

The History of Basque Pelota in the Americas

by

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One of the most fascinating chapters in the long history of Basque pelota is its extension and evolution in the New World. As can be expected, this history closely parallels the immigration of Basques throughout the American continents. But it goes beyond the Basque presence alone to take on a life of its own, developing its own personality in many corners of Latin America and, in to hers, creating new variants which would be incorporated into the family of basque pelota throughout the world.

Basque emigration to the Americas began in the 16th century with the first waves of conquistadors and missionaries and continued over five centuries until slowing to a trickle 30 years ago. Oftentimes, it was made up of segundones seeking limitless opportunities. At others it was a flood of refugees as wars, political instability, or economic problems forced thousands to leave Euskalherria. And so they went to the Americas; the new land of opportunity. The well educated tended to flock to the urban centers of Latin America while the young peasant farmers tended to find opportunity in the frontiers of the day.

Wherever they went, they took their customs and traditions with them, as well as their religion and beloved pelota. There, they tended to confront the unpredictabilities of a strange land by banding together to conduct business and to share the language, foods and festivals of their native land. Basque pelota was one of these cultural icons which served both as a form of recreation and as a cultural sacrament.

The first generation of immigrants invariably maintained the traditional rules and structures

of the game, usually playing with their bare hands on a court constructed from memory to approximate those found next to the church of their native villages. However, the lack of communication with the Old World and among the settlements themselves was to make this increasingly difficult. It was also difficult or prohibitively expensive to import equipment and balls from the homeland and so, in a new world characterized by improvisation and adaption, they began to make their own balls, equipment, and frontones. Furthermore, centuries of mining with millions of immigrants from the four corners of the earth created a "melting pot" in which Germans and Asians and Basques eventually realigned to form new national identities despite the desire to also maintain Old World cultural identities through euskal etxeak and other associations. As the years and the generations passed, so too did the collective memory of the village courts and the rules. The old trunk of the tree branched out to produce new and unexpected expressions.

New World Variations of Pelota

Similar to the homeland, the first games of pelota were likely played against the wall of the local church. As time went on, they built courts made from local stone, adobe or cement. It is safe to say that there were at least one, and perhaps several thousand of these courts scattered throughout the Americas. Many of these courts were irregular in size and in form.

Where the Spanish Basque settled, the frontón would frequently have a frontis, a back wall and a left-handed side wall, however, they are frequently missing the back wall. Occasionally, such as in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, the wall is on the right side thought to have been placed there because the local players were predominantly right handed and, without a back wall, could hit the ball further with the wall on the right side (Hist 171). As the construction of frontones became prohibitively expensive many opted to build a front wall only such as those found in the Valle de Jauja-Mantaro in Peru, or even the small wooden frontis pelota game which has evolved in Peru (Hist 196). Frontis only courts were also popular wherever French Basques settled. In fact, the

predominantly French Basque population of Uruguay left an indelible mark on the game there, since almost all of their courts are based on trinquette courts (Hist 215). Although they tend to maintain the tambor and sloping roof here again one can also appreciate many irregularities. The two walled, open back fronton can also be found in some of the provinces of Peru. The tin on the front is has also been moved up or down in places, or have disappeared entirely.

The accessibility of pelota balls in the Americas has been a constant source of frustration. In 1557, Garcia Hurtado de Mendoza, the Alavese governor of Chile went so far as to import 3,000 handballs for sale in Chile, much to the detriment and ire of the king's interests (Hist 86). Immigrants were forced to find a local solution to the pelota problem, producing important innovations. Certainly one of the most important contributions to the game took place towards the end of the 19th century, when someone incorporated virgin American rubber into the pelota, making the ball much livelier and dramatically transforming pelota into a much quicker and more interesting game. The variations were many - rubber string cores, solid rubber balls, hollow, air-filled rubber balls and rubber core wrapped in cork. In more recent times, the use of tennis balls to play pelota has become increasing popular. To be sure, other rubberless balls evolved as well. In Mexico, handballs were painted blue or black, or used goma arábica to protect the ball from weather. In Peru, they used a pelota de trapo made from tique (lana) wrapped with cayto (hilo de lana), eventually gave way to the tennis ball.

