Part 3

Being active, means learning about our culture!

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FIRST NATIONS TRADITIONAL GAMES

For First Nations, games were played more than for just simple pleasure. A large number of First Nations games had useful purposes, which are related to day-to-day survival (wrestling, archery, javelin throwing, running or canoeing) whereas others had a spiritual element, like dance or lacrosse. They allowed young people to develop the techniques and qualities of a good hunter or a committed warrior. Games could last for a very long time and be very rough.

Lacrosse

During the summer, lacrosse was played by a number of Nations, including the Huron, the Mohawk and the Plains Cree.

In the past, a game of lacrosse was contested between two villages. Each village chose its players according to their qualities and strengths. It was not unusual for there to be mass brawls between the players of opposing teams.

Today, lacrosse is played on a rectangular pitch measuring 100 metres by fifty metres. Two teams of roughly equal strength meet to contest the game. Each team consists of five players, including a goalkeeper, two backs and two forwards. Each player carries a two-foot stick with a U-shaped end with a net on it. The aim of the game is to propel the ball between the posts of the opposing team’s goal. Players pass the ball using their sticks as they try to score. The team that scores the most goals wins the game. Players may only touch the ball with their sticks.

Snowsnake

The Plains Cree, Ojibway, Sioux and other First Nations played the game of snowsnake during the winter.

The game involved propelling a round stick with a length of anything from two to four metres. It had a rounded tip, like that of a ski tip. This was known as the “snake”. The two teams dug a two-kilometre long course for the snake to follow in the snow, making sure that they piled up the excess snow on the sides to stop the snowsnake from leaving the course. Each player then took turns to send his snowsnake down the course, the aim simply being to send it as far as possible. The player who sent his snowsnake the furthest was the winner. It was not unknown for a player to send his snowsnake the whole two kilometres down the course - a genuine exploit! The snowsnake was propelled by pushing with the index finger on one end of the snowsnake while the other hand steadied it. The action involved was something like that of the tenpin bowler.
Shinny (ball game)

The Plains Cree played this game during the winter.

The game was played on the ice. Two equally matched teams contested a match, played with sticks with rounded ends like hockey sticks and a ball made with two leather circles, sewn together and filled with fur. The purpose of the game was to score in the opposing goal by hitting the ball with the stick. Players were only allowed to touch the ball with their sticks, otherwise the ball was given to the opposing team. No contact was allowed during the game, which ended when the predetermined number of goals had been scored by one of the two teams. The game was very similar to hockey.

Doubleball

Cree men and women played this game during the summer.

Doubleball was played between evenly matched teams on pitches up to one mile long. Players passed two balls connected by a piece of leather with their round-ended sticks. The game involved hitting the opposing team’s post with the two balls before the opposing team touched it. The game was a very physical one and was especially popular among women and girls.

Longball

Longball was played by the Plains Cree and other Nations related to them.

Two evenly matched teams contested the game on as flat a pitch as possible. Equipment consisted of a bat and a ball. The team that was batting stood behind the start/finish line and nominated a hitter. The other team stood between the safety zone and the start/finish line and nominated a pitcher. All the hitter’s teammates then waited behind the start line, while the pitcher’s team took up position between the start/finish line and the safety zone. A marker checked on which players successfully made it back to the finish line and a referee controlled the safety zone. The game then began and the aim was to hit the ball towards the opposing team, upon which the hitter’s teammates all ran to a predetermined line and back, trying not to get hit with the ball. The other players from the opposing team had to catch the ball and tried to hit at least three players with it before they could get back to the hitter. If they managed to do this, the two teams changed sides. One point was scored for every player who managed to get back to the line where the hitter was standing.
Archery

In the past, First Nations made both bow and arrows out of wood and used them for hunting to support their families with. Young hunters also had their bow and arrows and practiced shooting at three dimensional targets or at hares.

There are three main models of bow - the self-bow, which is straight and made of wood, the reinforced bow, to which sinew is added to make it more flexible and stronger and the composite bow.

Today, archery has become a sporting event that forms part of the summer Olympics as well as many national and international competitions. The bow and the arrows are made with several kinds of material such as wood, aluminum and composite.

The canoe and the kayak

Before the Europeans arrived, First Nations relied a great deal on the canoe and the kayak for travel and general survival and later on for the fur trade.

The type of boat used is indicative of its region of origin. The kayak comes from the North, the sea canoe from the west coast and the birch bark canoe from the Great Lakes and rivers. The material available and local conditions also influenced the form of the boat. Strength and speed were the necessary qualities for the paddlers during competitions and on long journeys. It was even possible to recognize the specific region that the boat came from by looking at the profile of its stern and bow.

In 1984, a Mohawk called Alwyn Morris won two Olympic medals in the two-man kayak event (gold and bronze).

