

# Traditional Indigenous games incorporated into SASG line-up

BY RY CLARKE - LETHBRIDGE HERALD LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER ON JULY 16, 2022.



Herald photo by Ry Clark Marry Ellen Little Mustache teaches participants Indigenous games at Indian Battle Park Wednesday evening to start off of Southern Alberta Recreation Association's Regional Southern Alberta Summer Games.

Southern Alberta Recreation Association offered residents a chance to participate in traditional Indigenous games Wednesday evening at Indian Battle Park, part of its regional Southern Alberta Summer Games (SASG).

Traditional games like Make the Stick Jump and Rock in Fist were taught by Piikani First Nation member Mary Ellen Little Mustache, teaching attendants of the importance of tradition and value of skills learned through play.

To Little Mustache, the games were taught to her through heritage and the importance of sharing through the generations keeping traditions alive, saying "I have a few of those games here today. But there's just so many games so I just scratched the surface."

Participants had a blast playing Make the Stick Jump, where they would line up and try to throw a ball at a stick planted in the ground making it 'jump' out of its spot, learning skills like attention and accuracy while also trying to improve with each turn.

Building Brains Together was present at the games, offering participants a chance to see how learning through play is fundamental for child development and encourages more than meets the eye.

Celeste Halliwell, Indigenous Games Coordinator with Building Brains Together, said "We're working with parents and caregivers, trying to get them to play more games more often with their kids" which emphasizes the importance of playing with children to help develop hands on skills.

“The idea behind it was just by playing more games, especially with your kids, helps strengthen and build a stronger foundation in their brain and better prepares them for school.”

The Regional Southern Alberta Summer Games is a five-day event highlighting the benefits of sports and recreation to help develop healthy and active individuals and communities. Wrapping up on Monday with boulder-style climbing on July 17, registration is still open for those looking to participate in activities like pickleball, disc golf, and horseshoes.

Shawn Daye-Finley, program and event coordinator, said “We run the Southern Alberta Summer Games annually, and this year it couldn’t happen due to COVID. It was postponed and then it was cancelled. So, what we did is we put together a number of events. We picked some more interesting, unconventional, type of events.”

Starting the event off with Indigenous games was important for SARA, highlighting the land and heritage of the region.

Daye-Finley said “We’ve worked with Mary Ellen on quite a few other events. And we thought that having the traditional games on Blackfoot territory was something that needed to happen for Southern Alberta Regional Games in this region. Especially since we are in Blackfoot territory, we thought we’d honour it by playing the games that were traditionally played here.”

Mary Ellen Little Mustache has a passion for traditional games and sports, linking the connection to heritage and the history of how they were taught to teach youth hunting and foraging skills while engaging in a form of play.

“We had to know how to work with the trees, how to work with the nature, which rocks are best for what. Also, it is a way of developing language. I started out as a Blackfoot language teacher and then went into the games because it’s so much fun.”

The passion is clear on Little Moustache’s face as she smiles at the kids enjoying the games and learning new skills through her heritage and teaching.

Registration is available online at [southernalbertasummertimegames.ca/cityoflethbridge](https://southernalbertasummertimegames.ca/cityoflethbridge) with plenty of chances to interact and experience different sports and activities.