

**Aboriginal Leisure in Saskatchewan
Focusing on Toys, Games and Pastimes**

The purpose of this paper was to develop research specifically for the Western Development Museum's exhibits to celebrate the Saskatchewan centennial.

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**Western Development Museum/Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
Partnership Project**

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Aboriginal Leisure in Saskatchewan- Overview

This research paper will provide information to assist in the development of the WDM celebration of Saskatchewan's 100th Anniversary exhibits, specifically with the leisure module for the Yorkton branch of the Western Development Museum.

The aim of the paper is to introduce various forms of Aboriginal leisure, both traditional and contemporary. Descriptions will give the reader an understanding of some of the history of Aboriginal leisure practices and methods of play in a variety of games. It will also discuss involvement in modern sport by the Saskatchewan Aboriginal population.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan leisure activities have always been an important part of a complete life. Aboriginal people recognized the importance of physical, emotional and spiritual health, combined as a whole. Many of the early leisure activities strengthened these areas. Physical activity was common in many games, while others relied on strategy and similar to all aspects of Aboriginal life, leisure had a spiritual component.

The appreciation for leisure activities did not mean that early Aboriginal people neglected other areas of their lives. The focal point of life was the pursuit of balance and survival depended on a balance between the different areas of an individual's life.

There was a disruption in balance when the Europeans arrived. The disappearance of the buffalo, the implementation of treaties, and government policies, a mandatory European education system, and the introduction of systemic racism as well as other factors lead to the movement away from balanced traditional Aboriginal life-style.

Since contact with the Europeans, Aboriginal communities have been looking forward, and assessing the best means of regaining a balanced life-style. One element of living a balanced life involves leisure and physical activity. Throughout the hardships experienced in the last one hundred years, gains have been made and today Aboriginal people are becoming more and more involved with leisure activities. The participation of Aboriginal athletes, especially youth, in mainstream sports is increasing at a rapid rate.

2. TRADITIONAL LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Leisure activities were an important part of life. With smaller groups of the past, leisure pursuits were useful ways of relieving tension. In many cases, the activities would be educational as well as entertaining. Many traditional games would increase the hunting and survival skills necessary to survive. As Bruce Miller puts it, "All aspects of life were connected in Aboriginal societies. Work, play, leisure and culture were interconnected. Life was based on the need for fitness in order to survive; fitness of the body, mind and spirit."¹

2.1 Songs and Music

Songs have always been important in Aboriginal culture as part of recreation, gaming, rituals and other areas. There were songs for various aspects of Aboriginal life, such as hunting songs and

¹Miller, Bruce. Our Original Games: A Look at Aboriginal Sport in Canada. Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2002. p.5.

warfare songs. Song was an element of activities and not so much an entertainment unto itself. The most common form of song was vocal, but also common was vocal accompanied by the drum.

Singing is tied to the oral tradition of Aboriginal people, as expressed by Miller, “Song was an extension of our being and represented our rich cultural heritage by instilling the philosophy of oral traditions.”² Singers were, and are, respected for their memory. Good singers can sing songs in exactly the same way every time they are sung. A respected singer is also one with a large repertoire.

Many games had song as an additional component. Susan H. Boyd described it as varying “... from a very casual delivery, to mumbled chants, to well-rehearsed song chains.”³

Song and music remains to be an important part of Aboriginal life. Whether ceremonial or contemporary, song and music remain strong. Powwow music has always been popular and many Saskatchewan drum groups continue to produce music such as Little Island Cree, Blackstone Singers and Red Bull. Contemporary music in various forms is also strong in the Saskatchewan Aboriginal community, whether it be country, rock, pop or rap. In 2000, Saskatchewan’s own Chester Knight received a Juno award for his album *Falling Down*.

2.2 Toys

There are three main categories of traditional toys for First Nations children. Some served as both entertainment and instruction, and others were purely for amusement. The children made other toys for their own use. Some of the toys children used are easily recognizable to any child today. Traditional toys such as tops, dolls, and animals are still played with by Aboriginal children today.

One very inventive toy was described by Elder Velma Goodfeather as being made “From the partridge or the prairie chicken, the stomach, grandma she put little seeds or something and glue it up and there hanging up to dry like that, so we used to play with those too, it was I guess Indian balloons (coughing) (laughing).”⁴

Elder Ken Goodwill also remembered making toys from any available materials. On making whistles, he said, “oh a piece you get a straight piece of ah it didn’t matter I guess cherry or willows whatever and you loosen the bark so that the bark comes off and you make a notch and

²Ibid, p. 24.

³ Boyd, Susan H. “Stick Games/Hand Games: The Great Divide.” **Forms of Play of Native North Americans**. ed. Edward Norbeck and Claire R. Farrer. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1979, p.211.

⁴ Velma Goodfeather, **WDM Elders Transcripts for Leisure**, SICC, June 2002, Tape 5, Side 2, Counter 064.

you have a whistle flat on one side like, like that and you make a notch in the, in the bark. (laughing) I was teaching you how to make a whistle.”⁵.

a. Tops

Velma Goodfeather remembers making tops from her childhood, in the following “...when I was a, a little girl um, we used to make ah tops out of wood where they put a little hammer on, grandpa (coughing) used to make different sizes so that was something we made tops, we called them anyways.”⁶.

Tops were a popular winter toy for they work well on the ice. Pat Atimoyoo describes them as being made of “...a short length of a peeled pole sharpened at one end.”⁷. Materials that could be used to make tops are birch, horn, bone or clay. Tied to the top was a whip made of a leather thong with a length of thin wood as a handle, by which the top could be spun. There are variations of games with the top such as knocking each other’s top over, getting the top through a goal or obstacle courses, and others.

b. Buzzer

The buzzer consisted of a thong threaded through holes of a button-like piece of wood or bone and tied together creating a closed loop. Holding a loop in each hand, the buzzer is flipped until it is tightly wound. Some buzzers also used end pieces as seen in the illustration below. By pulling on the ends after it has been wound up, a buzzing sound is created.⁸

c. Bull Roarers

Another sound producing toy, like the buzzer was the bull roarer. This toy was made by tying a thong to a stick at one end, in order to hold on to, and a small flat piece of wood to the other end of the thong. Spinning the bull roarer through the air produced a noise akin to the toy’s name.

2.2.1 Toys for Girls

Toys such as dolls, miniature cradleboards and carved animals were made for small girls. These toys built upon and encouraged skills that would be needed for adult life. Velma Goodfeather remembers, “...grandma used to always make ah raggedy ann dolls, out of you know and put

⁵ Ken Goodwill, **WDM Transcripts for Leisure**, SICC, June 2002, tape 5, side 2, counter 117.

⁶ *Supra*, note 4, Tape 5, Side 2, Counter 062.