An infinite variety of the rules can also be found in the Americas. In Ecuador, the game of tabla uses a pelota de gomo con viento, keeps score somewhat like tennis and is played with 5 players on each team (Hist 99). A point is called a Quince, and four Quinces constitute a juego. Winning three juegos gains the team a mesa and it takes two mesas to gain un coto or the match. In Peru Paleta Frontón matches are played on 5 by 6 meter frontis and are scored the same as voleibol: three out of five sets wins the match, with the first to win 15 points winning the game (Hist 187). Occasionally, invented pelota games never extend beyond one local. Such is the game

of Chacual which was invented by Sr. Beartriz Jiménez at his private frontón in Santiago Tulyehualco, Mexico towards the end of the 19th century (Hist 177).

In Occopa, Peru, pelota was introduced in 1725 when the Franciscans established the convento de Santa Rosa de Ocopa (Hist 197). Many of the Basque brothers not only played the game themselves but taught it to their local students, who made it popular throughout the province. Over two centuries, however, local adaption produced a game called Pelotaris which, while grounded in Basque pelota, has its own characteristics. In 1958 numerous representatives of the communities where Pelotaris was popular met in Lima with the Comité Nacional de Deportes to petición that it be recognized as a separate sport in order that it be eligible for financial support from the state (Hist 199). the National committee ruled that Pelotaris was nothing more than a variation of pelota vasca and that if they wanted it recognized, they would have to adapt the game to pelota vasca and to adhere to their rules. After several years of steady decline of the Pelotaris game, the committee reversed itself and recognized it as an autonomous Peruvian sport. Unfortunately, it was too late and the game is no longer played much.

Along with the ball and courts, there is enormous variation in the types of palas or paletas which are used in the Americas. In Ecuador, the game of guante is played with a disco de madera forrada de cuero gueso y tachonado en su parte central de clavos de cabeza guesa. The game of Tabla is played with a type of paleta forma rectangular u ovoidal de madera forrada de cuero crudo y con un brazo para asegurala con la mano (Hist 99). In Chihuahua, Mexico, they make a type of paleta called a palmeta by reinforcing their local soft woods forrándolas de cuero de becerro (Hist 171).

American Contributions to Basque Pelota

There were also modalities developed in the Americas which were to revolutionize the game. We have already noted the impact of rubber and any aficionado can attest to the popularity

of the game using one of the many varieties of rubber balls. Traditionally, pelota a mano has always been the most popular of Basque pelota games, however, today its popularity around the world is overshadowed by two innovations invented in Argentina, paleta and cesta punta.

In Buenos Aires, towards the end of the 19th century, a pelotari named Melchor Guruceaga was recovering from a broken wrist and, in the process, developed a longer wicker basket which would soon revolutionize the game (Cuba 19).

Similarly, the first paleta was conceived of and designed in 1905 in Argentina by Gabriel Martirén, a native of Baigorri known as “Sardina” (Hist 28). It occurred to him one day to use the shoulder blade of “paleta” of a cow to strike the ball, rather than his bare hand. Next he asked the local carpenter to shape a wooden plank that had been used to transport cans of kerosene into the shape of a cow’s shoulder blade. Seeing his fellow pelotari’s new weapon, a Basque friend nicknamed “Pescador” asked him to make more. Three paletas later, the first game of paleta was played in Burzaco, Argentina. His tombstone in the town of Diego de Alvear bears a plaque inscribed: “A la memoria de Don Gabriel Martirén, inventor de la pelota a paleta” (Hist 35).

The game, initially called pala ancha, became very popular and its paly quickly extended throughout the region. The construction of paletas became ever lighter and stronger though the use of hardwoods. In 1915 Francisco Marticorena, a native of Irun living in Argentina, began commercial fabrication of the legendary paleta “El Vasquito,” selling them from a store called “La Baskongada” (Hist 36). In Argentina today, there are some 350 paleta clubs, with 4,000 serious players and 20,000 avid fans.

Some Historical Footnotes

The earliest chronicle of pelota vasca in the Americas points to 1536 and the discovery of Chile by Diego de Almagro (Hist 86). It is known that he was accompanied by Basques and, in Comentarios Reales it is said that even though he was from Extremadura that Almagro use to play

pelota everyday in Lima. It was further popularized there by the Basque governor Garcia Hurtado de Mendoza in 1557. Among his fellow pelotaris was Don Alonso de Ercilla, a native of bermeo and the author of La Araucana (Hist 91). It is known that Ercilla was sued by someone who lost a lot of money betting on a match. The Ercilla incident is the first of a long history of trouble associating gaming with pelota in the Americas.

