

# Six Nations gearing up for Pan Am Games excitement

By Donna Duric  
Writer

Six Nations, as one of the four host nations for this summer's Pan Am Games, is gearing up to show off its presence on the world stage at the much-anticipated games in Toronto this July.

And the biggest focus of Six Nations this summer is to showcase lacrosse in the hopes that one day, it will be an official sport at the Pan American Games, and eventually, even the Olympics.

That was the main message from Six Nations organizers at a high-energy and inspirational Pan Am Games press conference at the community hall Saturday, kicking off the countdown to the games and detailing all the ways Six Nations will be involved in the games.

"One of the things we are really trying to push is lacrosse," said Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill. "We want lacrosse to be an exhibition or demonstration at the games because we're hoping that eventually, lacrosse will become one of the sports at Pan Am and then, eventually, at the Olympics. We all know that lacrosse is the Creator's Game and I think if we were able to achieve that it would be really something. We're going to keep at it."

Six Nations, along with New Credit, the Huron, and Metis nations, will be one of four aboriginal communities acting as hosts during the games this summer. New Credit is the official First Nation host community.

Six Nations was approached by aboriginal affairs in 2011 to see if it wanted to get involved in the games.

In the beginning, said Hill, Six Nations felt its voice wasn't really being heard. "We kind of put our foot



**Cher Obediah gearing up for Pan Am**

down and argued and said we've got to be true partners in these games," said Hill. "We convinced them to go along with that." Six Nations is now part of the games' aboriginal leaders partnership (ALP), with Coun. Mark Hill taking the lead on Six Nations' involvement with the games. Forty-one countries will be participating in the games. Six Nations negotiated a memorandum of understanding with the Toronto 2015 Pan Am Games Committee two years ago that outlines how Six Nations will be involved and what they want to see at the games.

Six Nations will be involved with the opening and closing ceremonies and at least two Six Nations athletes will be representing Team Canada - Cher Obediah, for boxing, and Carey Leigh Thomas, for softball.

There are a lot of employment opportunities with the games this summer, said Hill, many of which will be opening for applications this week, and arts

and crafts vendors will be able to showcase their wares at the games.

"It's really an opportunity to showcase our community," said Hill. She said events might be held in the community, in Brantford, and in Hamilton, and said the Pan Am Games committee in Toronto will help promote those events, including the Grand River powwow. There will also be events hosted at Woodland Cultural Centre and they're hoping to host a lacrosse demonstration or festival during the games.

"It's going to be a busy summer," said Hill. One local business has already cashed in on the games.

Willy's World, located on Chiefswood Road, won a \$200,000 contract to supply medical equipment to the games.

Hill is also hoping international athletes will use Six Nations sports facilities to train and practice.

The Pan Am Games Committee will be sending in-

formation to all 41 countries to let them know Six Nations has facilities available for practice, said Hill.

Thomas's participation in the games is already confirmed. Obediah finds out in March if she qualifies but Hill says she's confident Obediah has already qualified.

"I'm pleased to say we have two athletes here today. We're going to have two team members from Six Nations who are going to be participating in the Pan Am Games. Isn't that wonderful?" she said to loud applause from about 100 community members who showed up for the Pan Am Games kick-off ceremony.

"Our community is really proud of both of you," said Hill. "We're going to be behind you 110 per cent."

It's going to cost around \$750,000 for Six Nations to be involved and all but \$200,000 has already been provided through grants or donations, said Six Nations Pan Am Games coordinator Kevin Sandy. He said Six Nations is hoping to raise the other \$200,000 before the summer.

"This is going to cost a lot of money for us so we are seeking sponsors," said Hill. Six Nations has already secured a number of sponsors: the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the Ministry of Trades, Colleges and Universities, Samsung Renewable Energy, Connor, Clark and Lunn, Pattern Energy, Union Gas, and the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation.

Six Nations is in the midst of negotiating sponsorships with the Dreamcatcher Fund, Royal Bank and the Bank of Montreal.

"It's a good opportunity for us to showcase our community so let's start spreading the word," said Hill.

Traditional dancers did a standing quiver dance and smoke dance during the



**Carey Leigh Thomas will be competing in softball.**

kick-off ceremony, while Obediah and Thomas stole the show with their inspirational stories detailing their rise to greatness in their respective sports.

Thomas, 22, is the first aboriginal female to make it to Team Canada for women's softball.

She said she overcame a lot of adversity to get where she is today.

Thomas is also a young mother. Her toddler was running around the community hall playing with the games' mascot Pachi, eliciting giggles from the audience, while Thomas explained what inspires her to be great: her daughter and the Creator.

"I am dedicated to creating a positive name and image for our people. The Creator blesses all his children with gifts. I believe the Creator blessed me with the gift of playing this game. I utilize it. I work hard at it and I excel at it. I play what the Creator intended me to play. I play it because I want to be a positive role model for our youth and future generations. I play for all those little girls who had the same exact dream as I did when I was their age. But mostly, I play for that little girl who calls me mommy every day. My daughter is my motivation. We all need to find that one thing that motivates us the most...and I guarantee you, you will be unstop-

pable. Everyone in this room is capable of greatness.

I encourage you to go out and chase your dream as I did. Fight and overcome those battles. Prove someone wrong. Learn from your mistakes. Get knocked down but get back up and thank those who have helped you along the journey. If you live in a community such as this one, anything is possible."

Obediah, 25, told an inspirational story of a teenagehood that consisted of hanging out with the wrong crowd and heading down the wrong path before discovering boxing.

"I started boxing when I was about 18 because I was getting involved with the wrong people, so I channeled my energies into something positive for me as opposed to negative," she said. "Boxing gave me a sense of direction. Instead of going down the path of destruction, I overcame a lot of obstacles and I put in a lot of hard work and dedication. There were a lot of times I didn't want to go in the gym every day. But I had to stay dedicated to my dreams and goals."

Her dedication paid off. She started training in Brantford and last year won the provincial championship. She went on to fight in the nationals, representing Ontario, and came in third.

She now trains in Hamilton, is in her second year at Mohawk College in the Police Foundations program, and is looking forward to participating for Team Canada at the games.

"The important thing to me to completing a goal is being passionate about what you do," she said.

Renowned Six Nations dancer Santee Smith will also showcase choreographed numbers at the games.

The games run from July 10 to 26.