

information

Aboriginal Sports: Timeless Play

Just imagine walking across a grassy field. You sense something unexpected happening. The air is more crisp and fresh, the sun is brighter, and the ground feels charged with energy. Right before your eyes, there is a sudden swirl of tiny dots of lights and colours that spiral open to form a tunnel that passes around you.

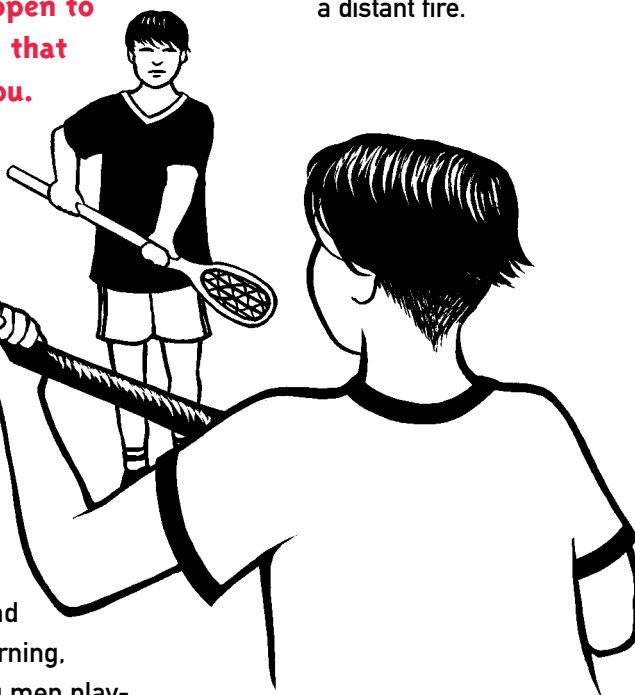
ball back and forth. You realize it's lacrosse but the men are dressed differently, wearing moccasins and clothing made from animal skins. There is the smell of roasting deer meat and Iroquoian corn soup coming from a distant fire.

the game. You quickly prepare yourself for the shot. The forwards make a quick pass. You dive to the side trying to block the shot but the player skilfully throws the ball between the goal poles. They cheer, while you turn to fetch the ball.

Then everything melts into a blur of spinning colours and lights, finally settling on grey-blue walls. Several reporters are asking Reggie Leech questions about the game. Leech, of the Philadelphia Flyers, played 606 NHL games, scoring 306 goals. Like Ted Nolan, Gino Odjick, and many other First Nations people, he took up the sport of hockey with intensity, gaining recognition for his skills.

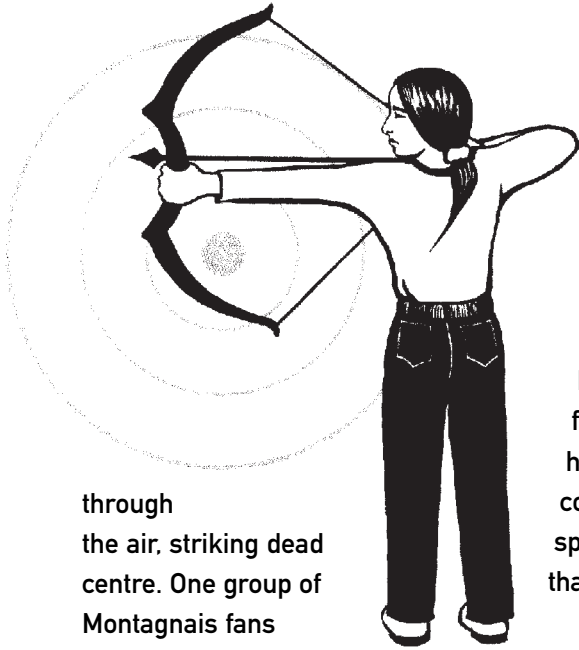
The camera flashes grow brighter and brighter until there is only light. Below, you see land growing more and more vast as you descend. A group of people watch an archer draw his team's 21st and final arrow. As he pulls the bowstring taut, you settle into the arrow, feeling at one with it. With steady hands, he aims at a target almost 50 metres away, then the trees blur as you slice

The field is still there but it's not the same. The surrounding houses, factories, cars, and city noises are gone. You hear shouts and laughter from behind. Turning, you see a group of young men playing a game that seems familiar. They carry wooden racquets resembling miniature snowshoes, and run quickly, passing a rawhide



