

# *Games test strength, endurance*

BY MARGIE BAUMAN

The 17th annual World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, July 27-29 attracted some of Alaska's top Native athletes and dancers, following a tradition of northern entertainment that dates back centuries.

From tests of strength and endurance in the ear-weight and knuckle-hop contests to the songs and dances of Native Alaska, village people competed to the cheers of an enthusiastic crowd

Somehow it was too hot

for comfort during the games at the University of Alaska's Patty Gymnasium, but somehow too the contestants managed to ignore the heat and keep smiling. Young women in heavy traditional fur parkas, competing for the title of Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, beamed at the crowds, though beads of sweat ran occasionally down their brows.

The temperatures in the gymnasium is a matter of frequent discussion, in fact, at the numerous meetings held to coordinate the annual games. With

no air conditioning in the gymnasium, hand fashioned fans made the Olympics programs often offer the only relief from the heat.

The athletes' events and dances evolved out of the villages of Alaska, where for cen-

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**FLYING HIGH**—The fur ball is flying high in this photograph, as it receives a powerful kick from Charles Komeak of Tuktoyuktuk in the Northwest Territories on the Beaufort Sea, Canada. Komeak broke the world record this year, which coincidentally he set last year. This year's record was 7 feet, five and one-quarter inches. Last year's record was 7 feet, two and one-half inches. Komeak also won the Howard Rock Memorial Trophy and the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics sportsmanship medal last year. There are many stories as to how the two-foot-kick originated, but the one we like was told to us by John Heffle. Many years ago when the hunters would be out, and wanting to pass the long winter hours in the hunting igloos or kashims, and at the same time stay in good physical shape, the two-foot-kick was invented.

A Lens Unlimited Photo by Stu Rothman

# Olympics were formally organized in 1961

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turies they've provided friendly competition, and good entertainment on long summer days and winter nights.

Though competition between villages has existed for years, it wasn't until 1961 that the games were organized on a statewide basis with the prompting of Frank Whaley and Bud Hagberg of Wien Airways (now Wien Air Alaska), who feared the Native games might be forgotten with the rapid influx of non-Native cultures.

That first year of the Eski-

mo Games in Fairbanks, competitors came from Barrow, Unalakleet, Tanana, Fort Yukon and Noorvik.

The event grew to become a major community celebration, promoted by the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce. Then, in 1969, the Tundra Times, the statewide Native press, took over sponsorship and Native attendance and participation broke previous records.

The insignia for the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics today is an Arctic polar bear on ice, with six interwoven rings on

his back, representing the six major Eskimo and Indian tribes in Alaska: Eskimo, Aleut, Tsimshians, Tlingits Haidas and Athabascans. The rings are linked to demonstrate the newly felt brotherhood brought on by this friendly competition.

John Heffle Sr. is chairman of the board for the Olympics, which was incorporated as a non-profit corporation on Oct. 4, 1976.

Questions have arisen from time to time on the future of the Olympics; whether they will continue to be held every year, and if so, where. Part of the question is economics. Using monies from tickets sales at the games, the Olympics committee has also paid for housing and meals for athletes and dancers and other participants in the

Olympics. After all the bills are paid for use of the gymnasium, security guards, trophies and other miscellaneous expenses, the small amount of money remaining goes toward advance work for next year's games.

It's never much, so the Olympics committee appealed to the legislature in 1978 for some support money. No funds were allocated. The President's Council on Physical Fitness has for several years indicated it might have funds for the Olympics, if the committee could get people to Washington D.C. to present their case, but there has never been money available for the trip.

So the question may boil down again, in 1979, to the

same old question: how many people will volunteer to work on the games and how much time will they have to give? With rising costs for transportation, another question facing the Olympics people is how to attract funds to pay the huge transportation bills for participants and to send representatives to the Northern Games in Canada.

Though Canadians in past years have hosted Alaska Native athletes and dancers at the Northern Games, no funding has ever been available to reciprocate. The number of Canadians participating in the 1978 games was down from the previous year and any Alaskans participating in the Northern Games would have to pay their own way this year.