

Natives show pride at Indigenous Games

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From July 29 to Aug. 5, I was at the 1995 North American Indigenous Games in Blaine, Minn. It was a very interesting and entertaining eight days.

The idea for a large scale Indigenous Games was conceived at a meeting of the National Indian Athletic Association in Reno, Nevada, some years ago. A few years later, Willie Littlechild of the Cree Nation, Alberta, introduced the concept at the World Conference of Indigenous People in Geneva, Switzerland.

The first North American Indigenous Games was attempted in 1990 at Edmonton, Alta. There were contests of archery, canoeing, rifle shooting, swimming, track and field, soccer, baseball and a rodeo. About 3,000 athletes from many first nations, including Cree, Blood, Peigan, Blackfoot, Sioux, Sarcee, Metis and Mohawk, took part.

The 4,400 athletes descended on Prince Albert, Sask., to take part in the 1993 Games.

The 1995 games drew more than 8,000 people. Of this number, about 500 came from Ontario. The largest contingent — some 1,300 athletes — came from Alberta. Saskatchewan with 900 was next. Manitoba, B.C. and the host state, Minnesota, also were well represented with about 500 athletes apiece.

Even such far-flung places as the Yukon and North West Territories had dozens of native athletes present.

Each participant proudly wore their team colors so it was easy to tell where each one was from. For example, Team Arizona was dressed in bright red while Team Ontario's warm-up jackets were blue and white.

It was a very stirring sight at the opening ceremonies when all the teams marched into the National Sports Centre Stadium. Besides their team signs, many groups identified themselves as Cree, Chippewa, Akwesasne Mohawk, Six Nations and Mde-wakanton Sioux.

Some groups were led by drummers and singers who were dressed in traditional clothes and wore various styles of feathered headdresses.

This showing of pride in the

traditions and history of first nations is what is needed by native young people.

Many young natives are dispirited by poverty and what they feel is an uncaring larger society. It is the dream of the organizers of the Indigenous Games that, through training and wholesome competition, the spirits of these young athletes will be lifted and their hope will not die.

Not many of these native athletes could ever hope to get to the Olympics.

The ultimate dream is to some way have Indigenous Games where the Sami of northern Norway, Sweden and Russia, the Maori of New Zealand, the aborigines of Australia and Indians from the jungles of South America can come together for worldwide Indigenous games.

That is the ultimate dream which is far in the future. The more immediate goal is another week of Indigenous Games in 1997 at Victoria, British Columbia.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver is a freelance writer who lives on the Six Nations reserve.