

Planning Underway for Colorful Eskimo Olympics

As spring stirs, the Eskimo Olympics is also beginning to stir and plans for this unique spectacle are now being formulated.

The enthusiasm for participation in the Olympics performances by the villages is already apparent.

"I was very pleasantly surprised when I went to Kotzebue that the people there are really anxious to take part in the Eskimo Olympics," said Laura Bergt, chairman of the EO. She said that plans for

fund raising were underway at Nome to send King Island village performers to Fairbanks. This year, the Olympics will be held on August 9 through 12 and the performances will be staged at the Memorial Park, the home of the Fairbanks Goldpanners.

Laura Bergt said that she was anxious to get participants from the Canadian North. She said she had talked with some people from Inuvik, who came to Fairbanks recently, about Canadian participation in the Eskimo Olympics.

If it could be arranged, Laura would more than welcome the Drum Dancers from Inuvik, seal hook throwers, Eskimo Olympics queen pageant contestants and other entries the Canadian North can furnish. She said this would give the Olympics an international flavor which would give added interest to the spectacle.

Laura and other interested people will be listening for news from the bowhead whalers at Point Hope,

Barrow, Wainwright and St. Lawrence Island. The reason:

"That muktuk eating contest we put on last year turned out to be very popular," Laura Bergt said. "Some tourists even took part in it and enjoyed it."

For the first time last year, knuckle hop was introduced and it was enthusiastically received by the audience.

Laura said that new games will be put on. Some of them will be difficult and competitive.

"Some of the games will be endurance contests and some of them are actually painful," Laura Bergt pointed out. "But then they are true Eskimo games and they were performed throughout the past to enhance the ruggedness of the men needed in their severe surroundings."

One of these is expected to be the ear-pulling contest performed by two men, usually

with a braided caribou sinew loop, where each man puts the sinew break through the base of his ear. The men then begin to pull at a signal.

In the heat of competition in villages in the past, it was not uncommon to see the sinew break through the flesh of one or both men's ears. The man who outpulls the other is the winner.

As usual, there will be Eskimo dance contests. Pete Sovalik of Barrow is already rehearsing his dancers for the occasion.

For the first time in the six-year history of the Eskimo Olympics, a program

booklet was published last year that proved popular. It will be done again this year. Ross Schaeffer, a student at the University of Alaska from Kotzebue, is making a series of original drawings of the Olympics events for the booklet.

"It would be great if some of our Eskimo and Indian citizens would send in short stories for the program book," Laura Bergt said.

More than usual interest in the Centennial year Eskimo Olympics is developing and the unique program is promising to be even more spectacular this year.