

FRAZIER, NOAH.

INTERVIEW

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Investigator
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Interview with
Noah Frazier
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TOLLIH AND HOW PLAYED

To the ancient hunter and warrior of the Choctaws, excitement of some kind was indispensable to relieve the wearisome of the nothing to do in which a great part of his life was spent. The intervals between hunting and war were occupied by having various amusements as ball plays, foot and horse races, wrestling, jumping and all other games known to them were being regulated by rules and regulations.

The games that they enjoyed most was the Indian Ball Game (Chahta Tollih) which was the Olympic Games of ancient Greece to them. Neither was it a child's game, for when they were playing match games they would not consider playing a young man under twenty-five years of age at the least, as they considered a young man under that age was merely a young lad who could not understand the game.

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A Choctaw Tollih of several years ago was, indeed, a game that well might have astonished the Titan from their own pastime. To describe a genuine Choctaw Ball play of those years ago, it excites a smile and only intensifies the old memory retained of that indescribable game. ~~What few Choctaws living that ever witnessed the real game of the Choctaws, or have played in the game, enjoy bringing up the subject for conversation as to the outcome of the game not caring that it was his side or team that lost the game nor does he care to relate the straight fact if he got beat up in the free-for-all fight which might have occurred during the game.~~

One who has not witnessed it can not form a just idea of the scene from any description given, for it baffles all the powers of language and must be seen before one can fully realize of the game.

When the able-bodied men of the village or settlement are tired of the same course that they have been doing for certain length of time and when

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they desire for a change, they sent a challenge to the other village of their own tribe for a game and if accepted--and it was rarely ever declined--a suitable place was selected and prepared by the challengers, and a date set as agreed upon. Usually Hetoka (ball ground) would be selected in some beautiful level plain easily found in their vicinity.

Two straight pieces of timber were firmly set about three to four feet in the ground, close together, each about ten feet in height and from four to six inches in width, known as Aiu'bi (goal or ball post). During the intervening time between play, both sides prepare for the ceremonies that they have to go through before the game.

Usually a day before the game most of the time was spent in painting with the same care as if getting ready for warpath, dancing with frequent rubbing of both the upper and lower limbs and taking their sacred medicine.

In the meantime, fans of the game, including the

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old, young, children, and the gravest of both sexes, could be seen winding through the woods toward the ball ground, carrying parcels of their wealth to stake or bet on their team while others loaded their ponies with skins, furs, trinkets, and every other imaginable thing that was to be a bet in the game.

On the morning of the day the players, at times would be seventy-five or more in number, would gather on each side, strong and athletic men, straight as arrows and fleet as deer, nearly nude excepting a broad piece of white cloth around the hips, while some may have a tail of a squirrel, deer, or ears of deer, owl, or some kind of feathers either pinned on their wearing apparel or on their garment that they may be wrapped up with. Now and then a red ribbon or red cloth may be flying which is fastened somewhere around their body. Upon their arrival they would gather and the forests would ring with their exulting songs and defiant humph-he (banter) as intimation of the great feats of strength and endurance, speed and activity they were to display before the eyes of the friends.

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While some one of the leaders of the game would make the announcement, betting was going on and the stakes being put up, the articles bet were all placed and others too numerous to mention. Then the players took their places, each furnished with a pair of Kapocha (ball sticks) which had been brought along by the players, each side were stationed at a pole. So many players on each side would be posted at their place and the defense were, or those defending their goal were called Hattak Fabussa (Pole men) while the offense players were called Fala-mo-li-che (throw-back men). The Fala-mo-li-che at the goal of their opponents were to prevent, if possible, the ball thrown by their opposite players from striking the pole and to throw it back toward their goal to their own player. In the center of the two poles, Iklanna (Middle men) were also stationed, the same number of each party as were stationed at the poles and with whom was a chief "Medicine man" whose business was to throw the ball straight up in the air which was

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the signal given which was the beginning of the wash-o-ha (play) to begin. It was more of the modern basket ball game although basket ball is not near so rough as the Indian ball game. The moment the ball was seen in the air, both sides, except the Falamoliche and Hattak Fabussa, who remained at their posts, rushed to the spot where the ball would likely fall. They were not allowed to pick up or throw the ball with their hand yet no rules and regulations governed the manner of playing, nor any act considered unfair which had been enacted under the impulse of the moment, regardless of consequences.

The ball was in the air as in basket ball. They throw, ran over each other, chased after the ball or the players who had the ball in the cup of the ball stick, stopping not nor heeding the broken limbs and bruised head or even broken neck of a fallen player. Like a herd of stampeded buffaloes upon the prairie they ran against and over each

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other in confusion and crazed excitement while the fans on the line shout "Falamoche! Falamoche!" (throw it back) while others shouted "Hokli! Hokli!" (catch, catch). Round and round they went until if chance was presented for the player, he would start off with the speed of a deer, holding the ball in the cups of his kapucha (ballstick) pursued by every player. In most cases when the runner got within about twenty-five or thirty steps or more from the goal, when the chance to run to the goal was impossible, he would toss the ball with the ball stick at the goal and usually hit the post and of course it counted as a score. It was played more of a combination between a football of school's and basket ball game.

From ten to twenty was generally the game. Each time the ball is thrown and hit against the goal or post it counted one score, and the first bunch or team reaching the required number won the game.

Note: Pete Cole, Indian, writes in distinctive Indian manner and little change is made in his manuscripts. Ed.