

Native American Games of Montana

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Many Native American tribes can trace their roots to the Montana region. Blackfeet, Salish, Kootenei, Gros Ventre, Souix, Chippewa, Inuit, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d'Oreille, Cree, and Crow are a few of the Native tribes whose games and traditions are shared in this presentation. Several different tribes play the same games, but the rules, playing fields and equipment may differ depending upon the area, materials available and the particular tribe's traditions.

Games of Skill

1. Ring the Stick (universally played)
2. Kick Balls
 - Pauite -- 50' field Goals are willow tripod. 4 players compete to kick their ball under the goal.
 - Northern Cheyenne -- 100' field Players race down & back kicking their ball.
 - Northern Cheyenne Foot Bag -- Partners or groupshacky sack competition.
 - Tewa slingball -- participants lie on back & sling ball overhead to see who can go the farthest.
3. Make the Stick Jump (Blackfeet) 5 sticks as targets, 3 balls per team at opposite ends. Players throw attempting to make points for their team.
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** Ring & Stake game played as above but with rings.
4. Line Tag (Blackfeet) Players line up and hold hands. First Person in line tries to tag the last person. The line tries to help the tagger. Tag-ee goes to the front if the line breaks or the end is tagged.
5. Run & Scream (universally played) -- Participants took a deep breath and began screaming while they ran, trying to cover as much ground as possible before running out of breath. The stick marked their stopping point.
6. Tie-up (Chippewa & Inuit) -- Two long strings with loose loops are placed on each wrist of two people. One end of one string is looped through the other persons string to form a link. Players try to unlink w/o removing the strings from wrists.
7. Hoop & Arrow
Salish and Pend d' Orielle -- Small ring with colored beaded sections & 2 Long arrows
Blackfeet, Cree, Gros Ventre, Souix -- Larger rings with "dream catcher" pattern
Teams of 6 with 4 arrows or darts per person (18" - 24")

X X X X X X
 O -----> Each player throws their dart toward the ring as
 T T T T T T it is rolled by, attempting to spear the ring.

8. Shiny

- Chippewa & Northern Cheyenne -- Two stakes are set up at each end of the field. Object: hit the ball between the stakes.
- White Clay -- A single post at the end of each team's field served as the goal. Opponents tried to drive/hit the ball into the post at the other end.
- Crow -- Goals are blankets spread on the ground at each end of the field.

9. Doubleball – (Chippewa, Cree) Two bags filled w/ buffalo hair connected by a leather thong is the “ball”. It is carried on a stick as competitors try to run down a field and hurl the ball toward a goal. Defenders give chase and try to knock or strip the ball from the carrying stick.

1 pt = over the crossbar, 2 pts. = into the goal, 3 pts. = wrapped on the crossbar.

The game starts with players from both teams gathered in the center with their sticks held high (in a tee pee). The ball is thrown on top of the sticks and the game commences.

10. Lacrosse

* Single Pole (Gros Ventre) Players play around a single pole with 3' sections marked in ribbon. Teams attempt to throw the ball and strike the pole with different sections being worth more points. Players must stay outside of a 10' circle to attempt a throw.

* Two Posts/Goals (Chippewa) Players from each team try to advance the ball to their opponent's end and strike their pole with the ball.

In such games there was hierarchy of play. Men could not bump women and women could not bump children. This was a reflection of each member's role in the tribe. Men were the protectors, women were the caregivers, and children were the youngest and vulnerable.

Games of Chance & Intuition

Rock in the Fist

In this hiding game two players sit facing each other. Between them are three sticks and a small rock. One player starts as the 'hider' and takes the rock and stealthily (behind one's back) shifts the rock back and forth. Ultimately both closed fists are presented to the 'guesser'. The guesser using powers of observation and “sensing” makes a determination on which hand holds the rock by pointing to the hand. Touching the hand is considered bad manners. If the guesser is incorrect the hider gains one of the three sticks and hides again. If the guesser is correct, no stick is gained but the guesser becomes the hider. Play continues after the sticks are gone from the middle until one player has gained all three sticks from the other player.

References:

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