



Photo by Brent Merrill

Randy Stewart, Yakama



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Harris Reibach



Photo by Peta Tinda



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Travis Mercier (left) and Jeff Mercier



Photo by Justin Phillips

Deitrich Peters

## It's All About The Deception, And The Fun

■ First ever Grand Ronde Stick Game Tournament held during the pow-wow.



Photos by Peta Tinda



**Native Players** — The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's first ever stick game tournament took place near the Governance Center during the Tribe's Annual Contest Pow-wow August 16, 17 and 18. Grand Ronde Tribal member Jeff Brisbois (left) has breathed new life into the stick game tradition by organizing the tournament.

### By Peta Tinda

They chatter like baseball players. They drum while they play, but only to throw off their opponents. More importantly, stick game players don't want you to know what they are thinking.

The First Annual Grand Ronde Stick Game Tournament was held in a large white tent, just west of the governance center. Inside the tent were rows of people singing and drumming, or just visiting and drinking coffee. A man in a brightly colored coat made from a Grand Ronde Pendleton blanket stood in the midst of all this, smiling and greeting people.

That man was Tribal member Jeff Brisbois, a self-professed "die hard," stick gamer.

To him, the stick game is more than just a game - it's a valuable cultural tradition.

"I believe that the game is important to our tradition," said Brisbois. "It's a solid link to our past."

With that in mind, Brisbois set about organizing the tournament. He was involved with teaching classes locally in the months leading up to the tournament. He contacted old friends that he knew from the stick game circuit and told them about the tournament.

The result was a successful tournament, with teams coming from all over the United States and Canada to take part in the traditional game.

"It went pretty good, all the teams had a good time and said they'd be back next year," said Brisbois.

The traditional game, in which two teams try to guess which hands the other team is holding a marked set of bones, accompanied by drumming and singing, has increased in popularity in recent years. Stick games are often held during pow-wows. Many Tribal members have traded in their slot tokens and bingo dabbers for

a set of bones and sticks, or instead of gaming at the local casino, many have begun to take up traditional stick gaming. Several who came for the tournament were Tribal Elders in their own communities, who to go to tournaments not only to play, but also to see old friends and meet people.

It's more traditional and a more friendly, social setting, says Brisbois.

"People just like to be around the drum and learn those good songs," he said.

The tournament reflected that. Everyone was smiling and visiting, or sipping the free coffee that was provided. Nine teams, including a team from Grand Ronde, competed for cash prizes and embroidered jackets.

"We're trying to bring it back," said Brisbois. "This is something we used to do. It helps us remember who we are." ■