

Government Involvement In Indigenous Sport Programs, Canada And Australia: A Step Toward Empowerment?

Vicky Paraschak
University of Windsor, Ont.

Native American Sport Session Participants

Indigenous people throughout the world have been working towards a more empowered existence, wherein they are the creators of their own lives, including their own cultural practices. Sport has not remained apart from this endeavour. Federal governments, both in Canada (1972-1981) and Australia (1969-present), have developed programs in order to facilitate the participation of indigenous people in sporting activities. In both these programs, indigenous participants have struggled within them to carve out a unique experience for indigenous athletes, rather than just the reproduction of mainstream sporting practices. These two programs will be compared and contrasted, to demonstrate the ways in which indigenous people from different parts of the world have struggled within historical and institutional constraints to control the shaping of their preferred sporting practices. This analysis shows that indigenous people have been able to create some alternative sporting practices, but these practices have never been able to replace the 'legitimate' mainstream sporting practices which are sponsored by government. As well, the creation of alternative practices which threatened the legitimacy of the mainstream sport system have jeopardized the opportunities made available, overall, for indigenous athletes. This case study thus examines the limited achievements gained by indigenous people, in their use of sport as a site for empowerment.