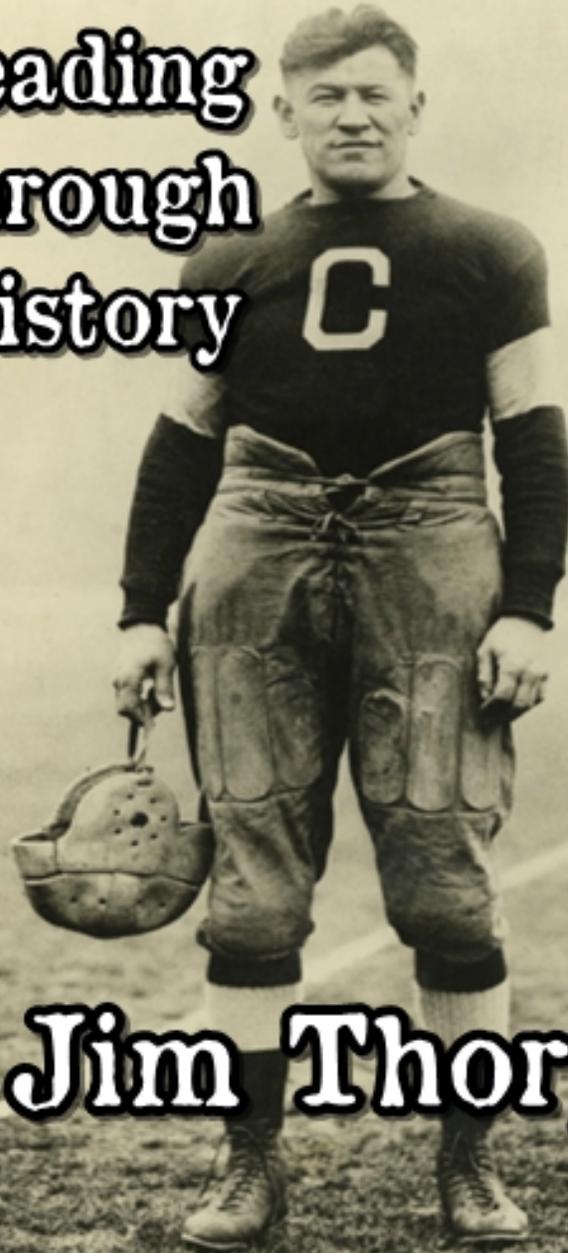


**Reading  
Through  
History**



**Jim Thorpe**

Excerpt from Oklahoma History  
by Jake Henderson & Robert Marshall  
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***Jim Thorpe***

*Jim Thorpe was one of the most legendary athletes who ever lived. Who was Jim Thorpe? What did he do to become so famous?*

In 1888, just outside of Prague, Oklahoma, twins were born to Hiram and Charlotte Thorpe. The young couple named their two sons Charlie and Jim. The two boys were raised as members of the Sac and Fox tribe, but their parents had a diverse ethnic background. The Kickapoo and Potawatomie tribes were represented in their family history, as well as Irish and French ancestors.

Jim's early years were fairly typical. He enjoyed hunting and fishing, he went to school, and he helped his father on the farm. Sadly, when the twin boys were nine, Charlie contracted pneumonia and lost his life. Despite the loss of his brother, Jim tried to continue going to school, but he was not a good student and he disliked being confined to a classroom.

*Words to watch for:*

*confined practical*

*decathlon prowess*

He was sent away to more than one boarding school, including the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, as well as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Carlisle was a well-known school for Native Americans. The school required students to speak English, rather than their native languages, and taught strong discipline and practical work skills.

While attending Carlisle, Thorpe became a standout track and field star. By the end of his first season on the track team, he had set every school record. He once won six events in the same meet, defeating the other team single-handedly! Aside from his track abilities, Jim participated in many other sports at Carlisle. He played basketball, lacrosse, tennis, hockey, and handball. He also participated in swimming, gymnastics, rowing, and ice skating. He even won the intercollegiate ballroom dancing championship in 1912!



However, Jim was not satisfied. He wanted to play football. The Carlisle School had one of the best football teams in the country. They were coached by the legendary Glenn "Pop" Warner. At first, Warner was hesitant to let the school's track star play football. However, Jim dazzled the coach with an impressive tryout. He evaded all of Carlisle's defenders multiple times. At the end of his tryout, Jim tossed the football to Warner and said, "Nobody is going to tackle Jim."

While playing for the Carlisle Indians, Jim Thorpe became the team's best player. He played running back, defensive back, kicker, and punter. During the 1912 season, he scored 25 touchdowns and led Carlisle to the 1912 national collegiate championship.

That same year, Thorpe participated in the Summer Olympics in Stockholm, Sweden. He competed in the pentathlon and the decathlon, as well as the high jump and long jump. He won gold medals in both the pentathlon and decathlon.

The King of Sweden, Gustav V, presented the gold medals to Thorpe. When he did so, he looked at the young athlete and remarked, "You, sir, are the greatest athlete in the world." Jim's only reply was, "Thanks, King."

Unfortunately, six months later it was discovered that Jim had played baseball earlier in his life and had received a small amount of money to do so. In the eyes of the International Olympic Committee, this made him a professional athlete. At the time, only amateur athletes could participate in the Olympics. As a result, the IOC stripped Thorpe of his gold medals and removed his name from the record books.



