



## ***Class I & II Gaming: The Bedrock of Indian Gaming***

by Jerry Danforth

*“There was a time when Indian gaming meant bingo and coin-in meant money in the cigar box. Originally, hard cards were used during each game session and corn kernels marked the number that was called.”*

Class I and Class II games laid the foundation for what has turned the economic tide on many Indian reservations. When the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) was passed it included, among other things, three classifications to various games that have been, and would be played, in many parts of Indian Country.

The first of these classifications, Class I, refers to traditional or ceremonial games, such as the Peach Stone game, played for generations and popular still today among the Iroquois. The Moccasin game of the Ojibiwe, and the list of traditional games of chance played in Indian Country goes on and on, and today they are still alive and well.

The rules of the traditional Native American games have been carried on from generation to generation. The responsibility to follow the rules was borne by participants, observers, and the community alike. Integrity and personal pride was paramount for both winners and losers. Yes indeed, well before there was IGRA, Native Americans were conducting and regulating Indian gaming. As a matter of fact, many Indian leaders at the time that IGRA was pending before Congress, spoke out against this legislation because they considered it to be an intrusion by the federal government on Indian tribal sovereignty. Despite the objections, IGRA became law for Indian gaming.

The second category of games within IGRA was Class II, or bingo, and it is bingo that launched Indian gaming and has become the bedrock of modern day Indian gaming. A game that migrated from Europe, commonly played at the family kitchen table or as a fund raiser game for churches and social groups, it's interesting to follow bingo from Italy to Indian casinos.

There was a time when Indian gaming meant bingo and coin-in meant money in the cigar box. Originally, hard cards were used during each game session and corn kernels marked the number that was called. Paper bingo sheets replaced the hard cards, and were spread out in front of each player at their place at the table. Players often marked their territory at the table with their personal lucky charms. Armed with their lucky color dauber, they were ready to play bingo. Today, with the help of technical aides, electronic pads have replaced the paper sheets and a stylus replaced the dauber, but in most cases the lucky charms have remained the same.

Advanced technology has now propelled bingo to a newer

and much more sophisticated level of play. Being able to display the results of a standard bingo game on a video screen, an electronic wheel, or a mechanical reel, coupled with audio effects, bingo today plays head to head with the most advanced Class III games in the industry. There are a number of examples where Indian tribes have built a dynasty on the bedrock of Class II gaming.

The third category of Indian gaming that IGRA defined was Class III. Basically, any game outside of Class I and Class II became Class III. They were games that were typically found in Las Vegas, Reno, and Atlantic City, slot machines, dice tables, roulette wheels, to name a few.

The passage of IGRA ignited the change, because within IGRA, Congress also delegated its authority, allowing states to engage with Indian tribal governments to negotiate gaming compacts. This set in motion the pursuit by many tribes and states to secure compacts and initiate Class III gaming. There were good, bad, and ugly negotiation processes taking place between tribes and states. The flurry of activity that ensued resulted in a wide range of terms within state/tribal gaming compacts and Class III Indian gaming was on its way.

During all this activity, bingo continued as a part of Indian gaming, but was pretty much left in the dust by those interested in bringing Vegas-style games to Indian casinos. The manufacturers of gaming devices, in most instances, followed the Class III gaming interest. A few manufacturers stayed the course, applying advanced technology, dedicated research and development, and engineering designs to perfect and enhance the game of bingo.

With the use of technological aids, handheld devices replaced bingo paper, styluses replaced daubers, and today players can sit at a Class II game right next to a Class III game and play with hundreds of other bingo players at Indian casinos – playing exciting and fun bingo games.

Bingo is the bedrock of Indian gaming and it is stronger and more exciting than ever before! ♣

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