Built by the Obispo Diego de Umanzoro in the 18th century, Santiago had a permanent frontón next to the church on the street San Isidro, otherwise known as the "calle de la pelota." In 1829, the cancha in el basural, as it was called, was transformed into a "refüidero de gallos" (Hist 88). There are indications that interest in pelota later waned considerably, but by the end of the 19th century a new wave of immigration brought renewed interest and frontones [1884 Fronton Vallesteros in Santiago, 1889 Plaza Euskara in Concepción] (Hist 92). Due to the destruction wrought by Chile's frequent earthquakes, it is impossible to know how many were built. Today there are at least seven in existence where the most popular modality is paleta with a rubber ball.

In 1563, Francisco de Ibarra from Eibar received the encomienda of Chihuahua, Mexico, where the men's-only pelota found quick acceptance (Hist 169). At least 10 canchas are still in use in the state of Chihuahua. One of the aficionados of pelota was none other than Pancho Villa. Villa would play on his own two walled court with laborers, soldiers and school teachers. On one occasion, Villa "se adelantó corriendo a un saque muy picado del profesor Rodolfo Rodríguez y éste lo golpeo con la palmeta. el profesor, muy apenado por la acción, quiso detener el juego para disculparse, pero el general Villa no lo dejó diciéndole; 'Déle, profesor, no se apene, éste es juego de hombres" (Hist 172).

From the beginning Lima, Peru had an significant and wealthy Basque colony. the date of the first frontón, the Corral Fronton Vasco in Lima is unknown, but it must have been early, since the second was built in 1634 (Hist 183). Frontones in Lima in the 18th century, not uncharacteristically, had an unsavory reputation. It is known that there was a suit against a fronton

in Lima in 1781, due to betting. In 1790 writer Tadeo Haenke confirmed that in Lima there was a “casa pública de Juego de Pelota en donde traviesa mucho dinero” (Hist 189). Finally, in 1794, the Virrey Francisco Gil Taboada Lemos y Villamain decreed the closure of the Fronton Vasco due to its giving “lugar a grandes aglomeraciones que luego degeneraban en riñas y motines” (Hist 183).

Uruguay, along with Argentina, is one of the most important pelota centers in the world. There was a virtual flood of Basque immigration in Montevideo in the middle of the 19th century. In 1842, it is estimated there were at least 10,000 French Basques there out of a population of 40,000 forming “un pequeño mundo” (Hist 216). There are perhaps 800 crolo or rural canchas in the country with frontis and two walls and tambor on the right, evidently derived from trinquete. Pelota a mano, paleta with pelota de goma (tenis pelada), and some pala and share are played. Since 1945 there has been Federacion Uruguaya de Pelota which organizes the annual Campeonato for its twenty affiliate clubs and which has brought five Campeonato Mundiales to Uruguay.

In Venezuela, Basques arrived not only with the ubiquitous Jesuits, but also with the important compañía guipuzcoana de Caracas (1728-1785). Today there exists the Centro Vasco de Caracas with its Fronton del Paraíso (Hist 292). In 1963 the Centro began the Serie Internacional de Jai-Alai which has attracted thousands of spectators. There are also courts in Naguanagua, Puerto and Miranda. Recent Basque immigration has helped to sustain interest.

In Bolivia, Basque pelota was said to be present in the Potosi mountain range by the beginning of the 19th century. A national championship of pelota vasca was apparently played in 1928 (Hist 50). The Federación of Pelota Frontón was established in 1937 and it still holds annual tournaments for 50 clubs. More than 300 adobe or stone frontones are still in use, located at elevations ranging from 600 to 4,500 meters above sea level (Hist 53). Racquetball, in particular, is increasing in popularity and it is estimated that more than a million and a half Bolivians, of all ages and sexes, play the game today. More than 1,000 still play handball (Hist 57).

