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### Let The Games Begin! Going For Gold At The NAIG

Posted by System Admin

Wed, 05-Jul-2006 12:06 AM



Raymond Montour



Gordon Thompson and his coach Deborah Stipdonk



Genevieve and Ashley Baker

Denver--Most of the 7,500 athletes at the North American Indigenous Games, like Raymond Montour, 14, dream of winning a gold medal. Montour, Gun Lake Pottawatomie/Acoma, is a competitive swimmer and has already won two bronze medals at the Games in the Individual Medley and the Butterfly Race.

But for 14-year-old swimmer Gordon Thompson, just being at the NAIG is a big accomplishment. When asked about his chances of winning a medal, Thompson replied "not so good." That's because Thompson, Inuvait from the Northwest Territories (Canada), is not a competitive swimmer. In fact, the only swimming pool in his hometown (Fort Sumner) is just 3 feet deep and is open only 6 weeks out of the year. In the two days before his meet on Wednesday, Thompson practised jumping from a block or starting platform. He'd never jumped into a pool from a block before he arrived in Denver. Neither had his teammate, 12-year-old Tyrone Stipdonk, Dene/Metis. "Ow, ow," yelled Stipdonk after making a belly flop dive from the platform. This is also the first time they've swam in a 25-meter Olympic size swimming pool.

"For them it's about having fun and meeting people. I hope by being here they will be inspired and get ready for the next one (NAIG 2008). My objective is to get them to be good swimmers so if anything happens, they're able to help themselves," said Deborah Stipdonk, their coach. As for Thompson, he hopes the three-day road trip to Denver wasn't for nothing. "Hopefully I'll win," said Thompson confidently.

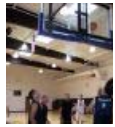
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Like Deborah Stipdonk, Raymond Baker is also coaching his swim team, Team Colorado, for the first time. "I offered to volunteer and here I am. This is my first day practising with the team," Baker said after arriving at the pool on Monday. His two daughters, Genevieve, 15, and Ashley, 12, are competing. The family resides in Connecticut but all are members of the Southern Ute Tribe in Colorado.

The 2006 NAIG is a large, multi-sport event that celebrates Native American and First Nations sport and culture. The 2006 Games are being held all week in Denver through July 8 and will feature competitions in 16 sports, a Cultural Village and many other exciting events and attractions.

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