

# Alex Wuttunee Decoteau: An Indigenous Olympian

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The telegram read: "Private Alex Decoteau, killed in action, October 30, 1917." The location of his death was Passchendaele Ridge. One report noted how Alex, as one of the greatest athletes in the Dominion's history, had been a good Indian and a good Canadian. He had met the criteria for an "Athlete Dying Young", established by the English poet, Alfred Edward Housman, and is today revered and fondly remembered by his people. Alex Wuttunee Decoteau's death was tragic, as is all such wartime waste of youth. However, his story of acculturation, which took place during the pioneer years of the Prairie West, was one of success. The indigenous hunter's way of life blended with the accepted norms of the age of Empire in which he lived. His choice of the individual sport of running allowed him to excel, travel to the Olympic Games, and to operate successfully in both indigenous and white societies. Alex Decoteau enabled indigenous concepts of socialism to be modified: his success was a result of altering his perceptions to include the hierarchical structures of the white man's world. The Olympics enabled competition to be perceived by him as the pursuit of individual excellence, and the strategic input of each performer vital not only to the participant, but to the success of the team, the games, and by analogy, the good of society.