

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND SPORT

Scabby Dried Meat and Bad Dried Meat: Blackfoot Brothers of the Wind

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The activity of running among the peoples of the Blackfoot Nation is a spiritual aspect of their lives. The Peigan, Blackfoot and Blood peoples, who constitute the Blackfoot Nation, all capture in their oral history the images of physical icons who ran like the powerful Chinook winds that frequent their vast homeland. Making their home on the Easter slope of the Canadian Rockies, they were the last of the Plains Indians to make contact with Euro-Canadians. Once contact was made, the three Blackfoot groups did not easily adjust to the social experiments thrust upon them by their non-First Nations neighbors. The period from 1883 to 1914 would be one of great dislocation for the proud Blackfoot who had for more than half a century been the powerful masters of the land where the Chinook winds blow.

The Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Christian missionaries, industrial schools, railways and reserve life would all contribute to the near extinction of the Blackfoot. How these factors related to the lives of these First Nations peoples was not understood or considered by Euro-Canadian immigrants who quickly became the dominant culture prior to the turn of the century. The examples of the Blackfoot runners of this period help clarify the problems that were created for the Blackfoot peoples. The frontier society of centres such as Calgary, Fort Whoop-Up and Fort Macleod provide the non-indigenous settings for this research. Frontier economics, the “Mounties” and rules of the reserves, on which passes were required by the members of tribes if they wished to visit outside their own reserve, all are a part of the story of the two Dried Meat runners. Their role in both indigenous and non-indigenous cultures make them important figures in understanding both old and new worlds.

This paper examines the life of two outstanding Blackfoot runners: Bad Dried Meat, a Peigan brave, and Scabby Dried Meat, a member of the Blackfoot whose

reserve was located just east of Calgary. Their personal lives reflect the conflicts of the day and the failure of many to assess the complex cultural situations.

Sources include personal interviews with First Nations citizens and research at the Glenbow Museum and Archives, and the Provincial Archives of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The significance of these two sporting biographies both clarifies certain misconceptions of earlier writers and adds to the cross-cultural body of knowledge that is important for the understanding between these two peoples. Two earlier biographies mistakenly reported the two Dried Meat runners were the same person. The second purpose for this study is to record the beginnings of the part sport played towards an understanding of the two cultures. Many forces acted on the lives of Scabby and Bad Dried Meat effecting identities both personal and collective. They became brothers of a changing wind.