⁷ Atimoyoo, Pat, Comp. Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na: Games of the Plains Cree. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1980. p.26.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.27.

buttons for the eyes, we had those to play with ah. ...Our grandpa made us lot of little dollhouses out of apple boxes...”⁹

2.2.2 Toys for Boys

Like girls, the toys given to boys served the dual purposes of entertainment and education in the skills and duties of manhood. The bow and arrow might be the most obvious example. Use of the bow and arrow gave boys and men a vital skill while also serving as an entertaining pastime. Because games using the bow and arrow continued from childhood to adulthood, explanations of these games are given in the *Games for Adults/Games of Dexterity* section.

a. Slingshots

Atimoyoo notes, “Slingshots were often the property of small boys and were used by all the Saskatchewan tribes.”¹⁰ Games using the slingshot would focus on aim and distance. Examples include target games and skipping stones on lakes or rivers, aiming for the most skips or furthest distance.

2.3 Games

Before discussing traditional First Nations games, it might be useful to define what a ‘game’ is. According to Alyce T. Cheska, a ‘game’ is defined as “... a pleasurable expression of voluntary participation in organized play, in which there are agreed-upon procedures and uncertain outcomes.”¹¹

Games were common among the different Aboriginal groups of North America. Games were often given or traded between groups. There would of course be variations from group to group, but each game was played in essentially the same way throughout different areas. Some variations will be included in the specific game descriptions that follow. Robert Stewart Culin’s 1907 work, Games of the North American Indians¹², also provides game variations gathered from throughout Saskatchewan.

Many games were divided along gender or age lines. Some games were symbolic of the season, with different games for different seasons. Games and myths were often interconnected. Allan and Paulette Macfarlan speak of the elements of games in regards to children as well as adults in

⁹ *Supra*, note 4, Tape 5, Side 2, Counter 064.

¹⁰ *Supra*, note 7, p.21.

¹¹ Cheska, Alyce T. “Native American Games as Strategies of Social Maintenance,” **Forms of Play of Native North Americans**. ed., Edward Norbeck and Claire R. Farrer. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1979, p.227.

¹² Culin, Robert Stewart. Games of the North American Indians. New York: AMS Press, 1973.

the following, “Ceremony, ceremonials, and taboos entered into the juvenile versions of games just as it did in the pastimes of grownups. Certain games could only be played at certain times, or seasons of the year.”¹³.

In many cases the creation of a game was related to, or part of, a particular myth. Culin expresses the interrelation of games and myth in the following, “References to games are of common occurrence in the origin myths of various tribes. They usually consist of a description of a series of contests in which the demiurge, the first man, the culture hero, overcomes some opponent, a foe of the human race, by exercise of superior cunning, skill, or magic.”¹⁴.

Games in early Aboriginal life were interconnected to the spiritual world. The Macfarlans note the importance of omens when planning to play games by indicating that:

Practically every Indian nation and tribe from coast to coast believed in various omens, often totally different ones in widely separated sections of the country, foretelling success or failure in tribal games. Such omens were taken so seriously that they could even cause a change of day for long-planned ceremonial games. If the members of some tribes heard the hoot of an owl on the night preceding the games, the games were postponed until a day that was not marred by ill omen. A shooting star, or lightning, seen on the night before a contest was considered a good omen, and the tribes which saw either of these signs felt certain that their players and teams would be favored in the games the next day.¹⁵

Games were entertaining, but were often used for educational purposes, especially among children. Games for children, like toys, often imitated aspects of adult life. Adult skills were introduced through the games that children played.

Many children’s games of the past were not really that different from the modern games such as hide-and-seek, tag, running, wrestling and ball games. All of these games were common for children in the past.

Adults played a variety of games, divided by Culin into two main categories: games of chance and games of dexterity.¹⁶

Games of chance included guessing games and random games using a form of dice or counters. The most popular guessing games were concealment games that required some skill. An

¹³ Macfarlan, Allan and Paulette Macfarlan. Handbook of American Indian Games. New York: Dover Publishing, 1985 Dover Edition, p.16.

¹⁴ *Supra*, note 12, p. 32.

¹⁵ *Supra*, note 13, p.17.

¹⁶ *Supra*, note 12, p. 31.

example is the Hand Game, where watching and evaluating your opponent made for a more successful game. There was no limit on wagers on a game, but the wager was roughly equal between the opposing sides. While a common pastime, the Elders discouraged the placing of wagers on games of chance, when the interest went beyond simple entertainment.¹⁷

Games of dexterity had practicality for they required physical skill, but could also be wagered on similar to the games of chance. Games of dexterity were viewed as a means of building skills necessary for daily life, such as bow and arrow games or any game that would improve practical skills. Physical games included horsemanship, running, wrestling, endurance, marksmanship and others. Athletic activities were a common recreation among Aboriginal people from an early time. Foot races and long distance running were popular with men. Wrestling was also common, whether on horseback or on foot.

In discussing early games of dexterity and their relation to the rest of Aboriginal life, Joseph Oxendine states that:

...sports were steeped in tradition and intimately related to all phases of life, especially to ceremony, ritual, magic, and religion. Investigation reveals, furthermore, that although many of these activities began as religious rites and evolved into sports over time, they nevertheless retained their connections to customs and traditions. Consequently, sports were never viewed as addenda to more serious aspects of life but as an integral part of it.¹⁸

Commenting further on the religious aspect, Oxendine also states that “Preparatory measures prior to major athletic contests were often symbolic, emphasizing abstinence from activities on things that signified weakness, fear, or failure.”¹⁹

Games helped to define a community in a number of ways. Games establish gender roles and responsibilities as well as foster group identity through competition with other groups. Games of chance could be used as a decision making tool and were linked with the religion and myth of the group.²⁰

2.3.1 Games for Children

a. Tag

¹⁷ *Supra*, note 7, p.1.

¹⁸ Oxendine, Joseph B. American Indian Sports Heritage. Chicago, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1988, p.xiii.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²⁰ Cheska, Alyce T. “Native American Games as Strategies of Social Maintenance,” In: Forms of Play of Native North Americans. Edward Norbeck and Claire R.Farrer. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1979, p.241.

Tag has always been a popular children's game. Atimoyoo compiled a few forms of tag. In one version;

Anna Crowe of the Piapot Reserve remembers this tag game played during the winter. A track in the form of a wheel is stamped out in the snow. In order to decide who will be "it", one person collects as many twigs as there are players. Whoever chooses the longest twig is "it" and must stand at the centre. Everyone else takes a place where a spoke intersects the circle. As long as he is on base, no one can go around him to escape "it". No one can run off the beaten track. As soon as someone is tagged, he becomes "it". The former "it" takes over the new "its" rest base.²¹

In another version called 'Holding the Pail Game', Atimoyoo relates:

Stan Cuthand remembers this game. Children lock hands in a circle, chanting "ne-chi-min-an-askikos". Whoever is "it" starts in the center and tries to force his way out of the circle by breaking through. (No going over or under arms). When he breaks through, everyone chases him until he is tagged. Whoever touches him first becomes "it".²²

b. Horses in Leisure Pursuits

Horses were used by all ages in leisure pursuits. Children's entertainment with the horse was crucial for skill development as well. Horses were an important part of the lives of early Aboriginal people, and continued to be well into the twentieth century. Children were trained on horses from an early age and were able to ride by the age of five. Boys were trained to use a bow and arrow on the horse, which would also improve horsemanship and hunting skills as well as combat skills with the bow.

