don't know what I was thinking when they offered me the position of GM I said, 'Okay, if I am going to take this I don't want politics involved.' I felt like throwing that out the window and it's the reality and I tried to minimize it as much as possible.

**Angela:** And maybe just one last question from the audience, I am such a sucker and this is also interesting to me because I am not as involved as I should be in Aboriginal sport and Native American sport. Ok, a quick question then I have some errands.

**Bruce Miller** thanks the panellists and gives each a gift.

**Charles:** I did want to share one last thing with you, it is customary in Aboriginal culture to close our gathering with a little prayer and I invite you to join me. If you allow me I would like to use my mother tongue.

—The evening closes.—

## Endnotes

---

- 1 The Sport Leadership Panel was held on Thursday, July 25, 2002 at Sport Manitoba, 200 Main Street. What follows is the transcript of that discussion, taken from an audiotape.

