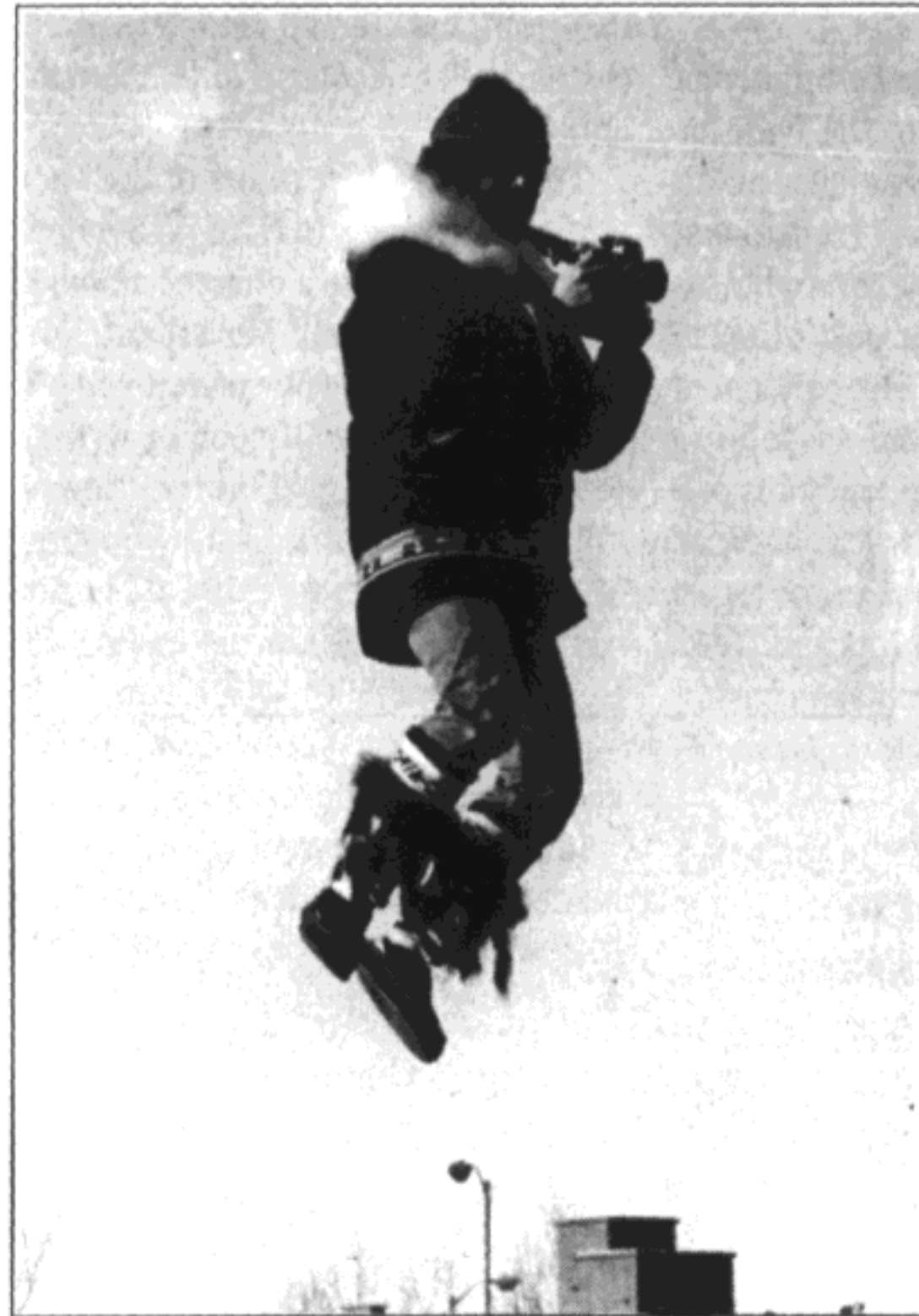


# Sports are an alternative to drinking and...

by Paul Tony

Alcohol and drugs are not a part of Alaska Native culture. That is a fact. Alcohol and drugs were introduced, however, and in the words of one Native leader have brought "devastation"