While learning the skills necessary for adulthood children would often use games to make the experience more entertaining. As Corbet and Rasporich state, "Games were devised on horseback all of which had to do with skill and maneuvering at all seasons in warfare. This is where such actions as the 'overhang,' in which a rider hung under the neck of his galloping horse and shot at the enemy, were taught and practised."²³

c. String Games

A favorite for young girls, a string game was a piece of string about two feet long tied together at the ends. Manipulating the string by one or two children would result in a variety of designs.

²¹ *Supra*, note 7, pp.28-29.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Corbet, Elise A. and Anthony W. Rasporich, ed. Winter Sports in the West. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990, pp.27-28.

One example, still common today with children, is ‘cat’s cradle’ as seen below.²⁴

2.3.2 Games for Adults

2.3.2.1 Games of Chance

a. Bowl Dice or Cup Game

Played usually by men, this was a popular gambling game that could last for hours. It could have any number of players. Points were scored depending on how the pieces would land. It would be played in four rounds, each turn shaking the ‘dice’ in the bowl or cup and rolling them out to see what points could be gained. Each turn would use a different set of dice: shells, pits, wood, and then bear claws.

Equipment used for the game varied from group to group. There may have been four bear claws, weighed down on the large end to stand on end, four small shells cut in half, four small pieces of wood marked or colored on one side, four prune pits cut in half, a small basket, and tally sticks.

b. The Handgame

This guessing game like many others was accompanied by song and rhythm. The game involved two teams of four to eight people, sitting across from each other. There may also have been a judge to ensure that the game was fair. Each team would try to successfully guess where the other team was hiding the marked bone(s). The hiding team would taunt the other team by singing songs and beating a rhythm on a log while moving the marker(s) between the hands of the player(s) holding them. If one team held both sets of bones each would hide their own set. They could not be passed between the two players holding the bones. In some variations a blanket was placed on the players’ laps to hide the bones.

Team leaders would take turns guessing where the other leader was hiding the marked bone. The options were in the left hand, the right hand, or under the blanket. Hiding the bones involved singing and chanting, and moving the hands around (in front, behind the back and under the blanket). When the person making the guess felt confident in their decision, the player would shout “Ho” and indicate with a hand gesture their guess. There were specific gestures for the different locations, and different gestures if guessing the location of markers held by two opponents.

The first team leader to guess correctly would receive both sets of bones. When a team had both sets of the bones the team leader and another member would hide one set each. The winning

²⁴ *Supra*, note 7, p.31.

leader would give one set to a teammate, and they would begin hiding their bones. The possible outcomes could result:

If the guessing team leader misses both guesses, the hider receives two points (tally sticks) and another turn at hiding. If both guesses are correct, the guessing team receives both sets of bones to hide. If there is one correct guess, hiders receives one point (tally sticks), and continues to hide the remaining set of bones until the guesser is successful.

Essentially the hiding team receives points when the guesser is wrong. Once the guessing team has found both bones, they become the hiders. Tally sticks were collected for successfully hiding the marked bones. If all of the tally sticks were held between the two teams, successful hiding teams would collect their points from the other team's tally sticks. The first team to collect all of the tally sticks wins the game.

There was also a two-person version of the game, which might use one marked piece instead of two.

Equipment used in the game were four small pieces of bone or wood, two marked, two not marked, one of each for each team leader, eleven tally sticks (number can vary), two logs, one in front of each team (in which to beat out a rhythm), and blankets to be placed over the lap/knees.

Elder Jimmy Myo recalls the hand game from his early days in the following passage

It was played by both (mixed). It went on for a long time until finally it was not played anymore. It was only played at powwows. Hand games are what it was called. Long time ago it was played all the time. Now it has slowly died. ... That game they played every night every second night. The elders played this the old men would come along to play too.²⁵

c. Moccasin Game (or Bullet Game)

As told by the Sioux, this game was created when a Sioux warrior came across a man from another tribe. The two were unable to communicate and invented the game to decide who would kill who. The two men took turns guessing which of the two moccasins the other had hidden his lead ammunition in. Eventually a winner was decided, who would decide not to kill the other. Both men then parted as friends.²⁶

The game play is similar to that of the hand game or pea-and-shell game, using slight-of-hand to

²⁵ Elder Jimmy Myo, **WDM Transcripts for Leisure**, SICCC, June 2002, Tape 5, Side 1.

²⁶ Corcoran, Frank, Director. "The Moccasin Game" [Videocassette]. Montreal, Quebec: National Film Board of Canada, 1996.

hide an object. This game of chance originally involved two people and two pairs of moccasins. The rules have evolved and changed, instead of moccasins, each team uses four pelts or hides, and there are there are two teams of four rather than only two opponents. Twenty long sticks are needed to keep score and a pre-determined number of short sticks that are used to keep track of the number of games played.

The teams consist of a striker (the person who guesses), a hider (the person hiding the bead or object), a scorekeeper, and a singer/drummer. The entire team stands behind the guesses made by the striker. If the striker is not very successful, the team members may switch positions in order to replace the striker.

The hiding team moves the bead, ball bearing or object around under the four hides, trying not to give any sign of where it has been placed. The striking team selects a hide. They have two chances to guess the hiding place. If successful on the first try they receive four tally sticks. If they are not successful they have another guess after the hiding team re-hides the bead. On the second try, the striking team hopes to not find the bead. If the striking team guesses correctly they lose four sticks, if they do not select the hide with the hidden bead they lose only two sticks. The game ends when one team has collected all twenty sticks.

Guessing the location of the bead is a matter of luck as well as noticing the subtle hints of the hider.

d. Stick Dice

A game of chance played generally by women, stick dice would begin with wagers being placed. Up to ten players sit in a circle on blankets or hides.

Four large sticks are used as dice (plain on one side and painted on the other) in the game. Each player receives four tally sticks marked 10s and ten tally sticks marked 1s.²⁷

To start, each player rolls a dice, the last one to continue to roll the marked side of the dice beginning. Once the game has started players roll the four stick dice, and collect tally sticks, representing points for different roll variations. The other players give the roller tally sticks that equal the value of the roll. Once out of tallies, a player would have one more chance to roll the dice. The game continues until one player collects all of the tallies.

Descriptions of different variations of Stick Dice exist, including different points for combinations of the dice. One description gathered by Culin, from Muskowpetung First Nation, describes the game as played by either men or women, in any numbers, in groups of four.²⁸

²⁷ *Supra*, note 7, p.11.

