

ABORIGINAL SPORT

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The Utility of Indigenous Knowledge: Decolonizing the Tom Longboat Awards

In 1951, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development established the Tom Longboat Awards to recognize and celebrate the outstanding athletic achievements of First Nations athletes in Canada. Over the years, responsibility for the awards shifted several times, moving from the Department of Indian Affairs, to the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada, to the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations), and the national political organization representing First Nations interests in Canada. In 1999, responsibility for the Awards shifted one more time, from the Assembly of First Nations to the Aboriginal Sport Circle, the national sport body representing Aboriginal sport and recreation development in Canada.

Today, the Tom Longboat Awards are the most established and prestigious form of recognition for Aboriginal athletes in Canada. Without a doubt, the recipients of these awards are highly skilled and extremely talented athletes. Although the list of recipients and their stories is far from complete, what information is known shows that award winners have been playing and competing successfully at the national, international, and Olympic levels of sport for more than fifty years. Indeed, one recipient is an Olympic Gold Medallist; another is a Paralympic Gold Medallist.

This paper will examine the history and evolution of the Tom Longboat Awards and the connected values, beliefs, and practices that have been promoted through it over the years (1951 - 2002). The primary argument here is that the Tom Longboat Awards reinforced Euro-Canadian ideas about "sport" by marginalizing traditional forms of activities and community-based ideas about what "excellence" means. Resisting a traditional research paradigm, this paper will be written from an Indigenous vantage point – what Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls a decolonizing methodology. This framework challenges Western ideas about the pursuit and usefulness of knowledge by stressing the importance of

relationships in research and which situates research paradigms firmly within Aboriginal control.
