



NEW HEART BEAT DEVOTIONS

A Tarnish Gold Medalist Story

For our 40th anniversary, we spent the weekend in [Jim Thorpe Pa](#). It was very nice. Lots of things to see and do. Being a historian, I asked how the town became known as Jim Thorpe. I got several different stories from the locals. I decided to research the events myself. Below is what I found. The locals do not share or know these details.

Jim Thorpe was born in Indian Territory, in Oklahoma, in 1887 or 1888. No birth certificate has been found.¹ Both of his parents had Sac and Fox Indian descendants. In 1904, Thorpe decided to attend Carlisle Indian Industrial School. There he competed in track and field, football, baseball, lacrosse and even winning won the 1912 intercollegiate ballroom dancing championship.² In 1912, Carlisle won the national collegiate championship because he scored 27 touchdowns.³ That same year he also competed in the 1912 Olympics, receiving gold in both the pentathlon and decathlon. Someone had stolen his shoes just before he was due to compete. He found a mismatched pair of replacements, including one from a trash can, and won the gold medal while wearing them.⁴ King Gustav of Sweden, said, "You, sir, are the greatest athlete in the world."⁵ In late January 1913, the Worcester Telegram reported that Thorpe had played professional baseball for one season before the Olympics, receiving \$2 per game.⁶ He was stripped of his medals but they were reinstated in October 1982. From 1913 to 1919, Thorpe played for four baseball professional teams. Between 1920 to 1928, he played in 52 professional football games for six different teams. He then played basketball for two years. In 1999, the Associated Press placed him third on its list of the top athletes of the century, following Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan.⁷ President Nixon, authorized April 16, 1973, as "Jim Thorpe Day" to promote nationwide recognition of Thorpe's life.⁸ However, after his athletic career, Thorpe struggled to provide for his family. He found it difficult to work a non-sports-related jobs.⁹ He died in 1953 from a heart attack, divorced twice, separated from his third wife, an alcoholic, penniless, and without a will.

"After he died, money was raised to bring Jim Thorpe back to Oklahoma, where his children and members of his nation met his body to prepare him for his journey out of this life. The traditional ceremony was underway when his estranged third wife, Patsy Thorpe, walked in with law enforcement officers. That anyone would interrupt was an idea so foreign that the tribal members present were frozen in surprise. They didn't know how to respond as the officers carried Jim Thorpe's casket away."¹⁰


"Patsy then undertook negotiations with bidders for his remains, and the highest bidder, it turned out, was a pair of slumping former coal mining towns in Mauch Chunk and East Mauch Chunk, PA had hopes of acquiring a tourist attraction and a little economic income. The towns united under the name the Borough of Jim Thorpe, and promised a fitting tribute to their namesake. There was talk of stadiums, museums and hospitals to bear the athlete's name, and perhaps even the Football Hall of Fame, none of which came to fruition."¹¹

"He was interred there in 1957, four years after his death, over the objections of several of his eight children, as well as the Sac and Fox Nation. The agreement Patsy signed also stated that neither she nor any of her heirs would remove or cause to be removed Jim Thorpe's body from the town, for as long as the towns were officially known and designated as Jim Thorpe."¹² It is not known where she kept the body those years or what she received for it

"In June 2010, Jack Thorpe, Jim Thorpe's oldest living son, filed a court case to have his father's remains brought home to Oklahoma. He once told the Borough: "The bones of my father will not make or break your town, it's the people living here that will do that." In his lawsuit, he argued that the Borough had failed to meet the requirements of [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#), and needed to return Jim Thorpe's remains. Initially, a Pennsylvania district court ruled with Jack Thorpe."¹³ "The Borough appealed the decision to a higher court. The representative for the Borough argued that the Borough was honoring the legally secured rights of a widow to decide where her husband is buried, and the matter represented little more than a family dispute. The panel of judges in Pennsylvania's Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit ruled in the Borough's favor in October, stating it was absurd to think this kind of family disagreement was what NAGPRA was intended to address."¹⁴ Thorpe's lawyer, Ward said "This is exactly what Indian people have experienced in history that Indian people's remains and possessions and culture has just been used as a curiosity, as a tourist attraction, for non-Indians."¹⁵

These events remain me of the verse: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36 The last half of Jim's life, he was a loser. Patsy stole his body for gain. Joe Boyle, who arranged things from the Borough end, later died when a float broke lost during a Jim Thorpe parade and crashed him.¹⁶ Jim Thorpe PA is doing great, if they can keep the body they purchased. "Only what is done for Christ will last." CT Sudd

¹⁻⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Thorpe ¹⁰⁻¹⁵ boulderweekly.com/news/still-lost-in-limbo/ ¹⁶ mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1992-05-27-2854812-story.html

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