²⁸ *Supra*, note 12, p.68.

e. Stick Flipping Game

This two-player game uses a short pole, flattened to four sides. Each side would be marked and/or colored differently, and represents a different number of points (one to four). The game was accompanied by song and also included four sticks for counting purposes, if the game was played to four points.

Instead of rolling or throwing the stick, it would be hit on one end to send it into the air and down again. The game was won when one player reached a determined number of points.

f. Stick Guessing Game

The stick guessing game was commonly a two-player game played by women. It was a fairly simple game. The only equipment required was thirty-nine peeled twigs, roughly eighteen inches in length. If thirty-nine twigs were not used the number of twigs would be an odd number.

One player would divide the bundle into her two hands, extending them to her opponent. The opponent would guess which hand contained an even number of twigs. If successful, she would receive a point and guess again. If unsuccessful, the players' roles would be reversed. In order to make a game point, three correct guesses are required. Success would mean winning the game and the wager.

The game could be played by men, women or both. Mr. J. A. Mitchell, describing the game, said that it could continue until one player (or team) wished to stop, or it could go on for "several days and nights."²⁹

2.3.2.2 Games of Dexterity

a. Ball Games

-Double Ball

A women's team game for the most part, similar to lacrosse or shinny, double ball required stamina and endurance.

The name comes from the ball (or balls in this case) used in the game. Two balls are tied together by a short piece of thong, six to twenty inches long, described by Atimoyoo as "... made from two bags of deerskin stuffed with buffalo hair and joined by a leather thong."³⁰ Sticks, three feet long, were used to catch, hold and throw the double ball. No part of the

²⁹ Ibid, p.230.

³⁰ Atimoyoo, Pat, Comp. *Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na: Games of the Plains Cree*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1980, p.23.

players' bodies could touch the ball.

Play would begin in the center of a field. Players with the ball cannot carry the ball, they can only pass it to teammates. Opponents can try to get the ball with their sticks. Goals were often up to one mile apart. The first team to throw the ball over the other's goal line wins the game.

Mr. J. A. Mitchell, commenting on the game in Culin's 1907 work, as seen at the Muskowpetung reserve remarked, "the game is a very interesting one and develops much skill. It is, from a hygienic point of view, highly beneficial, as it develops a fine, robust class of women. As with all other Indian games, this game is invariably played for stakes of some kind."³¹

-Lacrosse

Lacrosse was a ball game that was widespread across North America by the time the Europeans came to the continent. Unofficially, lacrosse has long been Canada's national sport. In 1994 it was legally named Canada's National Summer Sport. It remains popular in Canada, the United States and other countries around the world.

Lacrosse is played with racquets approximately three feet long with a wide, basket shaped end used to catch and throw the ball. Racquet sizes and shapes did vary throughout North America. Historically, the field played on could be up to a mile long, depending on the number of players. Goals were positioned at either end of the field. Only the racquets could be used to throw the ball, no hands or feet were allowed. The game was over when one team reached an agreed upon winning score.

-Tossing the Ball

This game is similar to modern volleyball and is one of the few games played by men and women together. The ball would be volleyed back and forth between the players (two or more). Anyone missing the ball would be 'out', with the game continuing until only one player remained.

b. Bow and Arrow Games

Games involving bow and arrows also served as a training tool to develop accuracy and skill. While playing, boys and men were improving hunting skills necessary for gathering food, hides for clothing and many other materials of use to the group. Small versions of the bow and arrow were given at an early age, allowing boys to gain experience with the bow. These games were primarily for boys and men.

-The Hoop Game (or Hoop and Pole Game)

A favorite among skilled bowmen, the hoop game was played by individuals or groups with two

³¹ Culin, Robert Stewart. *Games of the North American Indians*. New York: AMS Press, 1973, p.682.

sides of two to four men each. The teams would be separated by a distance of anywhere from thirty to one hundred feet. A hoop was rolled swiftly back and forth and the receiving side would shoot at it as it sped past. Each player started the game with four arrows and every miss meant the loss of an arrow.

Sticking an arrow in the hoop would result in the player having another attempt. Succeeding on the second attempt meant each player on the team would receive an arrow from players of the other team. Once a team had gathered all of the arrows, they had won.

This game also had many variations. One scoring variation is recalled by Jim Kahneptaytayo, compiled by Atimoyoo, "Jim Kahneptaytayo remembers another method of scoring. If a team doesn't hit the hoop when it rolls past, the team must give 10 arrows to their opponents."³²

-Shooting Arrows

Young men played this common game to test their archery skills in two teams of two. One player would shoot an arrow twenty or thirty feet away. Once the initial arrow was placed each person would try to land an arrow against this target arrow. Each player had four attempts to hit the target.

If one player was successful he would receive all of the arrows. If no one was successful, the player with the arrow closest to the original arrow would get one point. Points were given individually, but both players on the winning team would share the arrows when one member received four points for a successful shot.

One of the variations to the game was Shooting Women's Arrows, a similar game for the women. It was played using women's digging sticks. The object was to land their sticks between two other sticks placed on the ground.

-Striking the Bow

Striking the Bow was a popular game among young men. Four men divided into two teams played it. Each would have four arrows, with one other arrow used as a marker.

A bow would be stuck upright in the ground and the marker arrow would be bounced off of the bowstring. Each player would take turns bouncing their four arrows off of the bowstring, trying to land their arrows on the head or the feather of the marker arrow. If a player was successful, both he and his partner would receive an arrow from the opponents. Success also meant that the player would be able to take another turn. The winning team would be the first to gather all of the arrows.

³² Atimoyoo, Pat, Comp. Nehiyaw Ma Tow We Na: Games of the Plains Cree. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1980, p.18.

-Up There

This bow and arrow game was commonly played by four boys, but could be played by more or less. Each boy would choose a direction for himself. One boy would be selected to shoot first, often through a random selection such as drawing of straws.

The first boy would shoot his arrow in the direction he had selected. The other boys would then take their turns shooting their arrows, each trying to get closest to the original arrow. The boy closest to the arrow would then shoot his arrow in the direction he selected from the place of the last shot. The game would continue on in this way. The winner was the boy in whose direction the group had gone the farthest. This game could sometimes last over the course of an entire day.

c. Cup and Pin Game (or Ring and Pin Game)

Women usually played this small handheld game, but children and men were known to play it as well. The toy consisted of a piece of wood, bone or wire pin tied by a two foot leather thong to a piece of hide. The hide, often round or diamond shaped, had six holes in it and was approximately one-half foot square. Typically a thong was strung through eight or nine hollow bones. In some versions the bone closest to the piece of hide would also have holes bored into its sides.