In Cuba it is estimated that there are some 200 frontons where they play variations of pelota vasca using a tennis ball, including pelota a mano, frontenis, paleta and pedrada. The first article/verses on pelota appears in the *Papel Periódico de La Habana* on December 12, 1790: “Para hoy está prevenido/por gente de bizzarria/ allá en la Real Factoria/ de Pelota un gran partido:/ Al Público se ha advertido/por la afición que se nota;/y si nadie se alborota,/verán nueve Bascongados/ muy serenos, bien plantados/disputar una Pelota (Cuba 10). Coincidentally, the XI Campeonato Mundial was held in La Habana in 1990, exactly two centuries later.

Emigration to the United states was different in two ways from that in Latin America. First, it was quite recent, with the first group not arriving until the California Gold Rush in the middle of the 19th century. Second, while Latin America attracted a variety of Basque immigrants (professionals and the skilled as well as *baserritarak*), immigrants in the U.S. were almost exclusively *baserritarak* who went there for the purpose of herding sheep. As such, they were predominately single young men with the special needs of the sojourner. These needs were widely met in the Basque hotel or *ostatuak* that were established any place Basques were concentrated. Like the Old World village square, the Basque hotel became the social and cultural center for the Basque population of the American West. Dozens of these boarding houses sprung up and died out throughout the American West over the last 150 years, and it is impossible to know precisely how many had handball courts, or their specifications. By one estimate, one-half to two-thirds of the *ostatuak* might have built handball courts (Echeverria 162). Few were large enough to play *cesta punta*.

These handball courts provided the young Basque men the opportunity to play impromptu and for fun, or could involve elaborate tournaments which pitted the best players from Basque communities against one another. Betting for a drink or for a little money was quite common, but at times the wagering was heavy as can be appreciated in this 1929 newspaper announcement by Angelo Undabarrena in the *Eureka [Nevada] Sentinel*. “Money talks:” “Ignacio Larrea of Eureka,

will play a handball match with Bertaian Aranbe. To be played at Ely, Nev. within the next fifteen days, for from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for each side, for cash money - no checks to figure" (Voice 1977).

When the era of the Basque herder disappeared, so too did the *ostatuak* and, to a great degree, *pelota*. Euskal *etxeak* began to form to fill social and culture needs and several have handball courts. However, the last wave of immigrants have become too old for the demanding game and, consequently, *pelota* activity has diminished a great deal. Today, active courts remain only in San Francisco, Bakersfield, Fresno, and Chino, all in the state of California, with the level of activity of *pelota a mano* generally on the wane, but with some renewed interest in *paleta*.

Commercial Pelota Vasca

Ironically, the most widely publicized Basque game is the one played by the fewest Basque. In the Americas, Commercial Basque *pelota* is monopolized by *cesta punta*, often called *Jai-Alai* on this side of the Atlantic. Developed initially in Argentina towards the end of the 19th Century, this game was an unusually spectacular sport for all its well known characteristics and it was not long before commercial entities recognized its potential. In rapid succession, numerous *cesta punta* frontons were constructed in the Americas catering not only to men but also for women and high society seeking the chic and the exotic. Most of these initiatives enjoyed early success but few stayed in business very long.

The first one may very well have been *Fronton Jai-Alai*, inaugurated in 1901 in La Habana. Since Cuba was then under U.S. jurisdiction, approval for the "juego vasco jai-alai con apuestas permitidas" came from the military governor General Leonard Wood (Cuba 20). As it turns out, General Wood not only liked the game himself but also played it daily. By 1902 there were two *pelota* magazines in publication: *La Cancha Habanera* and *Beti-Jai* (Cuba 25). the "Palacio de los Gritos" closed in 1910 only to open again from 1918 to 1930. The best *cesta punta* players of the day played there, often for much money. In 1929 the *Jai-Alai campeonato* offered the winners

\$6,000 (Cuba 63). This fronton, like so many others, had a certain association with suicides, lost fortunes and shootings (Cuba 49).

A commercial fronton also opened in Cienfuegos in 1920, only to close soon after. In Habana the "Palacio de las Luces" or Nuevo Frontón opened in 1921 but a player driven strike closed it down almost immediately. The mayor of Habana then denied permission to reopen it, then approved it without betting, making it non-profitable. It reopened in 1924 but, two years later, the ill-fated frontón was destroyed by a cyclone.

