



Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

November 1-30

During Native American Heritage Month, we celebrate the rich and diverse cultures, traditions and histories of the Nation's First People and acknowledge their important contributions.

Developed by the NCAA Office of Inclusion and the **Indigenous Athletics Advancement Council**.

Traditional art from the Crow Nation is hand-painted on drums used during their ceremonies and sporting events. NCAA Photos.



NCAA Land Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that the NCAA national office is located on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi and Shawnee people. We honor the lands and the heritage of these tribes and pay respect to their ancestors both past and present.



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About Native American Heritage Month

HISTORY/SIGNIFICANCE

The first efforts to formally recognize the contributions of the Nation's Native Americans came in the early 1900s. In 1915, the Congress of the American Indian Association formally approved a plan to recognize the second Saturday of each May as American Indian Day and appealed for recognition of American Indians as citizens.

In 1916, the first American Indian Day in a state was declared on the second Saturday in May by the governor of New York. Through the years, several states have designated the fourth Friday in September as American Indian Day. Others celebrate Native American Day on the second Monday of October, when the federal government observes Columbus Day.

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed a joint resolution designating November as National American Indian Heritage Month. Every president since has issued annual proclamations designating the month of November as the time to celebrate the culture, achievements and contributions of people who were the first inhabitants of the United States.

Early Proponents of American Indian Day



Arthur C. Parker, a Seneca Indian and director of the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Rochester, New York, persuaded the Boy Scouts to adopt an American Indian Day in the early 1900s.

Wikimedia



The Rev. Sherman Coolidge, an Arapaho Indian and president of the Congress of the American Indian Association, issued a proclamation in 1915 declaring the second Saturday of May as American Indian Day.

Wikimedia

By the Numbers

According to the 2020 Census, **2.9%** of the U.S. population is Native American or Alaska Native, for a total of **9.7** million people.

According to the *NCAA Demographics database*, last published in 2023, there are 4,189 American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander student-athletes competing in NCAA sports. This is an all-time high and an increase of **7%** from the previous year.

1.58%

Football

1.34%

Softball

1.12%

Women's Volleyball

1.10%

Women's Basketball



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Sovereign Tribal Nations and Land

[Library of Congress Native American Maps](#)

Sovereignty refers to the right of American Indians and Alaska Natives to govern themselves. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Native American tribes as distinct governments, and they have, with a few exceptions, the same powers as federal and state governments to regulate their internal affairs.

To learn more about the 574 federally recognized tribal nations (often called nations, bands, communities, pueblos and Native villages) in the United States, visit the [National Congress of American Indians](#) website.

These Native nations are all culturally distinct communities, speak their own languages, and govern themselves as distinct political autonomies, different from both state and federal governments.

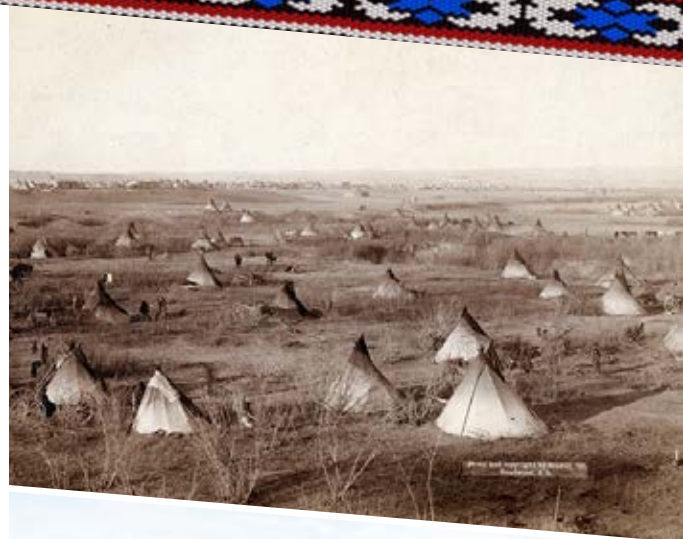
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Indigenous history is American history. Therefore, it is important that we recognize and show respect to the land we work and live on. A land acknowledgment is a simple way to honor the history of Indigenous people and to ensure that their history is not erased.

TREATIES

The United States government signed 370 treaties with numerous Indigenous nations from 1778 to 1871. Treaties with Indigenous people were signed across significantly different periods of history, with incredibly divergent views of what Indigenous nations were. This is why listening to what Native people are asking for is so important.