To play, a person would hold the pin vertically, with the thong and hide hanging below. Swinging the hand forward and up, the player would try to catch the bones or hide on the pin. There were a variety of scoring methods, but essentially the bones would be worth one point each, with the bone closest to the hide being worth more points or an automatic win. The holes in the hide would often be worth more points than the bones. A very good attempt may catch multiple bones and the hide as well.

d. Winter Games

While the winter months in Saskatchewan were harsh, it did not stop the Aboriginal people from enjoying themselves. A variety of indoor and outdoor activities were popular.

Many winter activities of the past for children and adults are common to many Saskatchewan residents today. While the majority of the winter games have been grouped in the Adult Games section, most of the non-gambling games were also popular with children. Sliding, snowshoeing, and tobogganing are obvious examples. Early Aboriginal toboggans were made using buffalo ribs or bark.³³

³³ Corbet, Elise A. and Anthony W. Rasporich, Ed. Winter Sports in the West. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990, pp.33.

a. Marbles (Sliding Game)

This game involves the use of marbles made from the rounded tips of buffalo horns. It was generally a women's game using an iced slope or snowbank. Holes in the snow would be made at the bottom of a snow bank, with different points attributed to different holes. The object was to roll the marble down the bank into the highest scoring holes.

b. Snow Snakes

A winter game, Snow Snakes is played with wooden sticks of buffalo or cow ribs, that were shorter for the men and longer for the women. Different wood was used but willow was most common. An iced track was created in the snow, approximately sixty feet long. In some variations loose snowy barriers were also created. In this variation the purpose was to slide or throw the stick, aiming for as much distance as possible, and making it through as many barriers as possible. Another version used a curved track without the barriers as the curves served as the barriers. The snow snake would have to be thrown hard enough for good distance but not so hard as to send it flying off the track. One other version involved bouncing the snow snake off an icy snow bank, trying to slide the snow snake farther than the opponents.

c. Shinny

Shinny, like today, could be a rough team ice sport. Both men and women would play but not together. Much like the hockey sticks of today, the sticks used were curved and larger and/or wider at the curved end. The sticks were used to hit a ball made from a stitched hide stuffed with hair. Often the game was played until the first goal was scored, and without any rest breaks.

2.4 Dances and Powwows

Traditionally ceremonial and secular dances were common. With the change from a mobile life to a stationary one, and government assimilation policies in the last century, Aboriginal dances have been forced through many changes.

The 1885 Rebellion made the Canadian government nervous about large gatherings of aboriginal people. Pat Deiter-McArthur describes one element of government cultural suppression, the pass system that was implemented to prevent large gatherings:

...in the west following the Rebellion of 1885, Indian Affairs officials introduced a pass system. This system was to restrict all Indians to their reserves. No Indian person could leave his reserve without first attaining permission from his Indian agent. If an Indian was found off the reserve without a permit, he would be forcibly taken back to his reserve or jailed. There was no legal sanction to enforce the system; it was based only on agreement made between the Indian agents and the North West Mounted Police. Despite this, the system was

practiced until the late 1930's.³⁴

A revision to the Indian Act in 1906, section 149, effective until 1951, stated in part:

Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating, or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort forms a part, or is a feature...is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months...³⁵

It was also the Indian Act that forced aboriginal children into residential schools to acculturate them in European society, culture and religion.

Since the 1950's, government policy has moved away from the policies of forced assimilation. This has resulted in a surge of cultural revival, including powwows and dances. Gontran Laviolette gives another reason for the revival: "A rise of Indian consciousness appeared in the mid-1950s. One significant factor in this awareness of their racial heritage may have been the population increase. As the population grew social rituals such as pow-wows were organized more frequently."³⁶

Today powwows are held across North America. There are traditional and competitive powwows. The competitive powwows are akin to a sport. Prizes are awarded to the winning dancers and drum groups who travel the 'powwow circuit' honing their skills in different event categories.

While a competitive event, there is still a spiritual aspect as well. The celebrations begin with prayers and a Pipe Ceremony. In the grand entry, veterans are honored and national flags are raised. An elders' prayer, blessing the event, follows this.

The grand entry begins a powwow session. The flags and staff are carried in first by the Flag Bearers, along with honored committee members, elders and veterans. Dancers enter by age and dance style category.

Dances are not complete without music. Drum groups accompany the dance, sitting or standing around the drum. C. Scott Evans and J. Rex Reddick describe the role of the head singer:

³⁴ Deiter-McArthur, Pat, comp. Dances of the Northern Plains. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1987, p.x.

³⁵ An Act Respecting Indians. Section 149 (58-59 v., C.5.6) 1906.

³⁶ Laviolette, Gontran. The Dakota Sioux in Canada. Winnipeg: DLM Communications, 1991, p.294.

One individual is normally designated as the “head singer.” It is his responsibility to run the drum by singing the correct songs at the appropriate time and making sure that each song is sung correctly. He is normally responsible for supplying the physical drum as well as choosing the singers who will accompany him. It is a great honor for a man to be selected for this position, as he will determine the tempo and vitality of the dance. Generally it can be said that if the “drum” is good, the dance is good.³⁷

Traditional social dances include the Grass Dance, Round Dance, and Tea Dance. Dances were often traded or given as gifts. The Grass Dance, a traditional warriors’ dance, was brought to Saskatchewan by the Dakota, who were fleeing the United States at the time. The Round Dance (or Moving Slowly Dance) is both a social dance and a dance to be used in times of sickness. It, like the Grass Dance, is still performed today in powwows as well as a social dance in many communities in winter. David Mandelbaum shares a story of the origin of the dance:

The Moving Slowly dance came from the south. A woman of the Mud House People (one of the village tribes of the Missouri, probably the Mandan) had four adopted children. She made feather bonnets for them and showed them how to dance. She said, “This dance will be all over and everybody will dance in it.” So it is.

They would make a special feather bonnet which was worn by the woman leader of the dance. A different woman would wear the bonnet for each song. That is what I heard when I visited the Rocky Boy Reserve in Montana. The Moving Slowly dance as we do it now (without a bonneted leader) was first danced by the Stoney. This was at the time of the rebellion (1885). They danced four times around and then would capture one of our men. That is how we got it.³⁸

Today, dancers compete in a variety of dance events such as the Men’s Fancy Dance, dancing to the beat of the Grass Dance songs. Another Grass Dance beat dance is the Men’s Traditional, a dance copying the motions of a search for game. The Women’s Fancy and Traditional Dances are also a staple of the powwow. The Women’s Fancy dance is similar to the Men’s but with a slower beat and smaller, more graceful steps. The Women’s Traditional dance is a stationary dance, requiring that the dancers keep time with the music. These dances all have different age categories, with children competing as well. The different dances can be identified by the style of dress worn by the dancers.

³⁷ Evans, C. Scott and J. Rex Reddick, Ed. *The Modern Fancy Dancer*. Pottsboro, Texas: Crazy Crow Trading Post, 1998, p.10.

