

The Sport of Wrestling: A Kahnawake Subculture

A commentary by Teyowisonte
teyowisonte@hotmail.com

A couple of weeks I ran into accomplished wrestling coach David Canadian. Dave had informed me that Kahnawake's premiere wrestling squad had began their summer training for the 2002 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) that will take place at the end of July. Being a former KSS wrestler, Dave then invited me to come and help out the team as best I can in their training; as many veteran wrestlers are encouraged to do. I instantly remembered the pride I felt when wrestling in high school and immediately accepted his invitation.

Not being on the mat since 1995, I knew I'd be rusty, but I didn't expect to be *humbled* by the young grapplers as I must have forgotten how tactical, intense, and ultimately exhausting the sport of wrestling actually is. I immediately began to appreciate the dedication, sacrifice, and intensity demonstrated by all of the wrestlers who set aside 2 hours from their beautiful summer vacations; to exert themselves to the limit. These kids work hard and deserve all the success they achieve.

The sport of wrestling is an ancient and traditional game and is as respected as Lacrosse is in Kahnawake. In fact, wrestling has become a real subculture here in Kahnawake since its GMAA championship dynasty that began in the 1989-1990 season. Since then, the undefeated squad has had unprecedented success in Canada and continues to breed champion after champion. This phenomenon has put Kahnawake on the map as a grappling force to be reckoned with.

Off the mat, the sport of wrestling also teaches valuable lessons in life for the young grapplers. Obviously, in order to succeed in wrestling one must be committed, focused, and goal oriented. Complimented by sacrifice and intensity, these qualities certainly help an individual succeed in school, work, and life in general. Moreover, unlike most team sports, wrestling teaches individual achievement for a collective success. A wrestler steps out on the mat alone and independent; yet the fate of the team is in his or her hands. This trait can be considered as an ethical lesson that very much harmonizes with our own traditional Kanien'kehá:ka way of life.

I suppose the greatest value that wrestling has to offer, aside from its numerous social advantages, is the raw pride and sense of camaraderie that is felt by both the individual and the collective. Indeed, it is a sensation that money can never buy, only hard work. The memories that are drawn from the time spent with the team and everlasting and priceless, and as a veteran of the squad I can certainly appreciate and confirm the good memories that comfort and inspire me when the going gets rough in everyday life.

The entire community also plays an integral part in the motivation and success of the team. This summer, it should be a priority of Kahnawa'kehró:non to encourage and nurture team spirit, for not only the wrestlers, but all Team Kahnawake athletes as time

draws near for the NAIG. When you see a wrestler jogging or a paddler struggling in the water, honk your horn and give them a “thumbs up”. Your support will surely motivate their spirit and enhance their performance. When you see an athlete selling a Team Kahnawake program, buy one!

In wrestling you only get what you put in. Therefore, the slogan of Team Kahnawake should be “hard work pays off”, because this is something that the wrestlers have proved time after time and is certainly a motto that could inspire and unify the spirit of Team Kahnawake. With a unified spirit Team Kahnawake certainly has the potential to dominate at the NAIG this year.

10-8-6-8-10 forever!