The 5th Annual WSU women’s basketball Native American Appreciation Day basketball game on November 20 featured Native WSU students throughout the event.

WSU Native American Programs, the College of Education, and Cougar Athletics collaborated to plan and promote the annual event. Reigning Miss Pah-Loots-Puu Powwow MyKel Johnson, a sophomore and member of the Nez Perce tribe, welcomed the crowd before the game. Johnson, a business major, represents WSU’s Pah-Loots-Puu Powwow held every March.

Native American student ambassadors were highlighted during halftime and breaks. Elsie Cree danced a fancy shawl exhibition for the crowd during halftime. Cree (Yakama/Nez Perce) is the President of the WSU Native American Women’s Association and a student ambassador.

Cherrise Reyes (Upper Skagit/Colville) narrated an informative video about Native American Programs and opportunities for Native students at WSU. Jacob Yarbrough-Jones (Nez Perce) educated the audience on Native Americans and sports history with his segment “Two Truths and a Lie.”

Olivia Battise (Alabama-Coushatta tribe) was selected from the crowd to name as many tribes as she could in 15 seconds during the “Quarter Minute to Win It” game. The WSU freshman was able to name 13 tribes, besting Native student ambassador Zach Clark (Squaxin Island) who had listed 12.

The ambassadors are student employees hired to do outreach to prospective Native students. Their positions are funded by a grant from the Nez Perce Tribe. In addition to helping with the Native American Appreciation Game, the ambassadors travel to area schools to give presentations, lead tours for campus visits, and served as camp counselors during the EXCEL conference for Native youth.

Audience members were able to try their hand at a traditional hoop and dart game during the 3rd quarter break. Ambassador Yarbrough-Jones rolled a hoop down the baseline while the daughters and nieces of doctoral student Veneice Guillory-Lacy (Nez Perce) threw darts at the moving target. Ultimately, Butch won that game with a well-placed dart (after the hoop had stopped moving).

After the game, youth in grades 8 and under were welcomed to stay and participate in a free basketball clinic led by WSU women’s basketball team members.

The first Native American Appreciation Day game was held in 2011 when the WSU women played Louisville whose roster at the time included Umatilla tribal members Shoni and Jude Schimmel. Be sure to join us again next year for the 6th Annual Native American Appreciation Day game!