

By: Talon Ducheneaux (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe)

Sports being adored more than education is an issue that sadly found its way to reservations all across the country. If you currently look at any newspaper, it is most likely that you will see an athletic picture on the cover page. On the other hand, you may find a small article and/or picture of a Native American student who has overcome poverty, violence, alcoholism, or even just the reservation itself and is headed to college. This college could have a reputation like Harvard or Stanford, and yet the student will only get a couple paragraphs worth of recognition. Meanwhile, sports receive pages of coverage. It is evident to any teen that lives on the reservation that sports have more meaning to the community than education. The problem with these beliefs is that they jeopardize the futures of every tribe, because without any educated people to help run the tribe in the future, it is more likely for negative things to occur within the tribe and all enrolled members. To ensure future success, tribes must overcome this misguided influence of sports over education by not only themselves influencing youth to think otherwise, but the youth need to also help change the norms and values as well.

First of all, by honoring sports over education, it is like disrespecting our ancestors, looking at the fact that they suffered and endured hardship specifically for the future generations. For instance, from the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Chief Drifting Goose did all he could for his people. He stopped non-Indians from disobeying the treaties and harming his peoples' already diminished territories. Drifting Goose, however, being peaceful and wise as well, knew that a school must be made for the future generations to survive in the changing world. According to the Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center, Drifting Goose "wanted his children, and his children's children to have an

education that would help them survive in the modern world,” As a result of Chief Drifting Goose’s vision and influence, the land where the Crow Creek School now sits is on land that once belonged to him. His gravestone even sits in the cemetery near there. “A singular pillar on the dusty prairie for an extraordinary man.” (Akta Lakota Museum)

Now, as a former pupil to the school, and someone who is adescendent of Chief Drifting Goose, I saw and sometimes still see ways that the community behaves that shows much ungratefulness to their ancestors who invested so much in them. In the most recent year that I attended the high school, the facility had just opened a new gym that the tribe was very excited about. Any activity that was to be held was in the new gym year round. It came to be so breathtaking for the tribe that they had many pep-rallies for the basketball team, which interrupted full afternoons of class. Some of the community would come and help support the basketball team, even the Chairmen himself and other council members showed up throwing out free knick-knacks to the students sometimes, getting them excited. As a result of these pep-rallies, the counselor of the school decided it would be a good idea to honor the junior class with a special pep-rally, as they would be taking a very important test which would help determine the school’s funding and reputation. I, being a junior at the time, walked up in front of the gym with the rest of the class in embarrassment. About half of the students were absent, no community members appeared, and no tribal leaders or chairman felt it necessary to come. I felt so disgusted with the representation that I almost blew off the test, not really caring about it since nobody else did either.

The message that the community sent to me was that they did not care about academics. It seemed that as long as the basketball team was good, there would be no

turmoil or hardship on the reservation anymore. But while people followed the team up to the state championship that year, the reservation stayed the same. People drank, fought, domestic disputes continued to occur, children and teens still exchanged their money for narcotics to either experiment or feed their young addictions. Nothing on the reservation changed. Perhaps for a while the tribe received hope from this athletic achievement, but how long would those feelings last? What percentage of that team will get into the NBA? What percentage of high school students in America get into the NBA? For that matter, what percent of college students get into the NBA?

I am not mocking the Crow Creek high school in any way, I am just stating that all tribes need to get their youth into education more. The only way this can happen is the influence and message we send to the youth. One interesting fact is when living in Eagle Butte, South Dakota as a child; the teen suicide rate was dramatically high. Things had gotten so bad, a couple of times a week kids were committing suicide. The adults started to create groups and gave speeches, but it was not until a youth group full of high school students started that the suicide rate decreased. It took the work of the youth to help change the youth. Noticing this, I made it my top priority trying to become what the Native American communities need: a positive role model. When I made this goal for myself, I was honestly scared about doing big and affective things. This continued until I had a talk with very intelligent Native American college student, Tyson Johnston from the Quinault Nation, who is also the current co-vice president of the youth commission, tied in with the National Congress of American Indians. He said just to succeed, and watch the youth follow. That it didn't matter where I went or what I did with my future, as long as I played a good influence in the youth's lives.

Education is the only way we can better our communities. Sports on one's resume alone will not grant acceptance to many jobs no matter how good the player is, and athletics alone does not guarantee one's college acceptance. Bosses do not give raises, nor do they offer promotions solely on how good one's three-point shot looks. It is, instead, hard work that one puts into education that is valued, because it's what this world needs and looks for. President Barack Obama even stated that "we need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the super bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair." (Call of the Day, 2010). All in all, every Native American can help change their world and reservation as we see it today. Simply by succeeding and getting their younger successors into doing the same.

Works Cited

"Call of the Day" Call of the Day: **Barack Obama Thinks Science > Super Bowl**
<<http://presscoverage.us/news/call-of-the-day-barack-obama-thinks-science-super-bowl/>> (25 March 2011)

Johnston, Tyson, current co-vice president of the youth commission of the National Congress of American Indians, March 3rd, 2011.

Newman, Kathleen. "Drifting Goose."
<<http://www.aktalakota.org/index.cfm?cat=1&artid=52>> (22 March 2011)

"Youth Commission." **NCAI Youth Commission.** <<http://www.ncai.org/Youth-Commission.86.0.html>> (25 March 2011)