



AKIACHAK "BEAVERS"—The Beavers, school basketball team of the village of Akiachak, has sparked the village spirit behind it. Coached by a part Sioux Indian, Dick Wiegand, the Beavers even have taken on Bethel, a team on the junior level, and won one out of three games. There is "excitement" and the team is "really something"

at the village of Akiachak. Kneeling left to right: Ida Isaac, Carrie Noes, John George, Bertha Frederick, Sarah Nelson. Standing: Mike Wassillie, Walter Featherly, John Featherly, Lincoln Peter, Fritz George, Jackson Lomack, Eddie Moses, Charlie Jones, Golga Frederick, Moses George, George Peter and Nick Isaac. (Story on Page 4)

Grade School Basketball Team of Akiachak Causes Stir of Interest

By BETZI WOODMAN
(Special to Tundra Times)

Basketball has come to Akiachak on the Kuskokwim and it has turned the town on.

A team of 14 elementary school boys playing basketball, abetted by four girls leading cheers, has stirred a spirit in this community of some 300 people, which goes way beyond cheering and support for a school team.

Townfolk have caught an excitement and are busy using winter energy to build new or repair old homes. Parents and school are closer than ever before.

What's more, the spirit is spreading beyond the town limits. Already it has infected Kwethluk, some six miles down river.

And Walter Featherly, principal of Akiachak School, says everyone's happy. Especially Mr. Featherly.

Last year a new school was built in Akiachak. Two things about the Bureau of Indian Affairs school are important to the present bustle in town: it has a

multi-purpose room (rather rare in bush schools) and the men in town helped build the structure.

The former fact means there is a place where basketball (and other activities) may be carried on in proper manner.

The second point means the men were employed as carpenters and families have a little more money this year to augment income from fishing, cannery work and that earned by some at the prefabricated housing factory across the river at Bethel.

The money alone, however, can not account for the zingy atmosphere which prevails as people keep busy. Featherly says the town is "alive with enthusiasm."

Fifteen new houses are being constructed with "Bartlett funds" (which appear now to be curtailed with President Nixon's budget cutbacks). Another six or eight are going up with families getting their own lumber and handling the job themselves.

There is a new community hall and a cooperative store, now, too.

Not a little of the credit for this new spirit goes to Dick Wiegand, teacher and basketball coach. A graduate of a BIA school, Dick is half Sioux Indian and grew up on a reservation in Montana.

He and his team, the Akiachak "Beavers," have done well. They won one of three games played with Bethel—a team on the junior high level—and they have beat Dillingham twice.

Every two weeks the Kwethluk team-in-the-making comes over to use the multipurpose room (they do not have their own) and play the Akiachak fellows.

Bethel even came to Akiachak once. AND, this is the first small village to ever play organized basketball, Featherly reports.

It's "really something" when Kwethluk comes over for a game, says Featherly. Practically the whole town comes snorting over on snowmachines, along the trail and over the frozen river.

There's rarely an empty seat in the Akiachak gym and the cheers elicited by the pom-pom girls ring out across the wintry tundra.

Everyone in town coming to school for the games has done wonders for school-people relationships, Featherly reports. "Nothing done in the past 10 years has advanced the cause of education in the village so much."

It's not that basketball leads directly to appreciation of education, of course, but that the games have involved the people with the school in a happy relationship and provided the opening for even better understanding.

The first time the team planned a charter flight—about 15 or 20 minutes away by air—to play the Bethel team, there was no money for such a venture.

But basketball had already gotten into people's hearts and the villagers anteed up the \$10 each team member required. Since then, the Akiachak cut of the gate receipts has been sufficient to carry on.

Members of the Akiachak team who have helped lift the town out of its former winter dulls are: John George, Carl Moses, Mike Wassillie, Walter and John Featherly, Lincoln Peter, Fritz George, Jackson Lomack, Eddie Moses, Charlie James, Golga Frederick, Moses George, George Peter and Nick Isaac.