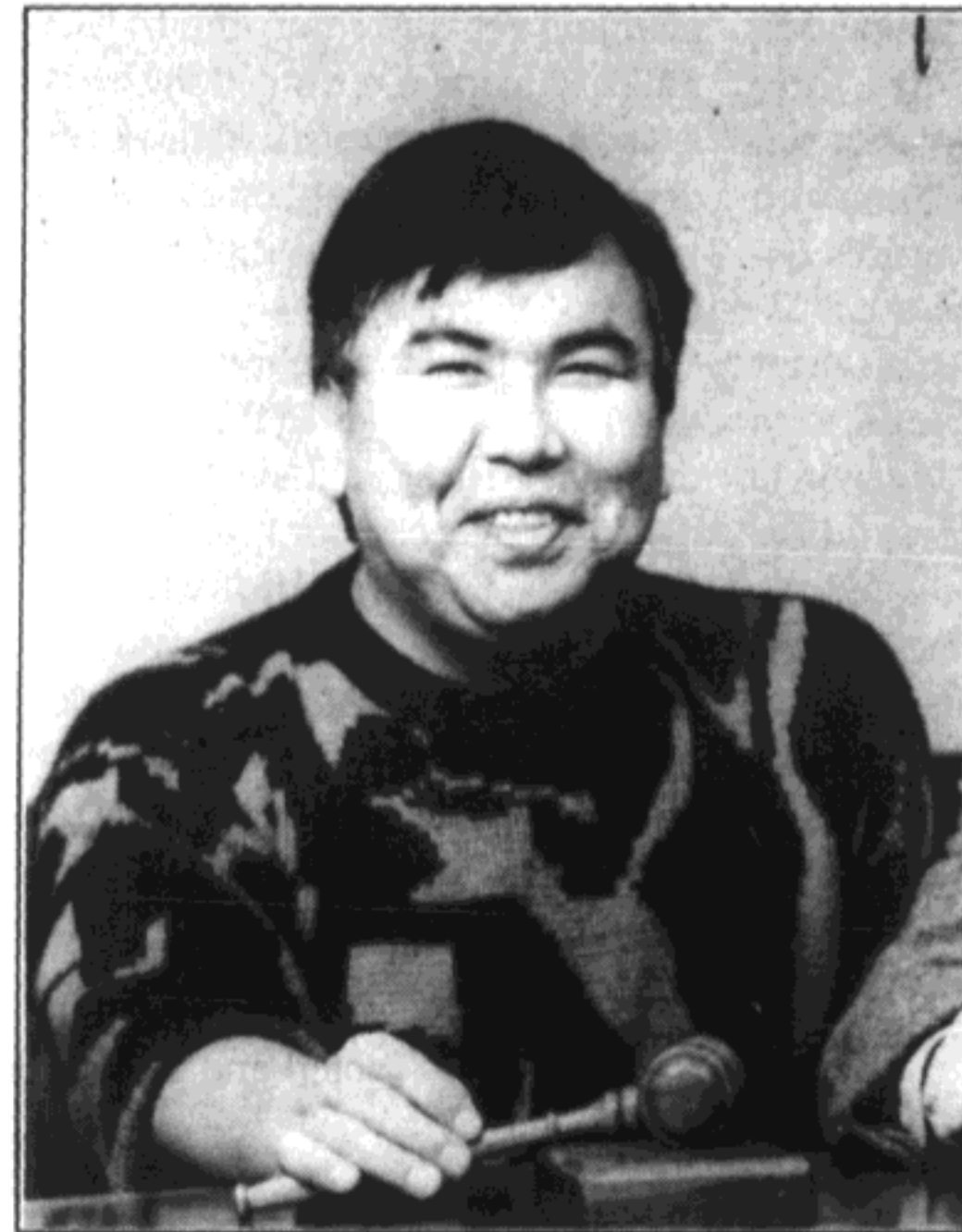
Reggie Joule does the blanket toss

*Tundra Times* file photo

to Alaska Native individuals, their families and communities. Beginning with elders from every region of the state and growing into what has recently been referred to as a "sobriety movement," many Native people have quit drinking and drugs. Their example is the subject of the following profile which explores individual sobriety and its role in sports in village Alaska.