The terms “American Indian/Native American” are political terms, not to be confused with a person’s race or ethnicity. Since Indigenous communities existed within their own territories before the colonization of what would eventually become the United States, tribal sovereignty is held to be an inherent right, but its political effect depends on its recognition of other sovereign nations. Tribal sovereignty was recognized and ratified through treaties signed with Native nations and the United States. Treaties are documents signed between two sovereigns and are still upheld today.



Top photo: Potawatomi State Park. Middle photo: The Great Hostile Camp. Bird's-eye view of a Lakota Sioux camp, probably on or near Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. Photo by John C. Grabill, 1891. Bottom photo: Entering Pine Ridge Indian Reservation Road Sign, South Dakota.

Shutterstock





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Inclusive language

Native American, American Indian and Indigenous are all terms that Indigenous people use to identify themselves. Indigenous people also identify with specific nations, tribes, bands and communities. It is important to ask people how they would like to be identified and referred to.

For more information, see: najanewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAJA_Reporting_and_Indigenous_Terminology_Guide.pdf

CELEBRATE

- Educate yourself and your department about Indigenous history and contemporary contributions. This includes learning whose land you are on through resources like native-land.ca. Incorporate a land acknowledgment before each athletics event or celebration. Include stories on aspects of the Indigenous history of sports and contributions of Native Americans.
- Explore Native American/Indigenous culture through [art](#), [literature](#) and [film](#).
- Tag your teammates.
 - Highlight the voices of individuals on your team(s) and in your athletics department who identify as Native American/Indigenous. Lean on their advice on how best to celebrate their culture.

- Support local Native American and Indigenous organizations by volunteering, creating awareness of their efforts and inviting organizations to collaborate on events.

CENTER

- Establish an affinity or resource group.
 - Create a platform for your Native American student-athletes and staff to be heard by establishing an affinity/resource group or ensure Native American/Indigenous representation in current groups. Check out this resource on how to [create an affinity group](#).
- Highlight Native American/Indigenous student-athletes.
 - Lift the voices of both past and present Native American/Indigenous student-athletes by allowing them to share their stories and cultures with teammates, athletics departments and fans.
- Partner with campus organizations and local Indigenous communities.
 - Athletics departments can connect with campus resources such as Native American/American Indian/Indigenous studies departments, a Native American student center and student organizations to host collaborative events. For example, collaborate with admissions to host a Native American Prospective Student Day. Collaborate with local Indigenous communities to create giveaways that are culturally appropriate.
- Institute an athletics department diversity, equity and inclusion education session that focuses on awareness, recruiting, retention and graduation/promotion of Native American student-athletes, coaches, staff and administrators.

CHAMPION

- Host diversity, equity and inclusion panels and trainings.
 - Foster an inclusive community by offering educational training and workshops on various topics in diversity, equity and inclusion. Include the experiences of Native American/Indigenous athletes and staff in the conversation to center their voices and to provide cultural insights that address the needs of this population.
- Host athletic clinics and events within local Indigenous communities.
- Host a Native American Heritage Game.
 - Foster awareness and inclusion by presenting local tribal flags and incorporating a Native speaker to perform the national anthem in a Native language of your respective area during pregame activities, incorporate a local drum group and dancers for halftime and host a VIP reception for tribal dignitaries.

NOTE: These recommendations are not strictly for National Native American Heritage Month and should be practiced throughout the year.



Student-Athlete Spotlights

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BRAD GREENE

Shoshone/Paiute

Division I, UC Irvine, 2020 Graduate

Basketball Student-Athlete

Q. How do you feel other Native American student-athletes can be supported by their teammates and coaches?

A. AN EDUCATION OR BRIEF UNDERSTANDING OF NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE WOULD HELP SUPPORT THE NATIVE AMERICAN ATHLETES. The representation of Native Americans not only in collegiate athletics but in college in general is very small, so when there isn't this knowledge, it creates an even greater isolation. There was little knowledge of Native Americans on my team where it felt like I was always teaching or explaining every little thing about my culture and background. **IT SHOULDN'T BE A SURPRISE THAT THERE IS SOMEONE WHO IS NATIVE AMERICAN ON A TEAM**, or that there are Native Americans, which is how it feels when there isn't knowledge of Native American culture and heritage. Over my time at college, it progressively got better as more of my team and coaches began to understand more of my heritage.