This did not stop Thorpe's athletic career, however. He would continue participating in professional sports until the age of 41. He played professional baseball and football, as well as having very brief career in basketball. Following his playing career, he struggled with poverty and failing health. He eventually died in 1953, at the age of 64. Twenty years after his death, it was decided to restore his name to the Olympic record book, and his gold medals were returned to his family.

Thorpe's prowess as an athlete is legendary. In 2000, the Associated Press voted him the #2 athlete of the century, behind only Babe Ruth. ABC Sports took a similar poll and ranked him #1, ahead of Muhammad Ali, Jesse Owens, and Michael Jordan! He has been honored in numerous other ways. He is in the National Football Hall of Fame, there are numerous buildings and awards which bear his name, and there is even a town named in his honor.



**Multiple Choice:** *Select the choice that completes the statement or answers the question.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following best describes the Carlisle Indian Industrial School?
  - a. This school helped Native American students get in touch with their tribal roots.
  - b. This school required students to speak English and taught practical work skills.
  - c. This school specialized in teaching young Native Americans about other cultures.
  - d. This school taught Native Americans how to cook, clean, and drive automobiles.
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following best summarizes Jim Thorpe's athletic career at Carlisle?
  - a. He was a standout star in track, football, and virtually every other sport imaginable.
  - b. He played football exceptionally well, but did not participate in other sports.
  - c. He was an exceptional track athlete, but was prevented from playing other sports because he was Native American.
  - d. He played baseball and basketball, but was not that talented at the other major sports.
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following statements was made about Jim Thorpe?
  - a. "There is no doubt, you are the fastest man alive."
  - b. "He's the only man I've ever met that I didn't like."
  - c. "You can do anything you set your mind to."
  - d. "You, sir, are the greatest athlete in the world."
  
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following best explains why Jim Thorpe had his Olympic medals taken from him?
  - a. It was discovered that he had used performance enhancing steroids.
  - b. It was discovered that he had placed a wager on himself.
  - c. It was discovered that he had been paid to play baseball.
  - d. It was discovered that he was not actually an American citizen.
  
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following statements about Jim Thorpe is *not* accurate?
  - a. An ABC Sports poll ranked him as the #1 athlete of the century.
  - b. His Olympic medals have yet to be returned to his family.
  - c. He is in the National Football Hall of Fame.
  - d. There are numerous buildings and awards which bear his name.

**Vocabulary:** *Match each word with its correct definition. Consider how the word is used in the lesson. This might help you define each term. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.*

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| a. confined  | d. poverty |
| b. practical | e. prowess |
| c. decathlon |            |

6. \_\_\_\_\_ unable to leave a place
  
7. \_\_\_\_\_ an athletic contest made up of ten different events
  
8. \_\_\_\_\_ exceptional or superior ability
  
9. \_\_\_\_\_ useful for actual work and everyday life
  
10. \_\_\_\_\_ the condition of having little or no money

**Guided Reading:** *Fill in the blanks below to create complete sentences.*

1. Jim Thorpe was sent away to more than one boarding school, including the \_\_\_\_\_ Institute in Lawrence, Kansas.
2. While attending Carlisle, Thorpe became a standout \_\_\_\_\_ star.
3. The Carlisle School had one of the best \_\_\_\_\_ teams in the country.
4. While playing for the Carlisle Indians, Jim Thorpe became the team's best player, playing \_\_\_\_\_, defensive back, kicker, and punter.
5. At the Summer Olympics, Thorpe competed in the pentathlon and the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The IOC stripped Thorpe of his gold medals and removed his name from the \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Thorpe played professional \_\_\_\_\_ and football, as well as having a very brief career in basketball.
8. Following his playing career, Thorpe struggled with poverty and failing \_\_\_\_\_.
9. In 2000, the Associated Press voted him the #2 athlete of the century, behind only \_\_\_\_\_.
10. There is even a \_\_\_\_\_ named in Jim Thorpe's honor.

**Summarize:** *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!*

1. Who was Jim Thorpe's football coach at Carlisle?
  
2. What events did Thorpe compete in at the Summer Olympics?
  
3. When did Carlisle win the national collegiate championship in football?
  
4. Where was the Summer Olympics that Thorpe participated in?
  
5. Why did the Carlisle football coach not want Thorpe to play football?
  
6. How did playing baseball result in Thorpe having his Olympic medals taken away?

**Student Response:** *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of three to five complete sentences.*

7. How do you feel Jim Thorpe would compare to today's modern superstar athletes? Explain your answer as thoroughly as possible.

**Answer Key:**

**Jim Thorpe:  
Multiple Choice:**

- 1) B
- 2) A
- 3) D
- 4) C
- 5) B

**Vocabulary:**

- 6) A
- 7) C
- 8) E
- 9) B
- 10) D

**Guided Reading:**

- 1) Haskell
- 2) Track and field
- 3) football
- 4) running back
- 5) decathlon
- 6) record books
- 7) baseball
- 8) health
- 9) Babe Ruth
- 10) town

**Summarize:**

1. Glen "Pop" Warner was Thorpe's football coach at Carlisle.
2. Thorpe competed in the pentathlon, decathlon, high jump, and long jump.
3. Carlisle won the championship in 1912.
4. The Summer Olympics were in Stockholm, Sweden.
5. He did not want Thorpe to play football because he was the school's star track athlete.
6. He had been paid to play baseball, which made him a professional athlete, rather than an amateur.

**Student Response:**

7. Student answers will vary.