

Downsview Stories

2018 MASTERS INDIGENOUS GAMES

Inter-tribal athletics competitions have been a meaningful part of Indigenous peoples' way of life for millennia, and that tradition continues into the present day. The City of Toronto played host to the 2018 Masters Indigenous Games on July 13-15, which centred around a specially created "Cultural Village" at Downsview Park. The Games brought together thousands of First Nation, Métis and Inuit athletes over the age of 20 to compete and connect with their peers in a range of contemporary and traditional sporting events.



Athletes in the Masters Indigenous Games archery competition showcased their skills and celebrated an ancestral connection. The bow and arrow was used by many nations for both hunting and social games since time immemorial.

The games are an important opportunity to be physically active and celebrate Indigenous wellness and cultures across Turtle Island. Both contemporary and traditional sports including lacrosse, basketball, archery, canoeing, tug of war and various traditional cultural demonstrations, including Indigenous martial arts, tomahawk throwing, lacrosse skills clinics and various arctic games.

“For Indigenous peoples, we hold up and honour competitive athletes throughout their lives and into Elderhood,” said Bob Goulais, Anishinaabe from Nipissing First Nation. “They are seen as role models for our youth, ambassadors to our communities and an important part of our living history.”



Left: A young grass dancer joins in the opening Grass Dance song at the Embody the Spirit Pow-Wow.

Right: Youngsters take part in the lacrosse demonstration at the Masters Indigenous Games. Known by the Haudenosaunee as the “Creator’s Game”, lacrosse is the official summer sport of Canada.

Masters athletes are often catalysts in their community to get youth involved. This gives them a special opportunity to increase awareness of and participation in these sports, as well as the chance to celebrate Indigenous cultures and traditional arts like storytelling, visual arts and performance.

Central to the 2018 Masters Games mission, was the inclusion and promotion of Indigenous culture, arts and performances held at the Cultural Village at Downsview Park. The Games closed with the Embody the Spirit Pow-Wow, a contemporary cultural gathering featuring singing, dancing, and cultural demonstrations.

“Pow-wow is the central part of inter-tribal socializing and celebrating our living culture,” said Goulais, who served as the Master of Ceremonies for the Pow-Wow. “It was truly awe-inspiring to see the athletes, their families and our community to come together, inclusive of all genders, all ages, and all peoples, in friendship and unity.”

The pow-wow included intertribal and social dancing, medal ceremonies, sports demonstrations, and a Smoke Dance competition.

This was the second pow-wow to be hosted at Downsview Park in recent years. In May 2016, Downsview Park hosted the North American Indigenous Cultural Festival, which included a contest pow-wow featuring the top competitive singers and dancers from across North America.



The Embodiment of the Spirit Pow-Wow began with a mens/all-genders Grass Dance Special to officially open up the dance area at Downsview Park. The grass dancers come out before all other dance categories to bless and ready the grounds for a day of pow-wow.



Left: A womens/all-genders Traditional Dance special honours all women and Mother Earth. This dance special also paid tribute to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.



Right: The Jingle Dress dance is a healing dance for all those pow-wow participants and visitors seeking wellness. The Jingle Dress was first created by the Anishinaabe people, who also include the Mississauga nation.

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