³⁸ Mandelbaum, David G. *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979, p.215.

C. Scott Evans describes powwow judging by explaining, “The dancers are judged on their dance style, knowledge of the songs, and ability to stop precisely on the last beat of the drum.”³⁹

The last day of a powwow is the time for a give away. This is a traditional ceremony of appreciative gift giving. Finals are also held on the last day, with dancers competing for trophies or cash prizes.

2.5 Storytelling

Storytelling was an important traditional activity. For children the stories told by the adults were very entertaining, especially those involving tricksters and pranks. While being entertained, children were taking in life instruction, myths and morals of their people.

3. CONTEMPORARY LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Today’s leisure activities vary widely. Some traditional leisure activities continue to be played along with all of the new activities currently available to children and adults. The most recognizable area of leisure today is sport. Aboriginal involvement in sport continues to grow. Many recognize sport as an important element in building character. For example, it has been stated that “Sport and recreation have always been a source for self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline for youth. Such activities also mean better health and a chance to travel and to meet new friends.”⁴⁰

3.1 History of Contemporary Leisure

Government and race relations in the past have not always made it easy for Aboriginal people to get involved in sport. After contact with Europeans, Aboriginal people were confronted with barriers to participation in sport and games, primarily because of the federal government’s treaty and reserve policies. Miller states “the treaty process was part of the creation of reserves and the isolation of Aboriginal people. This affected our overall participation in society. It also created geographical, cultural and a class system of obstacles to our participation in sport, recreation and leisure within Canada.”⁴¹

Over time First Nations communities have adopted the sports and games of the Europeans. With

³⁹ Evans, C. Scott. *The Northern Traditional Dancer*. Denison, Texas: Crazy Crow Trading Post, 1990, p.5.

⁴⁰ MuskegLake.com. <<http://www.muskeglake.com>>.

⁴¹ Miller, Bruce. *Our Original Games: A Look at Aboriginal Sport in Canada*. Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2002, p.30.

the residential school system Aboriginal children were assimilated and acculturated into Euro-Canadian society, picking up its games and sport while distancing themselves from their Aboriginal games and sport. Miller describes the reception early Aboriginal athletes received “aboriginal athletes were subjected to social and racial discrimination. For example, early snowshoe events were held with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal competitions in different categories, essentially divided by race through informal policy of racial discrimination.”⁴²

At the same time as Aboriginal people were introduced to Euro-Canadian games the Europeans were also picking up Aboriginal games or elements of them. As Elise Corbet and Anthony Rasporich explain, it was not until very recently that forms of recreation were shared:

During the initial contact period there was extensive cultural transferal from Native to European culture and vice versa, but it is important to note that this was not the case in the area of leisure and recreation. Indian games, sport, music, dancing and other pastimes remained almost exclusively the cultural property of Indians until well into the nineteenth century, nor did they borrow much from the Europeans.⁴³

Whether Aboriginal or contemporary leisure and sport the activities were and continue to be an important part of a complete person. Miller echoes this by stating, “the purpose and orientation of Aboriginal sport training is based on the mind, body, and spirit. This holistic view prepares the individual for many journeys in life (not just the journey of sport), and it points to the commitment that the athlete will be contributing to the community.”⁴⁴

3.2 Women and Sports

Female involvement in sport has continued to grow in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population. Even with this growth, it has been hampered according to Miller because “The position of power in early colonial times favoured the men. Men largely determined Aboriginal women’s access to, and involvement in, sporting and recreational resources and activities. This is reflective of how little involvement Aboriginal women have in modern sports.”⁴⁵

While women may have had a harder time being involved in sport and recreation they have managed to become involved over time. As an example, women have been involved in baseball for quite some time. In the early days, teams would often not have uniforms and would have to

⁴² Ibid, p.31.

⁴³ Corbet, Elise A. and Anthony W. Rasporich, Ed. Winter Sports in the West. Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990, pp.14-15.

⁴⁴ Miller, Bruce. Our Original Games: A Look at Aboriginal Sport in Canada. Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2002, p.48.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.34.

raise their own tournament entry fees. In the late 1970's and early 1980's Muskeg Lake had two fastball teams, both lasting for about three seasons each. Since that time Muskeg Lake First Nation has formed another ladies' team, the Aldina Angels. The Mistawasis Blue Jays, Mistawasis First Nations' ladies' fastball team, lasted for four years. In 1981 the team placed third in the Canadian championships in Nanaimo, British Columbia.⁴⁶

3.3 Saskatchewan Aboriginal Sports Today

The twentieth century has seen the Aboriginal population adopt European sports, slowly at first but with growing enthusiasm. Today, Saskatchewan Aboriginal athletes can be found in any imaginable sport.

Soccer as an example has been played in Saskatchewan for many years. In Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart's collections of women's stories, Alpha Lafond recalled soccer being played regularly at Muskeg Lake First Nation when she was a child.⁴⁷

Another example not normally associated with Aboriginal athletes is fencing. Jamie and Kent Witchekan, brother and sister, are prime examples of Aboriginal youth involved in a non-traditional sport. At the 2002 Saskatchewan Provincial Fencing Championships Jamie, age 13, won the Under 17 Women's Epee and her brother Kent, age 14, won the Under 17 Men's Saber event. Jamie also won a Silver and a Bronze in other events and Kent won Bronze in another event. The brother and sister have also won medals at the Calgary Open Fencing Championships. Their success to date has given them an opportunity to be included on the Under 17 National Team in 2003.⁴⁸

Judo is another sport not necessarily associated with Aboriginal athletes. Aaron McNab of Gordon's First Nation was the first person from Saskatchewan to ever win a gold medal at the Canadian Judo Championships. Aaron, sixteen at the time, won his blue belt medal in June 1988 in Edmonston, New Brunswick.⁴⁹

Saskatchewan Aboriginal involvement in sport is probably best known in two areas: hockey and rodeo.

3.3.1 Hockey

Hockey has long been a popular sport among Saskatchewan residents, including the First Nations

⁴⁶ MuskegLake.com. <<http://www.muskeglake.com>>.

⁴⁷ Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart, Ed. and Trans. *Kôhkominawak Otâcimowiniwâwa = Our Grandmothers' Lives, As Told in Their Own Words*. Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1992, p.245.

⁴⁸ "Sister and Brother Duel on New Grounds," *Saskatchewan Indian*, Spring 2002, Volume 32, Number 2. p.18.

⁴⁹ "Gordon Youth Captures Gold at Canadian Judo Championships," *Saskatchewan Indian*, June 1988. p.34.

people. Many First Nations children were first exposed to hockey through the residential school system. John PeeAce recounts his school hockey experience at the Lestock Indian Residential School in 1965 at the age of eleven:

... played peewee hockey with the school team. We played in a league with the surrounding communities of Kelliher, Ituna, Punnichy, Gordon's Reserve, Lestock and Poorman's Reserve. We travelled by school bus. Ordinarily we would put our hockey equipment on right after school and hop on the bus to get to the games.⁵⁰

John's team went on to win the league championship and finished second in the provincial playoffs in Estevan.