Ken Johns, Ahtna Athabascan leader from Copper Center, was a three-point shot maker when he played high school basketball for the Glennallen Panthers. Sober for 12 years now he has "conquered the alcohol problem for himself." Now his concern is for the younger people who need a mentor and role model. An interest and love for the sport of basketball brings him together with younger Native men in his community. He says that

basketball is a stress-reliever and talks about sitting down to dinner with his family after work. Even though he feels the aches and hurts



Ken Johns

*Tundra Times* file photo

of playing, the phone starts ringing and keeps ringing until he opens the gym. Sometimes, he says, as many as 30 people show up. He sees a need for teams and activities for younger kids also.

Basketball, says Ken, is an alternative to alcohol. Even if it is only for a night or a weekend traveling with a team, it is an alternative. For the past three years, Ken has put together a team from Copper Center and traveled Southcentral Alaska to play in tournaments and

**Page 7, please**

# here are some sports enthusiasts to tell you so

Continued from page 6

games in communities like Tetlin, Nenana, Valdez, Tyonek and Kenai. The first year his team was organized they won a tournament in Tok and I recently saw his team in the Fur Rondy Basketball Tournament.

For Reggie Joule from Kotzebue, the



Charlie Gregg

Photo by Paul Tony

issue is simple: a role model has certain responsibilities to project a good healthy lifestyle for others to follow. And you don't get to choose whether or not you will be a role model because if you are good at your sport, and visible, you will be a role-model and Native youth need good healthy examples. Reggie has been sober for close to 10 years now and he describes Native games and sports as "part of the circle" of Native life. It is not more important than other aspects of Native life, but rather as important. For Reggie, who grew up seeing Native

games played, he first played at Point Hope at Christmas time. He credits the community with teaching him how to play and noted that the difference between Native games and "western sports" lies in the apparent contradiction implied in the question he sometimes is asked: "How can you coach someone you're competing against?" The answer is straightforward: 'you never lose.' To Reggie, knowledge is no good if you don't share it with someone and he states that when he was better than someone else at an event, he won, and when he helped someone else improve and they won, he felt that he had won also.

He has come a long way since he first played Native games and sports in Point Hope. He was good at the games and active in them for fifteen years. He promoted and shared Native games with others and reflects that the games added meaning to his life. He remembers that when the World Indian Eskimo Olympics was over, the athletes used to party, but that has changed. Now there are healthy champions like "Big Bob" Aiken, Greg Nothstine and Asta Keller-Tony. Reggie, who works at the Alaska Technical Center in Kotzebue as a recruiter and administrator, says it's "cool to be clean and sober."

For Charlie Gregg, who played junior varsity and varsity basketball at Mount Edgecumbe High School, it is

easier to play sober. When you're not hung over or drunk, you have more fun and it "feels good not to drink." Charlie volunteers as a coach for Lions club basketball in Kotzebue where third through fifth grade kids learn to play basketball. The kids must have at least a C average to participate so it helps to motivate them to get good grades. Charlie and his wife got sober in 1987 because they felt a responsibility to provide their kids with a healthy environment. Family is No.1 to Charlie. Charlie says his experience is that alcohol is a problem

and leads to trouble. If you play a team sport like basketball, it is not right for you or the team. He enjoys coaching the kids because they "give it all they've got" and they are "fun to watch." Last year was also the first year that Kotzebue had youth softball for kids from ages five through fifteen.

Deborah "Tweety" Ivanoff said that she and her mom quit drinking at the same time. They got tired of the "same old thing." Now she finds participat-

ing in sports "more enjoyable." She enjoys playing basketball because of the long Unalakleet winter and "nothing else to do." It is also a chance to



Deborah "Tweety" Ivanoff

Photo by Paul Tony

get out of the house and stay in shape. Tweety played basketball in high school and then quit afterwards. She returned to the game, playing in the A bracket of the city league two years ago after she quit drinking. Now she feels that she performs better, has a clearer picture of things, and she stills like "watching others who think they have to drink to have fun." Now she can focus more on the game than being hung over.