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## ***Strong Woman-Nobody Could Knock Her Down: Aboriginal People and the Sports of the Arctic Fur Traders***

The commencement of the fur trade in the early decades of the nineteenth century initiated a period of fundamental transformations in the aboriginal cultures of the western Arctic and sub-Arctic. The trade led to far-reaching changes in the economy and, concomitantly, served to refocus the traditional migratory patterns. A semi-nomadic people, the aboriginal group had traditionally oriented their annual movements with regard to the adaptive requirements of the seasonal cycle. Their increasing involvement in the commercial fur trade necessitated adapting seasonal migratory patterns to the contingencies of the trade. Within a few decades, the different regional aboriginal societies became dependent upon the commodities obtained during the large annual trade gatherings at the trading posts. Thus the trade meets at the fur trading posts gradually developed into major events in the annual cycle.

Outside of trading activities proper, sporting competitions organized by the fur traders, as well as traditional games and dances, soon came to occupy an important position in these meets, and the effects of the changes brought about by the fur trade were extended into the area of games and sports. There were two major effects: the sporting competitions organized by the fur traders brought aboriginal people into contact for the first time with the “performance principle” (Henning Eichberg) of modern sport, and the sporting competitions helped to realign political relations between the various regional aboriginal groups.

The paper examines this incipient stage in the development of organized sporting competitions, as well as the forms of inter-regional cultural exchange that occurred at the trade meets. The evidence used consists of fur trade post journals, eyewitness accounts left by Arctic explorers and travellers, and oral history accounts provided by aboriginal elders.