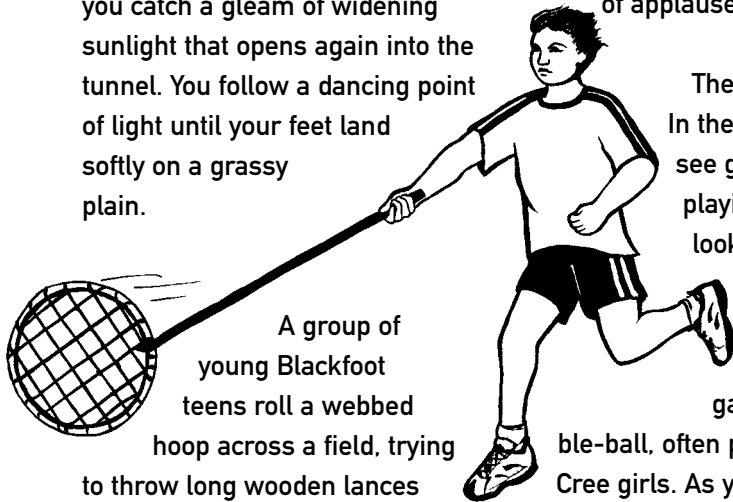
Calling out excitedly, two forwards race past a defenceman toward the goal, approaching you — you're in





through the air, striking dead centre. One group of Montagnais fans cheers loudly, and teases the losing team in a friendly way. They are not poor sports; it's part of the game. The losing team joins in the laughter, then challenges for a second round, each team gathering up its arrows.

The archer retrieves the winning arrow and in his eyes you catch a gleam of widening sunlight that opens again into the tunnel. You follow a dancing point of light until your feet land softly on a grassy plain.



A group of young Blackfoot teens roll a webbed hoop across a field, trying to throw long wooden lances through the target as it speeds away. They are strong, agile, and accurate. The next two competitors are ready; you roll the hoop and one lance passes through it,

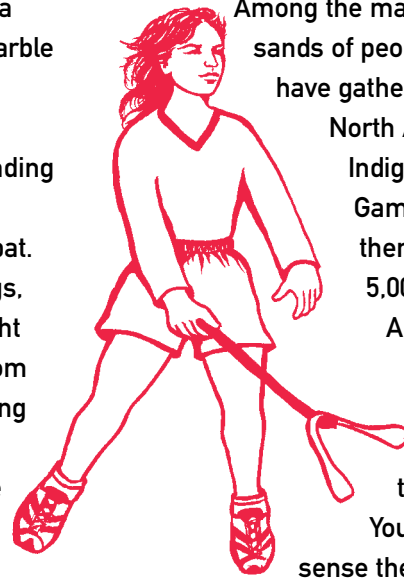
barely touching the webbing. This is the sport of great hunters, a game that helps them in the hunt. The next two people prepare to throw and as you watch, you see something beyond the rolling hoop, a change in the grassy field. The circle within the hoop grows, blurring the colours until it looks like a spinning gold and blue marble that pulls you inward.

People cheer. You're standing behind home plate where a Mi'kmaq girl gets ready to bat. The pitch comes. She swings, sending the ball into the right field. The ball is grabbed from the grass and thrown, coming toward first base as the girl slides. "Safe!" the first-base umpire shouts to a round of applause.

The image changes. In the distance you see girls running, playing with what looks like two balls wrapped together in a piece of rawhide. It's a game called double-ball, often played by Plains Cree girls. As you watch them, the image grows until you are standing on the same field. The girls pick up the double-ball with sticks, making skilful passes as they work their way up the long

field until they are close enough to throw the double-ball over the goal line for a point.

Their cheering becomes louder until it rings in your ears and you sense people laughing and playing all around you. There are track and field events, wrestling, volleyball, baseball, and lacrosse games going on.



Among the many thousands of people who have gathered for the North American Indigenous Games, there are 5,000 young Aboriginal athletes taking part in the events. You see and sense the competitive spirit around

you, and it strikes you that in competition, they are having fun.

The image changes. Lights and colours spiral until you are looking through time where you see images of Ojibwa people hand wrestling and leg wrestling. You see Haida people racing in war canoes. And you watch people from all First Nations enjoying a vast number of games they played long before Christopher Columbus arrived, games that still exist today such as ice shinny, which is still played but also became ice hockey. /

This information is also available on the Internet at: <http://www.inac.gc.ca>.