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Excerpts from the opening ceremonies of the World Eskimo Indian Olympics

Fairbanks, Alaska

Moses Wassillie, moderator

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Series: Potlatch series

Moses Wassillie said the 1976 World Eskimo-Indian Olympics was held on the last three days of July. It was dedicated to Howard Rock's memory.

Willie Hensley spoke at the opening ceremonies of the World Eskimo Indian Olympics. He said Howard Rock was a writer, carver, painter, and a journalist. He said we will always remember people who have had an influence on our lives. Howard Rock has had an influence on all of our lives. Hensley said when he was in school he worked on solving the lands claims issues. Howard Rock was always there to listen and to help strategize. Hensley said he would like to read a portion of the book that Howard Rock wrote about the Alaska lands claims. Howard Rock wrote one thing that could be important is your own background. He said your culture can't be taken away from you. Your people in the past have dealt with life in Alaska. He said the will to survive is a great story and you should be proud of it. Your ancestors did amazing things and you should think of them when you meet obstacles. Willie Hensley wished the participants good luck.

Moses Wassillie said they asked Ebbie Jessup of Kotzebue what the Olympics meant to her. Jessup said the Olympics are when the cultures get together to meet and show their way of life. She thinks the regional corporations should sponsor their people. She said there should be a group started that should find ways of fundraising for participants. She'd rather have the Olympics in Fairbanks instead of Anchorage.

Song by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Moses Wassillie said they asked one of the ladies from Barrow about the blanket toss, Nalukataq and the proper way to get tossed. The unidentified person said they only have the blanket toss only in the spring after a successful whaling season. Even if they catch one in the fall season they do not have the blanket toss. They had always competed one against the other in the blanket toss. They also competed in other kinds of sports, too. They determined who the best stander on the blanket was and who was the highest. The elders were the judges. They would sit all around the Nalukataq. This tradition started way back. They can't remember how it started. The first thing you learn when competing is to learn how to stand up. You keep your legs wide when you are standing on the blanket. If you really want to do a good job on the blanket you don't look down. That makes you twist your body. The men that hold the blanket are supposed to hold it a certain way. Most accidents happen when some of the people tossing the blanket aren't tossing it properly.

Sally Moses from Bethel talks about how she keeps her balance in the air. She said you have to know the maneuvers. You jump on the count of three. Her first toss was two years ago. She had to have her

knees locked and bent a little. When you are up in the air you are supposed to keep your balance. Your keep your legs moving to keep yourself in balance. Your eye contact should be horizontal. When you look down people tend to get scared. This may make you flip over.

Moses Wassillie said Sally was one of the contestants in the queen contest. She said she wants to go back to Nunivak Island and write a book about her people when she graduates from college.

Song by Floyd Westerman

Moses Wassillie said the next segment features the queen contest.

Helen Lee announced the finalists. She said Miss Congeniality is Faith Peters. Miss Photogenic is Sherenna Jaegar. Second runner up for 1976 is Selena Goodin. First runner up is Sherenna Jaegar. Sherenna Jaegar said she was the youngest girl in the pageant. She is attending college and majoring in computer programming. Miss World Eskimo Indian Olympics is Bea Ballot. Helen Lee talks about Bea. Bea Ballot said there were eleven other girls in the contest. They had different business and corporations supporting them. She is a public health dental assistant and covers 14 villages in the Bering Straits region. When she first started attending school she wanted to be a dentist and she may return to school for that.

Moses Wassillie said the final segment features music from the five dance groups that appeared at the Eskimo Olympics. The first was a group from Wainwright. They perform two dances. The next group is Oliver and Olga Amoyuk. They perform the grandma dance about a grandson wanting to visit his grandma. The Barrow Dance Group salutes Howard Rock and the Bicentennial year. The winners of the Indians dance group were from Minto. They perform the invitational dance. The final group is the Tanana group with a couple of dances.