
Indian Games and Early American Historians

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Since the discovery of the New World, the sports and Games of the North American Indians have intrigued scholars. Anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have often dealt with Native American physical pursuits, compiling a substantial literature in the field. The majority of contemporary scholars have used the works of nineteenth century writers; among them perhaps Culin's and Catlin's studies are utilized most extensively.

The intent of this paper is to present a number of early American historians who described Indian sports and games in the East coast of the United States. The paper will highlight the

works and descriptions of early American historians such as William Strachey, John Smith, Daniel Gookin, William Wood, William Rogers, and Thomas Hutchinson. Their works, often forgotten or neglected, are important since they provide the first accounts of Indian life. They were the first, years before the birth of Rousseau, to create an image of the "Noble Savage." A tolerant and sympathetic attitude toward the Indians prevailed in their writings. While marveling about the Native's remarkable physique, Hutchinson admiringly observed in *The History of Massachusetts-Bay* that, "They were remarkable for firm well compacted bodies, strong and active, capable of enduring the greatest hardships and fatigue . . ." The sports and games pursued by the native population did not escape the attention of these early writers, who emphasized the significance of these pursuits to Indian culture. Wood, in 1633, wrote in the *New Englands Prospect* that, "But to leave their warres, and to speake of their games in which they are more delighted and better experienced, spending halfe their dayes in gaming and lazing." These early chronicles described fishing, hunting, various games, and gambling of the Natives.

This paper, hopefully, will be a directing step toward rediscovering the earliest historical sources of Indian games and sport activities of early American historiography.