



Archers gallop across the National Sports Stadium during the Opening Ceremony of Nadaam festival in the Mongolian capital of Ulaan Baatar.

Mongolia's "Three Manly Games"

By Lucy Brown

THE POUNDING sound of hoof beats fills the air as armor-clad Mongol archers deftly guide their galloping steeds. Their mounts kick up clouds of dust, skidding and pivoting sharply as the riders expertly fire their arrows at randomly positioned targets.

This is *Nadaam* or the "Three Manly Games," Mongolia's most important annual festival held during the national holiday from July 11 to 13. Its roots lie in Mongolian warrior traditions and include fierce competitions in three disciplines: Male only wrestling, all gender archery and gritty horse races out on the open

steppe with fearless child jockeys.

Celebrated throughout the country, the National Sports Stadium in the capital Ulaan Baatar hosts the biggest festivities, which open with an extravagant ceremony of horsemen, athletes, dancers, musicians and military. Parades and displays on horseback and on foot continue for hours while a whirlwind of dust, color and noise fills the stadium and saturate the senses.

Agile riders clothed in spiked skull caps and traditional long tunics known as *deels* (still everyday attire for many in the city and on the steppe) perform tricks on horseback as platoons of uniformed, face-blackened soldiers demonstrate weapons and hand-to-hand combat.

Vividly costumed troupes parade the

perimeter of the stadium, waving giant flags and handfuls of gaudy balloons while floats bearing smiling beauty queens glide around.

Parachutists land in the midst of synchronized dancing displays, causing momentary mayhem and raising cheers from the crowds while dapper musicians pound, toot and blast on drums, brass horns and trombones.

Judges, competitors and thousands of spectators, both Mongol and foreign, squint down from the packed stands. ■

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