Equipment in the early days was a collection of what the player could gather:

"In the old days, the equipment that was used was what they could afford or make on their own. A new pair of skates would cost six dollars, and used ones would sell for two dollars. Players used to get a shoemaker to make shin pads out of canvas, felt and sticks. Jackets were used for their jerseys, elbow pads were made or purchased, and shoulder pads were used if they could afford them. Some players had gloves but those that didn't used outdoor working gloves."⁵¹

Saskatchewan has produced many talented Aboriginal hockey players. Some of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal NHL players have included Blair Atcheynum, Rich Pilon, Wade Redden, Joey Teterenko, Brian Trottier, and of course Fred Sasakamoose.

Fred Sasakamoose is famous for being the first Treaty Status Indian in the NHL. Fred played eleven games as a Chicago Black Hawk in 1954, but his contribution, exposing the NHL to the untapped Aboriginal talent, was invaluable. For would-be Aboriginal hockey stars, the Native Role Models Camp is a place to meet successful hockey players and learn from them.⁵²

3.3.2 Rodeo

With the coming of the government reserve policy and the disappearance of the buffalo, the Aboriginal population was forced into a change of life. Government policy in the 1880's encouraged agriculture among the Aboriginal population. While mostly successful, some of the Aboriginal population resisted and were able to convince the federal government in the mid

⁵⁰ PeeAce, John. "We Almost Won." In: And They Told Us Their Stories. Jack Funk, Editor. Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991, p.68.

⁵¹ MuskegLake.com. <<http://www.muskeglake.com>>.

⁵² Miller, Bruce. Our Original Games: A Look at Aboriginal Sport in Canada. Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2002, p.43.

1890's that ranching was more akin to their traditional life. Some aboriginal people worked on the ranches of the European settlers. Skilled with animals, especially in the training of horses, ranching was a perfect fit for some Aboriginals of the time.⁵³

Some other aboriginal people learned their ranching skills in the European education system. Shirley Bear, speaking on her father's education at the File Hills Boarding School, said:

My Dad learned how to be a good cowboy. He had no intention of being a cowboy but he had no choice. The story goes like this. This boarding school was like a big farm. They had horses and cattle there. My Dad went to school there when he was twelve years old. Students attended school until they were eighteen or nineteen in those days. So there were a lot of boys older than my Dad. The older boys made the younger boys ride the animals whether they wanted to or not. This is how he got the practice he needed to become a good rodeo cowboy.

When I was a kid, I used to be so proud when he would take first prize in bull riding.⁵⁴

As a lifestyle ranching brought about new forms of sport and entertainment tied to the daily life of ranching. Rodeo skills began as simple contests by those working on ranches. The first recorded rodeo was at Fort McLeod in 1891, but no Aboriginals were involved. As time went on, Aboriginals became more involved in rodeos. These early Aboriginal cowboys were talented, but were often confronted by discrimination.⁵⁵

Up until the 1940's, many western cities (e.g., Regina) would hold 'Indian Days', including Regina. These organized events would have the mainstream population come out to see the event, which was something like a Wild West Show. The Aboriginal population soon realized that they wanted to put on their own events, for themselves, and the 'Indian Days' soon disappeared.⁵⁶

Jimmy Myo, reflecting on rodeos on his reserve in earlier days stated, "Back on my reserve we use to have a rodeo grounds young men would ride. And a lot of white kids would come and train there and many of the young Indian guys would just start and they were just natural born good riders."⁵⁷

⁵³ Cuthand, Doug, writer and director. "The Gift of the Grandfathers" [Videocassette]. Montreal, Quebec: Blue Hills Productions/National Film Board of Canada, 1997.

⁵⁴ Bear, Shirley. "He Didn't Intent to be a Cowboy." In: And They Told Us Their Stories. Jack Funk, Editor. Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991, p.54.

⁵⁵ Cuthand, Doug, writer and director. "The Gift of the Grandfathers" [Videocassette]. Montreal, Quebec: Blue Hills Productions/National Film Board of Canada, 1997.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 1997.

⁵⁷ Elder Jimmy Myo, WDM Transcripts for Leisure, SICCC, June 2002, tape 5, side 1.

As Aboriginal cowboys faced prejudice in the mainstream rodeos, an eventual move in the 1960's to all-Aboriginal rodeos began. Salt Lake City, Utah was the site of the first world Indian rodeo finals in 1975, or the Indian National Finals Rodeo. In 1997, the National Finals Rodeo was held outside the United States for the first time. This Indian National Finals Rodeo was held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Aboriginal cowboys and rodeos continue to be a prominent part of the Saskatchewan summer.

3.3.3 Saskatchewan Indian Summer Games and Winter Games

The Saskatchewan Indian Summer and Winter Games are yearly events allowing Aboriginal youth from Saskatchewan the opportunity to get involved in sport, recreation and culture. They provide a chance for young athletes to travel, meet and compete with other Saskatchewan youth. The games also provide a training ground for those that are interested in competing in the North American Indigenous Games.

3.3.4 The North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) and Team Saskatchewan

The North American Indigenous Games was created as a way to encourage Aboriginal participation in 'mainstream' North American sport. Youth from across North America participate in the Games, exposing them to fitness, travel, culture and meeting new friends.

Events at the games have included archery, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, canoeing, fastball, golf, lacrosse, marathons, rifle shooting, rodeo, soccer, softball, swimming, track and field, volleyball, and wrestling.

Cultural groups and events also provide a link to Aboriginal culture, providing a look at Indigenous cultures from across North America and throughout world. Such events include powwows, throat singing, square dancing, spiritual ceremonies, traditional sports and Elders sharing their wisdom to the young athletes.

First North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), Edmonton, Alberta, 1990.

The first NAIG had approximately 3000 young athletes and nearly forty cultural groups from across Canada and the United States. Team Saskatchewan was the overall winner of the first North American Indigenous Games.

Second North American Indigenous Games, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, July 18-24, 1993.

Saskatchewan was the host of the second NAIG in Prince Albert in 1993. Roughly 4,400 athletes and several hundred coaches and support people participated in the second Games. Eugene Arcand, the Team Saskatchewan head coach in 1990, was now the Games chairman. All

ten Canadian provinces and two territories were represented at the games and along with U.S. teams from Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, South Dakota, and Washington. For the second time Team Saskatchewan came away with the overall championship, with Alberta following closely behind.

Third North American Indigenous Games, Blaine, Minnesota, July 29-August 6, 1995.

The third North American Indigenous Games were held in the United States for the first time. Nine provinces and twenty-six states participated in the third NAIG, with a total of 11,000 participants. Team Saskatchewan was again the overall champion of the games.

