

# Elite Micmac Indian Athletes: Maritime Provinces of Canada 1900-1930

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During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Micmac Indian athletes achieved notable success in sport in the Maritime Provinces of Canada. The most outstanding achievements occurred in road racing and track and field. Following World War I there was a sharp decline in both the number of elite Indian athletes and the level of their performances.

The fundamental reasons are not readily discernible, but nevertheless there are indications that the changing social and economic conditions that exist within the Indian population caused a regression in their level of participation in the mainstream of society in the Maritime Provinces.

While the fundamental causes remain obscure, the consequence of the problem is observable within the realm of sport activity. During the first decade of this century two Indian role models were prominent in influencing other Indian athletes. Tom Longboat's victory in the Boston Marathon in 1907 and his subsequent rise to international fame had a profound effect on participation in sport by Indians in the Maritimes. Longboat toured the region and was successful in attracting wide public interest and press coverage through his legendary accomplishments in running. Jim Thorpe's outstanding performance at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, although of American origin, was nevertheless influential within the context of the Indian population in the Maritimes.

In the Maritimes local Indian athletes gained reputations by their own performances. Michael Thomas of the Abeqweit Club of Charlottetown was an inspiration to his fellow Indians when he established himself as the top distance runner in the region. He dominated the *Halifax Herald-Mail* ten mile road race from 1910-1912 and was the first Indian from Prince Edward Island to compete in the Boston Marathon. Indian runners from both Nova Scotia and P.E.I. were dubbed the Nova Scotia Longboat or the Island Longboat in reference to the role model of Tom Longboat.

This paper will review the outstanding achievements in sport of Micmac Indians from the Maritime Provinces during the era and investigate the reasons for the decline. The research goes beyond the results of road races and track and field meets. It examines the roots of the Micmac Indian people in the region and traces the thin line of athletic involvement leading to the early 1900s. The spectacular achievements of Michael Thomas, Noel Paul and Barney Francis will highlight an era of prominence and prestige for Micmac athletes in the Maritime Provinces of Canada.