



## "THE ORIGIN OF THE FIREBALL GAME"

Wampanoags, especially Mashpee Wampanoags have traditionally played fireball for years upon years. The origin of this "game" came from an ancient medicine person who diagnosed the need for courageous energy, which the patient lacked. This Pow Wow or medicine person burned tobacco and prayed for healers' instructions. The answer came through a ball of fire. The instructions were to gather the bravest men and women of the community. Once gathered they were told of their ability to create a marvelous medicine. Each were to paint themselves as if to war on a deadly enemy. The enemy being the disease within a beloved member of their tribe. The Pow Wow made a leather ball and soaked it in whale oil. When the warriors returned painted, bringing with them their families all were divided into two teams. A chant was taught for the spectators. The chant called the diseased spirit ordering it to leave the village forever. The warriors were told to kick and throw the fireball as they would our Indian football, this time playing for a life. Once the ball was lit the Pow Wow blessed the warriors and warned them that any show of fear or cowardice could kill the patient. Each player then dedicated their courage and strength to the patient. A signal was called out and the ceremony began.

While today this "game" is often played for sport, it is a ceremony of powerful medicine. Any person on the field can dedicate his or her fearlessness and energy to someone ill.

The fireball game is always exciting to watch. We can be proud of our warriors who are brave enough to face the fireball. If you know someone who is seriously ill, you can ask a player to dedicate their energy. It is considered proper to offer a gift when asking for medicine of any kind.

I give my greetings and thanks to those generations of special people who have continued our fireball ceremony.

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Ramona L. Peters