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Aboriginal Sports

Aboriginal games/sports are played both by adults and children. Before, games were played for hunting skills, learning tools, spiritual learning, or for entertainment. Many of the games were symbolic of specific seasons, winter or summer. Games that involved ice in the winter and games that needed a field in the summer.

There are three kinds of games played; chance, strategy and lifestyle. All three of which served a very important purpose in society. Basic educational skills like mathematics, probability and strategy were learned through many of the games played.

Now, games are used for much of the same reasons and purposes. This is because we play the same games that have been played in Canada for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years by the First Nations people.

Some examples of games which have similarities are:

Sliding game. This game played by Cree women was a game of marbles or a type of pinball. The women carved holes in a slanted piece of ice. They would label each hole having a different value of points. They used marbles which were the tips of buffalo horns. They would go to the top of the course and let the marble go, whichever hole it landed in was how many points that were achieved.

To Wepi Cikan. This game is a type of slingshot game played by young boys of Saskatchewan tribes. The slings were made from rawhide and the boys would swing the sling around their head and then let go.

Tossing the Ball. This game is a traditional Cree game of volleyball. Both women and men played together. Everyone would stand in a circle and volley the ball to one another trying to keep it off the ground.

Tewaarathon (Mohawk for Lacrosse). This game which was later named by the French as Lacrosse, is considered one of the oldest games played by aboriginal people. This game is mainly played by Eastern Canadians; Mohawk, Huron, Iroquois, etc. The game was played with a three foot stick with a two inch leather net at the end. Traditionally this game was played on a very large field. The goal of the game is to pass the ball from one player to another to get points in the opposing teams net. This game has not changed much at all and is the national sport of Canada.

Runners. Runners were brought to our attention by the Penobscot people of Maine. This was not a game; this was a form of sending messages or bringing gifts from one tribe to another. The runner also called "pure man" or "courier" would be selected in their village

and would have to run from village to village over long distances of land. Also having a relay/tag-team was done if the distances were way too long. This is our nowadays version of a relay or long distance race now done in track and field.

Akraurak or Aqijut. This game is a form of football the Inuit played; this game is very old and is mentioned in some stories. The ball is made from hide, stuffed with hair, moss, or feathers. Two lines of players face each other. The ball is kicked between the two lines until it passes through one line of players. Then all players run to kick the ball in their opponent's goal.

For my interview, I got the privilege of interviewing a girl I competed against as a child in swimming, Stephanie Omeasoo. Stephanie has swum for over 12 years. She was born and raised in Prince Rupert, B.C. In 2006 Stephanie was nominated to participate in the North American Indigenous Games in Denver. She placed third overall and won 9 medals. She is inspired by a famous First Nations swimmer and waterpolo player, Waneek Hornmiller. Waneek played on the Canadian waterpolo team at the Sydney Olympics; she now coaches a team in Quebec.

“Being an aboriginal athlete means you’ll make it further, you’re a somebody. It’s a big accomplishment.” –Stephanie Omeasoo.

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