The kayak was a symbol of a cultural link with earth and water. In general terms, and wherever it came from, the kayak was built with a wooden hull, covered with seal or caribou skins. The whole community was involved in making the kayak. The women sewed the sealskins together using waterproofed leather and the men stretched them out over the hull of the new kayak.

The sea canoe was approximately fifty-three feet long and was cut out of a red cedar trunk on the west coast. The Salish used them for their sea canoe regattas and up to ten paddlers could be seated inside them.
The birch bark canoe was found in the centre and the Southeast of Canada and the Northeast of the United States. Birch bark covered the hull of the boat and the pieces were sewn together using strands of pine roots. Waterproofing was achieved by using spruce gum. First Nations preferred to use birch bark because it was light and its surface was smooth, so making it able to glide over the water. Birch bark was also strong and waterproof.

The Micmac made a canoe with a port and stern that were raised in the middle and they used it to sail on the high seas as well as on deep rivers and lakes. They also used the birch bark that was found locally.

Today, the canoe and kayak are used for outdoor activities by the young and the not-so-young all over the world where there are frequent lakes and rivers. The same lines and forms found in First Nations canoes can be found today in boating stores. First Nations have made an important contribution to the development of the canoe and the kayak in Europe and the rest of the world.

**DISCOVER FIRST NATIONS ATHLETES**

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***Alwyn Morris***

**Kayak**

Alwyn Morris is a member of the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, near Montréal. He came to international fame as a world-class kayaker in the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles when he won a gold medal in the 1,000-metre two-man race and the bronze medal in the 500-metre two-man race. Morris raised an eagle feather for the First Nations people of Canada upon receiving his medal. He was subsequently appointed Ambassador of Youth for Canada and named to the Order of Canada.

Morris studied history and archaeology before taking on the demanding training to become a world-class kayaker. He decided to retire from competition and work with troubled First Nations youth, because he had been profoundly moved by the unhappy situation of some young people he had seen on reserves in British Columbia. Because he had always known exactly what he wanted to do, Morris was greatly troubled to realize that some First Nations youth had very little self-respect or self-awareness. For the next 10 years, he crossed the country, introducing and promoting educational initiatives and prevention programs against drug and alcohol abuse. His accomplishments today, after 14 years of work and dedication, are extraordinary.
One of his first successes was the *National Aboriginal Coaching Leadership Program*, and he also became the national spokesperson for the *Parents Resource Institute on Drug Education* (PRIDE). He helped create the *Alwyn Morris Educational and Athletic Foundation* to provide young people with more opportunities. Morris is President of the organization to this day.

**Tom Longboat**

**Longdistance running**

Born in 1887, marathon runner Tom Longboat was an Onondaga who set the course record when he won the Boston Marathon in 1907.

His time included running the last mile in an amazing four minutes and 46 seconds. His overall time for the marathon was two hours 24 minutes and 24 seconds - nearly five minutes faster than the previous best time! His nickname was the Bronze Mercury. Longboat's name was added to the Canadian Indian Hall of Fame. He retired from distance running and competitions in 1912 and died in 1949.

Today, the Akwesasne Mohawk School in southern Ontario holds an annual long-distance race in honour of Tom Longboat.

**Waneek Horn-Miller**

**Water-polo**

Waneek Horn-Miller is a member of the Kahnawake Mohawk Nation located near the city of Montréal, Quebec. She is an exceptional athlete and participated in the Sydney 2000 Olympics as co-captain of Canada's national women's water polo team. Waneek started swimming competitively at the age of seven and competed until 1997, winning many championships and gold medals.

In 1989, while in high school in Ottawa, Waneek began playing water polo - she was a natural. Waneek's water polo career hit the heights when she won the gold medal with the Canadian team at the 1999 Pan-Am games.

These games were extremely successful for Waneek as the team went undefeated and she scored three of the goals in the gold medal game, helping to defeat the U.S. 8-6. She is considered to be one of the best water polo players in the world.
There is a strong history of athleticism in Waneek's family. Her grandmother was selected for the 1928 Olympic games with the track and field team, but unfortunately she was kept home due to a heart murmur.

Waneek graduated from Carleton University in 1999 with a degree in political science. During her time at Carleton, she won Female Athlete of the Year award three times. Waneek has played on many national all-star teams and won 20 gold medals at the North American Indigenous Games between 1990 and 1997.

In addition to sport, Waneek is involved in a variety of other activities, including a position as part-time television host with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). She was also present at the Oka crisis during the summer of 1990. Waneek’s mother brought both Waneek and her sister to protest the proposed expansion of a golf course over territory that Mohawks claimed as their own. Her Oka experience initially left her angry and confused. She tried very hard not to become bitter and prejudiced against the Canadian government, the army, and others who did not support the Mohawk fight at Oka. Eventually Waneek realized that being angry all of the time is no way to go through life. She made an effort to deal with her anger about the treatment of First Nations people in Canada. She became a much more positive person, and now tries to see the good in everyone.

