

'This game is our game:' opposing Akwesasne, Six Nations players join dances



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The Jimerson family performs a dance in the second-period intermission. They also performed a smoke dance during the pre-game ceremony and were joined by players from Akwesasne and Six Nations, on Wednesday August 7, 2019 in Akwesasne, Ont. Nick Dunne/Cornwall Standard-Freeholder/Postmedia Network *NICK DUNNE/CORNWALL STANDARD-FREEHOLDER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK*

AKWESASNE — The barn-burner Ontario Lacrosse Association Jr. B championship series between the Akwesasne Indians and the Six Nations Rebels brought plenty highlights to remember, but one of the most-memorable scenes occurred right before the game.

Each game in Akwesasne and Six Nations begins with a smoke dance. Like the rest of the season in Akwesasne, the Jimerson family performed it for the packed crowd at the Turtle Dome. But during the final series against Six Nations, they had some special guests.

Opposing players Brett Logan and Gutch Salinas— of the Indians and Rebels, respectively— took off their gloves and helmets and laid down a firestorm of moves with the dance crew, who were dressed in regalia. The dance involves lightning-quick footwork of the feet mixed with heavy, thunderous stomps that slam to the beat of the drum.

In Game 1, it was Logan who joined the smoke dance on a whim. In Game 2, Salinas couldn't help himself. From then on, the two performed before each of the remaining games.

"We are passionate about the game of lacrosse and our heritage, our language, our songs and our dances. As you can see, every single of us came together came for this series." said Salinas.

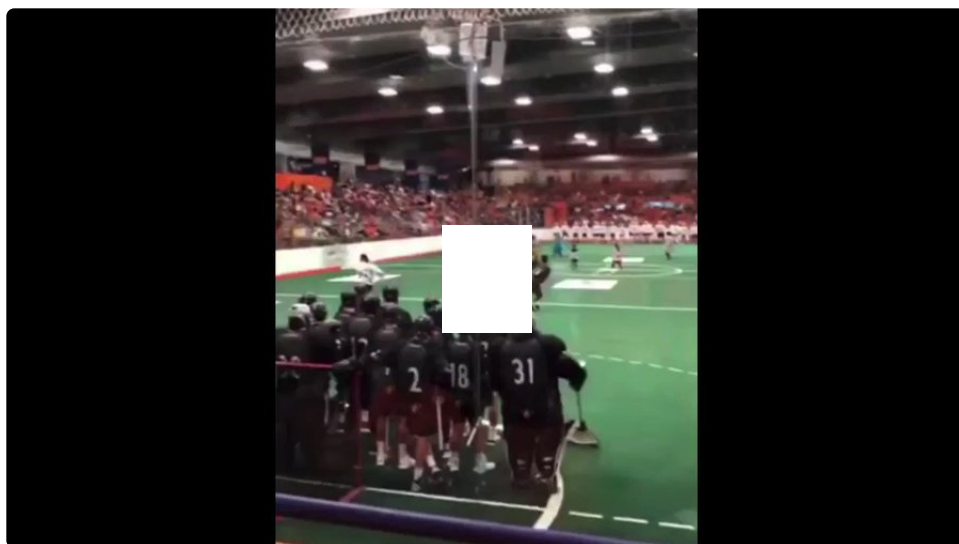


Lacrosse Flash

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A face-off before the opening face-off. Gutch Salinas (@SN_REBELSLAX) and Brett Logan (@IndiansJrBLax) take part in the pre-game smoke dance. If this doesn't fire you up, we really don't know what will.

(h/t Layne Smith/Facebook)#LaxFlash ⚡



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Formerly a war dance for soldiers to display their battle-time achievements, the dance's purpose and style has evolved. It is now a full-on competitive dance frequently performed at powwows, and is an opportunity for people to strut their stuff and show off their talents.

The smoke dance holds deep cultural value to the Iroquois, much like lacrosse, whose significance in both Akwesasne and Six Nations of the Grand River is major. It was considered to be the Creator's game, a gift to the people for his entertainment that would heal those who played. Though modern lacrosse has been modified to mirror elements of basketball and hockey, that cultural link remains strong to this day.

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Logan and Salinas whizzed around the boxed field, arms weaving through the air as they each put their own personal touches to the dance. A twirl here, a bob there. It was a mesmerizing start to a game that fired up the whole crowd. But it was also transcendent moment that caught emotions far beyond the realm of sport; it was culture proudly on display before thousands of people.

Salinas has been on a long journey through his lacrosse career. Hailing from Six Nations, Salinas plays at Trent University in Peterborough, Ont., when the OJBLL season is over. He began his career with the Rebels, but had to move away to play with other teams over the years. Returning to the team and performing the smoke dance at a home crowd in Six Nations and in Akwesasne, a fellow Haudenosaunee community, was a dream come true.

"It was a moment that I'll never forget in my entire life. Taking off my gloves, throwing my stick down and running out there onto the floor, its unlike anything you've ever felt before," said Salinas. "You're out there dancing for yourself, for your team, for your family, you're starting to reminisce about

everything that's happened before and start looking forward (to the future)."



Six Nations Rebels player Gutch Salinas joined the pre-game smoke dance before the final game of the OJBLL championship finals on Wednesday August 7, 2019 in Akwesasne, Ont. Nick Dunne/Cornwall Standard-Freeholder/Postmedia Network *NICK DUNNE / NICK DUNNE/STANDARD-FREEHOLDER*

Salinas and Logan, beyond both knowing the stellar moves, are closely connected to one another. They are friends who've played together and tried out for teams together.

"We kind of put the wall up against each other after the series started heating up," said Salinas, but toward the end of the game as Akwesasne made its final push while down 7-10, they had a quick exchange.

"I said, 'come on sevens, don't quit on me now.' He shined a big ole smile to me and I knew he wasn't going to. He was going to give it all he had," Salinas said.

The Indians certainly made the Rebels earn their victory, attacking the net with the championship on the line.

While the Indians ultimately lost the match, the winner of the dance-off was

"I don't know (danced better). There was a couple hops he missed in the first game. The second one I missed the final beat there," said Salinas. "Tonight, I don't know. I think it put on tonight, it was the last game of the season."

While Logan was unavailable to speak with the Standard-Freeholder for this article, Salinas said he was grateful for the crowd, who showed up droves and had to park in the neighbouring fields once the parking got filled up.

"I cant thank Akwesasne enough for having the people here, for making this game just as large as it should be."

"This game is our game. We're gonna play how we play it," Salinas said. "We did something much larger than the Ontario championship."