During these years in Cuba, cesta punta was watched and practiced by famous celebrities such as Babe Ruth and Ernest Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway's love for the Basque Country, particularly Pamplona and bullfighting, is well documented. Hemingway was also a great fan of Basque pelota and a friend to pelotaris. In what is probably his only interview regarding the game, Hemingway said that he had been a fan for more than 30 years. He noted that while he was acquainted with pala, handball and remonte, "jai alai is my favorite spectacle. In it I find constant emotion, a manly effort taken to the maximum" (Areitio 56). When asked about his most memorable moment as a pelota spectator, he recounted the dramatic accident of his friend Julian Ibarlucea in Havana.

"In my life I have seen many people with life threatening injuries, but the accident which Ibarlucea suffered exposed before my eyes an event of courage and serenity which I could never have dreamed. I had been talking with him not more than half an hour before. I sat down to watch the game and I was very satisfied with the formidable effort being made by the four competitors. All of a sudden, Guillermo, who was a great player, caught and threw the ball in an awkward posture and had the bad luck of hitting Ibarlucea in the head. The ball, which was travelling very fast, sounded different, dry, cold, like the slam of a door. But Ibarlucea did not fall. What fortitude! it seemed impossible that he could remain on his feet. Red Red carnations began to spread on his white shirt. His face was completely crimson... he was bathed in blood and still he remained on his feet. The other pelotaris and the judges ran up to him and led him to the infirmary. Frightened, I also ran to the treatment room and when I arrived I was amazed that the victim received me with a sorrowful smile. He shook my hand... and passed out. Three days went by and he was unconscious. He was dying. He was going at the height of his vigor, powerful in strength and in youth. They operated on him two times and science miraculously returned him to life" (Areitio 57).

In the United States there have been at least sixteen cesta punta courts, two located in Nevada, ten in Florida, three in Connecticut, and one each in Rhode Island, Chicago, and Missouri. The first commercial court in the United States was constructed in St. Louis Missouri in 1904. It was erected by Ricardo Galbis Ajuria, a civil engineer in Havana who was also involved in the construction of Habana's first commercial frontón (BSP 1977). Despite the initial interest and fascination in cesta punta, the St. Louis fronton failed spectacularly. The cesta punta operations of longest duration in the United States are in Miami, Florida area with the first fronton dating to 1924 being destroyed by the first hurricane and replaced in 1926 by the Miami Fronton. A second court, the Biscayne Jai Alai, operated in competition (Hollander 47). The game did not attain popularity, however, until 1935 when the Florida legislature legalized parimutuel wagering in Jai-Alai (Hines 95). In 1953 Dania Jai Alai became the state's second pari-mutual fronton. The sport boomed in the 1960's, with the influx of pelota-loving Cubans and by 1978 there were ten frontons in Florida (Hollander 52). In the 1975-76 season alone, 4.5 million spectators paid to watch the game in Florida (Hines 96).

Not unlike other professional sports, there have been several labor-management disputes in cesta punta in the United States. In 1968 the players in Florida struck management at five of the state's six frontons then in operation (Hollander 126). Fronton management did not settle and, instead, hired completely new crews. Most players returned to the Basque Country or quit the game. Similarly, in December of 1973, the opulent MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas opened the first cesta punta court in the state of Nevada, bringing the exotic to a new level in a state known for unusual attractions. Less than two years later, play was interrupted when the Basque-dominated players struck (Deadline 1975).

There is a close association between modern-day cesta punta in the United States and gaming and it is apparent that the spread of gaming has greatly impacted the success of the game. In Nevada, competition from other gaming activities has always existed and it ultimately became

evident that the enormous expense and space involved in running a fronton, as well as the slower pace of gambling could not compete with the fast action of table games and slot machines. Consequently, the MGM Grand fronton in Reno was closed by hotel management in 1980, and the fronton in Las Vegas lasted but a scant three years longer. Despite the promise of the 70's and the beginning of the 80's, cesta punta activity throughout the U.S. has dropped dramatically in the last few years. This is due, in part, to the after shock of another strike in 1988. More importantly, competition for gaming dollars is also much stronger now, primarily as a result of the introduction of state lotteries and Nevada style casinos on Indian reservations and elsewhere. The result is that several Miami and Connecticut frontons have closed and others are on the brink. A similar fate has affected the commercial frontons in Lima [1906 the Fronton Lima, in 1930 the Jai Alai], in Brazil [Club Athletico Paulista-1900], in Caracas [Fronton Jai Alai] 1933-1937], and in Mexico. Today commercial cesta punta frontons are in danger of disappearing altogether.

