



Indigenous Ball Games

Pokón Iihtá'paisskootsiyo'p

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Many of the games that are played today come from traditional Indigenous games. Games like soccer, basketball, shinney or hockey, and kickball (Little Mustache, 2023).

There were many variations of ball games for ball racing over the prairies. Because there are many gopher holes, a tail was and is still often attached to be able to retrieve balls after falling through holes (Wilson, 2020).



In the past, ball games consisted of various activities using a ball that was usually made of stuffed buckskin; some were wooden, or made from bladder, cordage, bone, or sinew (Stewart, 1992). Unless the game rules included the use of hands, touching the ball with hands in any ball game was a strictly forbidden rule (Stewart, 1992).

The ball race was popular among the Southwest tribes and consisted of players kicking or tossing balls with their feet around a circuit that comes back to the beginning. Some tribes would set up two posts at the end of the track with relay stations along the track for additional players to aid in moving the ball along for their team. Similar to soccer today, the goal was to kick the ball between the two posts and winners were the first ones through the posts. As with many contests of games, there would be stakeholders and bets placed on teams. A medicine man would accompany the team with advice for food and water consumption (Stewart, 1992).



The overhead ball throw, or sling ball, requires players to pinch the ball between the large toe of each foot while sitting on the ground. Each player would have to roll back, swing their legs up over their heads with the ball between their toes and throw it as far as they could.



The one who could throw it the farthest was the winner. (Little Mustache, 2023).



Some ball games used rackets, such as in lacrosse. This is generally a game men played, but many tribes included women's games as well as, co-ed games. Balls were often juggled and players practiced handling them with sticks to enhance skills (Stewart, 1992).

Double ball

The ball is made up of two oblong balls made from buckskin and stuffed with buffalo hair or deer hair that are connected by a long thong. Players try to ring the double ball with their sticks.

Traditionally, double ball was called the "Throwing Game" by women who try to throw the ball around their opponents' pole. The poles are placed at opposite ends of the playing field. Two teams start at each end of the field with each player holding a long stick. At the whistle, players run for the double ball placed in the middle of the field and runs to sling it around the pole (High Five, 2020).

In Indigenous culture, adults held the responsibility of hunting, fishing, and procuring various foods for their clans, while children would play games every day to develop their skills for these upcoming responsibilities. Children also learn skills of balance, motor and cognitive coordination, agility, reflexes, and patience while playing various games. These skills were mastered to become a reliable provider for community roles (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2019).

References

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Ball games enables young people to design, create or invent their own games. This form of learning is viewed as a self-organizing process that is emergent and adaptive to different conditions (Mermert, et., al., 2015).

- ♦ *Ball racing, such as in kick ball, requires cognitive abilities of sustained attention, cognitive flexibility and judgements based on a continuation of activity requiring players to coordinate their kicks with the ball, monitor their progress with the ball and update their actions accordingly. It also involves good running skills that strengthen stamina and endurance while developing anticipation of movement in players prepares them for competitions in a dynamic environment (Markis & Igesi, 2015).*
- ♦ *The over-the-head ball throw requires learning finer motor skills of placing enough tension on the ball while the body is in a curling over motion. A timely release of the ball with as much force as possible strengthens executive functions of action monitoring, and inhibition of impulses to throw the ball before an optimal time. Self-awareness and perceptions of sensory signals with body motion strengthens agility and balance that facilitates improved motor learning (Ossmy & Mukamel, 2018).*
- ♦ *Games such as double-ball and lacrosse require players to develop dual attention. Firstly, visual search is highlighted while players attend to the target, or goal. The second, attention and focus of specialized whole body movements with sensory feedback that are necessary for optimal balance control and a successful goal (Marsh, Richard, Verre, & Myers, 2010).*

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