As a high profile Olympic athlete, Waneek recognizes her position as a role model for all kids across the country. She states: “I hope that they see that it's possible to achieve your dreams and go the whole (way) in whatever you decide to do, whether it's sport or anything else - and to live a healthy lifestyle." Waneek has received much praise from First Nations groups across Canada for her incredible contribution to the positive image of First Nations in Canada.

Brian Trottier
Hockey

Born to a Cree/Chippewa father in Val Marie, Saskatchewan, Brian Trottier was the 22nd pick in the 1974 National Hockey League (NHL) draft. He and his team, the New York Islanders, won the Stanley Cup four years in a row, beginning in 1980. Throughout his 18 seasons with the NHL, “Number 19” enjoyed a reputation as a tough player with formidable scoring ability. Many fans consider him one of the greatest players ever in the NHL.

Trottier played his first professional game aged 17 and won the NHL's "Rookie of the Year" award. He later won the Hart Trophy (Most Valuable Player) and, in 1980, the Conn Smythe Trophy (Most Valuable Player in the Stanley Cup Playoffs). He stands eighth on the list of all-time NHL scorers.
His statistics are amazing. He played 1,279 games, scored 524 goals, had 901 career assists, for 1,425 total points and a total of 912 minutes in penalties. His personal scoring records include the greatest number of goals by a player in a game, the highest number of games by a player in a career, the greatest number of points by a player in a game and the greatest number of points by a rookie in a single season. Playing as an offensive forward, Trottier led the Islanders to win four Stanley Cups from 1980 to 1983, and then two more while playing with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Trottier worked as an assistant coach for the Pittsburgh Penguins after his retirement in 1994. He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame, and recently received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his contribution to professional hockey. He hopes to become an NHL head coach.


David Gill
Track and field

“In life there are talkers and doers. I hope that I can be one of the people to encourage young people to stop talking and to start doing.”

David Gill is a member of the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh. He has made his mark in track and field and specializes in the 800m.

Since the beginning of his career in 1997, David has been lucky enough to practice his passion all over the world, from Quebec to Hawaii and Australia and including the largest cities in Europe. His determination and motivation have enabled him to climb the performance ladder slowly but surely until finding the place where he belongs. As a member of Team Canada, David has had the opportunity to represent his country at some of the biggest competitions in the world. Every minute spent training is driven by his ultimate dream - the Olympic Games.

David really harvested the fruit of his labours as a student athlete. Throughout his university career (when he represented the Université Laval Rouge et Or) he collected an impressive number of honours. These included the title of Canadian Track Athlete of the Year in 2005 and 2006 as well as overall Rouge et Or Athlete of the Year in 2005. He was also awarded the National Assembly Medal.

In addition to his current status as a top athlete, David carries proudly with him the heritage of the First Nations. The fact that he is from an Aboriginal background has meant he has benefitted from constant support and his dearest wish is to give back some of the support on which he has been able to count that has allowed him to get where he is today. This is why he began a series of conferences, designed for First Nations youth, so that he could share some of his experience with them. Through his presentation “Dreams and Hard Work” he attempts to motivate young people to pursue their dreams. Over 3,000 people saw the conference in 2005, which is aimed at giving young people the tools they need to structure their objectives in order to achieve their goals.
Angela Chalmers
Track and field

Angela Chalmers is a former Canadian 1,500m and 3,000m runner, born in Manitoba and member of the Birdtail Sioux First Nation. In her youth, Angela showed an interest in a variety of different activities. She took ballet and piano lessons, loved reading and did a lot of running.

In 1992, Angela won the bronze medal at the Barcelona summer Olympic Games in Spain. In 1990, she had already taken two titles in the Commonwealth Games, the 1,500m and the 3,000m, in record time in Auckland, New Zealand. Four years later, in Victoria, Canada, she failed to win the 1,500m, but successfully defended her title over 3,000m in a new personal best of 8:32.17, which ranked her third in the world for 1994. She remains the only woman in the history of the Commonwealth Games to defend the 3,000m title.

Ted Nolan
Hockey

Ted Nolan was born in 1958, on the Garden River reserve in Northwestern Ontario. He was the third youngest in a family of 12 children, living in a house without running water or electricity, but nonetheless grew up strong and proud of his Anishinabek heritage. Ted played three years in the NHL for the Detroit Red Wings and the Pittsburgh Penguins. He was also coach of the Buffalo Sabres for two seasons after having spent a season as assistant coach of the Hartford Whalers. He has been head coach of the New York Islanders since 2006.

Ted has learned to follow his vision. He believes that pride, strength and the desire to dream are the foundations of this vision and the keys to success.