

Baseball And The Native Peoples Of Atlantic Canada And Maine

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Although Harold Seymour has written a chapter on native people in the *People's Game*, little attention has been given to the significance of baseball in the life of native communities. This paper looks at the history of baseball, softball, and a variant of these sports sometimes referred to as "Old Fashion," in the MicMac, Maliseet and Penobscot communities of north-eastern North America. Often studies of native sporting life have centred about the accomplishments of its sporting heroes, rather than the social purposes and functions served by sport within native communities themselves. To be sure there have been significant sporting lives, as the continuing fascination surrounding the Penobscot baseball player Louis Soxalexis, and his controversial career, demonstrates. This paper, based largely upon interviews and supplemented by newspaper research, shows how native people living on reserves adapted baseball to their own needs and traditions. Within the community baseball games were often the focus of a larger celebration, which included men and women, and served to celebrate community solidarity. Baseball was attractive because it was inexpensive; softball became even more popular because gloves were not always needed. In addition, women could be more easily integrated into the latter game as players. But as a ritual of community solidarity, the "Old Fashion" game was most significant. This paper inquires into the origins of this game and addresses its continuing popularity.

On a more competitive level, baseball was often played between reserves, and regional championships were held as early as the turn of the century. Now and then games were played with white teams, although in the Maritime Provinces those games usually involved teams of an Acadian background. But competition was subordinated to other ends. For the most part, the purposes of the sport were social and political, providing a sense of community cohesion, and an opportunity for people from different reserves to meet and discuss issues of mutual concern. What this meant for those who acquired skill as players and took those skills beyond the reserve, however, was that the process of adjustment to a larger and more competitive world would often be difficult and trying, as the Soxalexis biography suggests.