While gaming related issues are at the forefront of the demise of commercial cesta punta in the Americas, there are also other factors. Since cesta punta requires a high degree of skill which takes years to develop, extremely expensive equipment and balls and can only be played in a few places, most of which exclude minors, it is virtually impossible for young people to learn to play the game. Furthermore, it is very expensive to finance the cost of a large group of imported professional players.

Conclusion

The ebb and flow of Basque Pelota in its classical forms in the Americas is inexorably linked to Basque immigration. A wave of immigration was inevitably followed by a boom in the construction of frontons and of pelota related activity. As the immigrant generation dies off, pelota dies off with them or is adopted and modified by the local population into just one more sporting activity. Meanwhile, second and third generations of Basque-Americans try to keep the game and

their culture alive through euskal etxeak.

In view of the ever growing popularity of paleta with a rubber or tennis ball, there is no question that paleta, as a sport, will continue to thrive, particularly in Latin America. In circumstances where the players and spectators are aware that they are playing Basque pelota it will be a Basque game. When they are not, it will be an Argentinean or Uruguayan game which will thrive.

Cesta punta's popularity is likely to continue to deteriorate as a commercial endeavor and may disappear altogether except for special occasions.

The paly of pelota a mano with the hard ball is also likely to lessen for numerous reasons. Demographic changes may be the single most important factor. Pelota is physically demanding, taking a heavy toll upon a young man's hands, legs and back. Since immigration over the last 30 years has virtually stopped, there is no renewal of the ethnic pool and first generation Basques are aging. No longer is the average Basque-American likely to be an Old World born, young, single male--that sector of society most likely to actively exercise Old World sports. Medical studies document the short term and accumulated trauma of playing pelota with the hand: broken hands or wrist, the rupture of blood vessels, discoloration and pain (Hist 321).

Furthermore, the forces of acculturation have pushed second and third generation Basque-Americans into American-based sports such as baseball, soccer, football, basketball and tennis. Each generation is motivated to compete in the sport of the culture dominant at the time and place of one's youth and of one's friends. For the immigrant from the small village it was pelota, but the athletically-talented Basque-American high schoolers will more likely be driven to compete for the pitcher's position than against a dwindling pool of aging pelota players.

Sports have a very different function and interest in industrial and post-industrial societies than in rural ones and, consequently, some of the factors for declining handball play in the Americas are reflected in the Basque Country as well. Handball is an Old World sport associated

more with traditional rural society than with urban life (Aguirre). With the rarest of exceptions, pelota is a man's sport, both in the Old World and New. While that reality posed no problems in a traditional Basque society accustomed to sexually segregated labor and recreation, it does not work nearly as well in modern-day American Culture. The fact is that the vast majority of Old World Basques today are city dwellers who live in apartments and work in offices. Their hands are clean and soft and far more adept at pushing computer keys than at bashing extremely hard balls or hoisting 300 pound blocks of stone to their shoulders. Since rural sports no longer reflect the everyday activity of their work, they are far more likely to strike a ball with a tennis racket or with a foot than with a bare hand. As a result, pelota is no longer the game of the Basque people, in the same way that baseball is no longer the American game. It is one of many.

Any possible revitalization of classical Basque pelota in the Americas will almost certainly not happen spontaneously. Rather, if it is to occur, it will be through the efforts of organizations such as the euskal etxeak, the numerous pelota federations and the Basque government. Communication between these institutions is greater than ever and they have made a serious effort to promote the game, particularly among the young. It remains to be seen whether they can halt the fading interest in the game, and particularly if they can succeed in re-installing a love of it in Basque youth.

Many Basque-Americans continue to learn their ancient language for largely symbolic reasons. It constitutes and reflects an integral part of their identity. They are motivated by an urgency to grasp the archetypal symbols of their ancestors. These symbols represent the sum total of the mental acquisitions of past eras and only through their conservation and actualization it is possible to share a common thread with other Basques today and to maintain a link with one's ancestors. Pelota is also a product of culture and so it may be that pelota will be embraced by those who value and are dedicated to the maintenance of tradition, as has already taken place with dance and other cultural icons. Pelota underscores the uniqueness of our ancestors, and ourselves.

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