

Look out for awesome feats at the Arctic Winter Games

by Heather Cox

Arctic Winter Games

YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T. — Awesome feats will be doubly present at the Arctic Winter Games this year, March 11-17, in Yellowknife. Not only will there be the Inuit Sports, but the Dene Games also will be featured.

As one of the most popular and crowd-pleasing, the Arctic Games are a showcase for athletes to display their amazing feats of strength, skill and endurance that were once required by the Inuit to survive their nomadic life in a harsh environment.

The games use limited space and equipment because they were usually played in snow houses during long winter months. Materials on hand, such as ropes or sticks became a part of the action. The sports kept the Inuit physically fit during periods of low activity and helped pass the time in cramped quarters.

Today, the traditional games remain popular. In a land where there are few roads, athletes fly to different communities to compete with each other.

There will be nine Inuit sport competitions during the Arctic Winter Games, including the Airplane, Alaskan High Kick, Arm Pull, Head Pull, Kneel Jump, Knuckle Hop, One Foot High Kick, One Hand Reach and Two Foot High Kick. There will be junior and open categories for men and women.

As one of the most physically demanding of all the Inuit Games, the Airplane requires perfect control and overall body strength. Athletes extend their arms and legs, maintaining a straight horizontal position, and they are carried by four people over a 7.5 meter square. The one who maintains

a perfectly rigid position the farthest wins.

For the Alaskan High Kick, athletes must grasp one foot with the opposite hand while kicking a target. The foot must be continually held throughout the kick and balance maintained while landing. The record for the Alaskan High Kick is 6'8", set by Jayko Neeveacheak from Spence Bay at the 1988 Arctic Winter Games.

The Knuckle Hop is one of the more painful sports. Competitors assume the "push-up" position using their knuckles and toes for support. They hop forward on their toes and knuckles for as long as they can. The one who can cover the most ground without stopping wins.

One of the most spectacular Inuit Games is the One Hand Reach. Tremendous muscular coordination, skill and strength are required. An athlete must balance his entire body on the fingers of one hand, touch a target suspended above the other hand and return to a position of balance. The winner is the one who reaches the highest.

The Dene Games were traditionally played mostly by elders, but will feature a men's competition at the Arctic Winter Games. The sports include the Snowsnake, Finger Pull, Stick Pull, Pole Push and Hand Games. Each team must participate in all five events.

For the Snowsnake, a three-foot spear is thrown underhand along a flat surface. The athlete who throws the farthest wins. Accompanied by Dene drummers, the traditional Hand Games are a great crowd-pleaser.