Fourth North American Indigenous Games, Victoria, British Columbia, August 3-10, 1997.

For the fourth time, Team Saskatchewan was the overall winner of the event. They collected 101 gold medals, 105 silver medals and 92 bronze medals, for a total of 2977 points. British Columbia was the second place team with 119 gold, 68 silver and 56 bronze medals, totaling 2507 points. Australia and New Zealand participated in the fourth Games, along with nine provinces and seventeen states. There were over eight thousand participants in all.

Lorna Arcand was chef de mission for Team Saskatchewan at the fourth games. She sees Saskatchewan's Aboriginal sports programming as the reason for Saskatchewan's continued strong showing at the Games:

Creating healthy alternative activities for youth is one of the main focuses of the Saskatchewan Indian Sport, Culture and Recreation Commission. [Lorna] Arcand believes that the strong sports program, including the annual Saskatchewan Indian Summer and Winter Games, is part of the reason why Saskatchewan has won every Overall Championship at NAIG since its inception in 1990.⁵⁸

Just a few of the notable athletes at the games include: Jesse Laframboise who won gold in Intermediate Open Boxing and has won other boxing competitions around the world; Janna Pratt from the Gordon First Nation won gold in Juvenile Female Wrestling and recently won the Canadian Women's title; and Lac La Ronge Cree Nation's Tom Charles who won every one of the six canoeing competitions he entered. Charles said "canoeing gives him discipline, keeps him motivated and gives him a positive outlook on life."⁵⁹

Fifth North American Indigenous Games, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 25-August 4, 2002.

For the first time Team Saskatchewan was not the overall winner of the Games. The honor went to the host team, Manitoba. Ten thousand athletes, officials and cultural performers participated

⁵⁸ "Team Saskatchewan Wins Fourth NAIG Title," **Saskatchewan Indian**, October 1997, Volume 27, Number 3, p.11.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.12.

in the event.

While on the topic of the North American Indigenous Games, it is timely to discuss contributions from involvement in sport. While the athletes may gain all the glory, there are supporters, organizers and promoters of all kinds of sport. These people see the positive effects on youth that involvement in sports provides. One example of such a person is Eugene Arcand of Muskeg Lake First Nation.

Eugene Arcand has contributed much to sport, recreation and culture in Saskatchewan. Also an athlete, Arcand's most important contributions to sport have been as an organizer and promoter of Aboriginal sport and recreation in Saskatchewan. Below are just a few of his long list of achievements (in the area of sport) from Muskeg Lake.com:

1990: Coordinator of Saskatchewan Indigenous Games, Saskatoon.

1984-1990: Co-Founder and coordinator of Prince Albert Aboriginal Hockey Tournament, one of the premier events in Saskatchewan.

Chef Des Mission of 1990 Team Saskatchewan, winners of the overall Gold Medal at the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), Edmonton, Alberta.

Major contributor in the revival of the Prince Albert Pow-Wow.

1993: NAIG Chairman, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

1993-: Saskatchewan Indian Sports, Culture and Recreation Commission Chairman.

1994: Saskatchewan Indian Sports Hall of Fame Committee Chairman, responsible for the opening of the Saskatchewan First Nations Sports Hall of Fame.

1995: On the NAIG 1995 Board of Directors, past Chairman of NAIG 1993.

1995: coach for Team Saskatchewan that wins third overall gold at the NAIG in Minnesota.

1996: Received Recognition Award for sports development in the Aboriginal community by the Aboriginal Sports & Recreation Association of British Columbia

1996: Secured the Indian National Finals Rodeo for Saskatoon, the first time this event was ever hosted outside the United States.

1997: coach for Team Saskatchewan at 1997 NAIG in Victoria, British Columbia where team won fourth consecutive overall gold.⁶⁰

3.3.5 Olympics

One of the most well known Saskatchewan athletes was Alex Wuttunee Decoteau, one of Saskatchewan's Olympic athletes. Alex Decoteau was born on the Red Pheasant First Nation in December 1887. Alex was a talented middle and long distance runner. He set a new western

⁶⁰ MuskegLake.com. <<http://www.muskeglake.com>>.

Canadian record in a five mile race in Lloydminster on July 1, 1909. In 1910, on December 25, Alex set another record in the Calgary Herald's Annual 6 1/3 mile race.

The highlight of Decoteau's career came in 1912. He was selected as a member of Canada's Olympic team in Stockholm, Sweden. Born in Saskatchewan and living in Alberta, Alex was the only athlete selected for the team from either province. Suffering from leg cramps, he ended the 5,000-metre race in sixth place.

After returning, Decoteau continued to win almost every race he entered and continued setting records. In 1916, Alex Decoteau joined the armed forces and on October 30, 1917, at the age of thirty, was killed in action in France.

Alex Decoteau has been recognized for his achievements by being inducted to the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame, and Saskatchewan First Nations Sports Hall of Fame.⁶¹

3.3.6 Saskatchewan First Nations Sports Hall of Fame

The hall of fame was first proposed in 1993 as a place to showcase recreation and sports in the First Nations community. The Saskatchewan Indian Sports, Culture and Recreation Commission, mandated by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Legislative Assembly, worked towards the creation of the hall. On July 14, 1994, the Hall of Fame was officially opened in the Sutherland area of Saskatoon.⁶²

The first five inductees to be honored were Paul Acoose, Art Obey, Alex Wuttunee Decoteau, David Greyyes Steele, and Fred Sasakamoose.⁶³

The second ceremony to honor new inductees was held in Yorkton on August 26, 1997. The inductees were Victor Machiskinic, Herb Strongeagle and Lawrence Weenie.⁶⁴

4. CONCLUSION

Overcoming the circumstances of history, today's youth are coming closer to the balanced life of their ancestors. I think Bruce Miller summed up modern Aboriginal athletics well when saying,

⁶¹ Prairie Gold: Sports Heroes From Saskatchewan.

<<http://www.publib.saskatoon.sk.ca/sports/pages/welcome.html>>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Legends Live On," **Saskatchewan Indian**, July-August 1994, Volume 23, Number 6, p.11.

⁶⁴ "Individuals' Contributions to Sport Recognized," **Saskatchewan Indian**, Winter 1997, Volume 27, Number 4, p.33.

As people come together in large events such as the North American Indigenous Games or the Arctic Winter Games, we are celebrating the modern *affirmation* of our culture, which gives meaning and direction to our forms of games and activities. Such activities drive home the importance of health and refreshment of spirit to the individual, community and society.⁶⁵

Once again youth are strengthening the physical aspect of their lives, whether it be on a personal basis or through an organized sport. Organized Aboriginal sport goes even further, in reinforcing the importance of the spiritual and cultural elements, while participating in the physical activities. These activities can only help in achieving a balanced life for the Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan.

⁶⁵ Miller, Bruce. Our Original Games: A Look at Aboriginal Sport in Canada. Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2002, p.57.

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