

Alaska Native Olympics

Information about the Alaska Native Games

Celebrations are times when people gather together to share. They are often a happy time complete with food, music, games and friends. In the days of our ancestors, "celebrations" happened for a variety of reasons. The maritime Eskimo people celebrated after a successful whaling season, the Athabascan after summer fish camp or at a trade gathering with the Tlingit. During these gatherings the entertainment included physical competitions which put agility, strength and endurance to the test.

The games were derived from the effort of staying alive in an environment that demanded rigorous fitness to survive. Native games of agility might include balance skills that may save your life on a slippery log or hunting on an ice flow. People with great strength were needed to pull a large marine mammal or haul a net out of the water and to carry an animal out of the forest. Endurance games came from running long distances, carrying heavy loads for a long distances or paddling a canoe or kayak. There are games for everyone. Native games test your ability, skills and your sportsmanship.

The games are not about beating each other. They are more about doing your own personal best each time you try.

Traditionally, cheering for your opponent and showing appreciation for their attempt was important.



There are three annual events that are offered:

1. Native Youth Olympics is held each year, usually in February. The program invites youth to age 19 to Anchorage.
2. The Arctic winter games are held in the Yukon Territory.
3. The World Eskimo Indian Olympics is held in Fairbanks the third week in July.

Each organization has their set of official rules and all three celebrations have similar and different games. You would have to contact them individually for the rules booklet.

In addition to the games, visiting, reconnecting and meeting new people is a big part of any celebration.

The Games

These games were designed long ago by the people from the circumpolar regions. These people included the Yupik's from southwestern Alaska, Inupiaq's and Saint Lawrence Island Yupik's and the Athabaskan's from interior Alaska, Canada, Russia, Scandinavia, Greenland and Iceland. These events were training methods to stay in shape during the long winter months. They were also signals and ways of communicating, since there were no telephones, VHF or CB radios.

The one foot high kick: This is a game that was designed as a signal to let the village know that a whale had shot or caribou are running nearby. Competitors must jump with both feet kick a suspended ball with One foot and land on that same kicking foot, hence the name One foot high kick. The world record for this event is held at 9'8" by Jesse



Frankson from Point Hope, AK who is depicted in the photo shown and Alice Strick holds the women's record at 7'7"



The Two foot high kick: This event is very similar to the One foot High kick. Athletes still must jump off of two feet, kick the ball with Both feet land and maintain balance without shuffling feet their feet. This was also a signal but used mostly by the whaling villages. When a whale was taken a runner would be sent out, as soon as he was in sight of the village he would jump in the air kick both feet. This signaled the village to prepare to beach the whale. The world record for this event is held at 8'8" by Brian Randazzo from Tatitlek, AK, and Nicole Johnson holds the women's record at 6'6"

The Alaskan High Kick: Is a game of balance and eye foot coordination. The athlete much sit on the floor place one arm behind them for their base, and with their free hand grab their opposite foot and the free foot becomes the kicking leg, after the athlete springs up in the air and kicks the ball they much show and maintain balance. Height is the objective. The world record is held at 8'0" by Elijah Cabinboy from Nome, AK and Jaclyn Weston holds the women's record at 6'7"



The Eskimo stick pull: this is a test of strength. The competitors both sit down feet together and they will both grab the stick with one person's grip on the inside and the others on the outside. When the judge's say go both athletes must try to pull the stick away from their opponent or to pull their opponent other. This is a best 2 out of 3 game. This was designed to keep young men in shape and to also to prepare them to be able to pull a seal from their breathing holes in the ice. Robert "Big Bob" Aiken Jr. holds the most records for the men, and Annette Donaldson holds the most records for the women.



The Seal Hop: This is a game of endurance to pain and distance. The athlete will lay belly down with their shoulders lined up on a line. When he or she is ready they will lift themselves up into a push up position and they will hop with only their hands and toes touching the ground. The competitors back and arms must remain straight, for if they break position they will be warned once, if the athlete does not correct the position they will be told to they are done and the distance will be marked. The world record for the men is held by Calvin Bell at 171'5" and for the women it is held by Shawna Nicholson at 159'4".

