

Iroquois Nationals Champions for Sovereignty

by Ernest L. Stevens, Jr.

This past July, the world's eyes were fixated on the battle for tribal rights as a Native American lacrosse team took a bold stance against two countries' attempts to erode their tribal sovereignty. The Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team may have been unjustly stripped of the opportunity to compete in the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships, but to Indian Country and tribal sovereignty advocates worldwide, the 23 players of the Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse team remain true champions.

The Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team, ranked 4th in the world by the Federation of International Lacrosse, was to compete in the opening game against England in the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships. The Championships were being held in the United Kingdom this past July. Initially, the U.S. State Department refused to allow the team to travel outside of the country because the team's Haudenosaunee Confederacy-issued passports did not have the required



security features. After much public outcry, the U.S. State Department approved the travel on a one-time waiver at the request of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. However, the team was unfairly barred from competing yet again when the British government said that the team wouldn't be allowed into the U.K. without U.S. or Canadian passports.

Rather than accede to the demands of the

U.S. and British governments, the Iroquois Nationals insisted upon using their tribal passports because they consider themselves citizens of the Iroquois Confederacy. Refusing to use U.S. or Canadian issued passports, the Iroquois Nationals argued that the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, as a sovereign nation, issues legitimate and valid transportation documents that should be recognized by other sovereign nations like the U.S. and Britain. However, the British government rejected the team's tribal passports and the team was forced to forfeit its games, in a sport invented by the Haudenosaunee nonetheless, at the 2010 World Lacrosse Championships.

The National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) commends the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team for fighting for their tribal rights and for taking a stand against attempts to weaken their tribal sovereignty. In the team's struggle to maintain and protect tribal sovereignty, they sacrificed their dreams of capturing a championship title for which they have worked and trained for all of their lives. The Iroquois Nation proved to the world that we will not allow our tribal sovereignty to be compromised, even at the cost of lifelong dreams and goals. Like our warrior ancestors who acted only for the benefit of their people and never for personal gain, the Iroquois Nationals refused to jeopardize their tribal sovereignty for personal victories and fame.

Congratulations to the 2010 Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Team. Each and every one of you are our champions! ♣

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