Q. What suggestions would you have for amplifying the voices of our Native American student-athletes?

A. I would encourage Native American student-athletes to never be timid to **USE YOUR VOICE**. Whether it's among your team, student organization or classroom, by using your voice, you not only help yourself, but you also help everyone you represent be heard, as well. Being an athlete, you are given such a powerful platform to help bring attention to matters that may be hidden away from those around you. But more importantly, **YOU ARE GIVEN A PLATFORM TO INSPIRE** and encourage those who share your culture that may not think they have what it takes. You never know who is listening and who it may benefit.



Brad Greene
Submitted photo



TETON SALTES

Oglala Lakota Nation
Division I, New Mexico 2020 Graduate
Football Student-Athlete

Q. *How do you feel other Native American student-athletes can be supported by their teammates and coaches?*

A: First and foremost, **BE YOURSELF**; never feel the need to hide who you are and where you come from if other people around you feel uncomfortable or don't understand your culture and way of life. Embrace who you are and do not be afraid to share your culture with your teammates around you. I have found throughout my journey that there are so many people (teammates, friends, coaches, etc.) who find our way of life fascinating and want to learn more about our experiences/perspectives; always look to **BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER** in a positive way and look to **EMPOWER** those around you. As Indigenous people, you are far too powerful and valuable not to share who you are with those around you! Use your identity as a way to bring people together and empower your teammates to work toward a collective goal. It may be potentially uncomfortable at first, but you'll quickly find that you have the unique intrinsic quality and ability to spread **POSITIVITY** and **COLLECTIVENESS** throughout the lives of those around you each and every day!

LAKOTA BEATTY

Lakota/Gros Ventre/Caddo Nation
Division I, Oral Roberts 2019 Graduate
(Previously played for Oklahoma State)
Basketball Student-Athlete

Q. *How do you feel Native American student-athletes can be supported by their teammates and coaches?*

A. Because the number of Native Americans playing NCAA athletics is so low, I think it is important to acknowledge that fact and understand where they come from. Understanding this will allow them to **FEEL SEEN AND UNDERSTOOD**.

Q. *What suggestions would you have for amplifying the voices of our Native American student-athletes?*

A. I would suggest that **EDUCATING YOURSELF ON OUR CULTURE** would be a good place to start. There are still many harmful stereotypes/tropes that are used today against Native people, so not contributing to that is so important. Allowing space for these Native athletes to be heard and fully themselves is a positive step in the right direction. November is Native American Heritage month, so a tangible way to begin is to ask the Native athletes what communities they represent and belong to and then educating yourself on whose Native land that you are currently occupying. All of these things will encourage the Native athlete to not feel so alone during their collegiate experience.



Teton Saltes
Submitted photo



Lakota Beatty
Submitted photo

NANABAH ALLISON-BREWER

Navajo Nation

Division I, New Mexico 1999 Graduate
Basketball and Volleyball Student-Athlete

Q: *What can be done to help young American Indians pursue sports in conjunction with higher education?*

A: I think that sport brings so much. Just the **VALUES** and the **BASIC LIFE PRINCIPLES** and all of those things that are in sports are what you utilize in everyday life. To **MATURE** and **GROW** and to be **STRONG LEADERS** who can later go back into their **COMMUNITIES**. And help fight the issues of **EDUCATION** or help fight the issues of **HEALTH CARE** or **OBESITY** or **TEEN VIOLENCE** or whatever it may be because we are going to have all those different obstacles. Stress, pressures, but I feel like sports help in those areas of **COMMUNICATION, TEAMWORK, LEARNING HOW TO FIGHT, LEARNING HOW TO CONTAIN A STUDY, AND THAT IS PART OF EVERYONE'S LIFE**. That is what I hope I can **GIVE BACK** and help these players be strong women and gain the **RESPECT** and help out in their communities in every aspect.



Nanabah Allison-Brewer
Submitted photo

Additional Resources and Sources

ncai.org/about-tribes

vox.com/first-person/2019/9/23/20872713/native-american-indian-treaties

critfc.org/member_tribes_overview/treaty-q-a/

illuminative.org

Native American Journalists Association



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