

Remembering Tom Longboat: A Story of Competing Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Remembering Tom Longboat: A Story of Competing Narratives

William Brown

Tom Longboat was one of Canada's first sports heroes and one of the most famous Canadians of the early twentieth century. He was an Aboriginal from the Six Nations reserve in Southern Ontario. Longboat was one of the best runners of his generation, winning the Boston Marathon in 1907, and winning races at various distances throughout his career.

Most of what has been said about Longboat over the past century falls within two categories. There is the early view of him as a gifted but flawed man, "a wayward Indian" who was more interested in drinking and carousing than training, and who ended his days in poverty. The current view, however, is that Longboat was a strong-willed, independent, and innovative athlete who survived racial discrimination to become an inspiration to all Canadians.

This thesis examines how Longboat went from being a man accused of questionable behaviour to an admired role model in just a few decades. It explores the competing narratives and the social and political contexts in which they were formed. In the end, the analysis reveals that these competing views say more about those who formed them than they do about Tom Longboat.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Legends are fashioned less by those they commemorate than by others. They are gardens in which common men plant impossible dreams and harvest crops of make-believe. Good and bad are magnified...Legends, by their very nature, consume the facts from which they sprang...And those whom legend most immortalizes are those it most obscures.”¹

Although there is some question as to the day and even the year of his birth, it is generally thought that Thomas Charles Longboat was born on June 4, 1887 in Oshweken, the main town of the Six Nations Reserve near Caledonia, Ontario. The Onondaga are one of the six Iroquois nations and Longboat's Iroquois name was Cogwagee, which roughly means “Everything.” His father died when Longboat was five and the young boy was raised on a farm by his mother. After winning a few races in Caledonia, Hamilton, and Toronto, Longboat's name became well-known in Canada. When he won the Boston Marathon in April 1907 he became a celebrity throughout North America. There was a civic reception for him in Toronto presided over by Mayor Emerson Coatsworth and attended by tens of thousands of people. The city awarded the young champion a medal and promised him five hundred dollars for his education.²

Longboat's victory in Boston was the first of many great accomplishments in a brilliant career. In addition to making him an instant hero in Canada, the win

¹ David Blaikie, *Boston: The Canadian Story*, [book on-line] (Seneca House Books, 1984, accessed 30 January 2007); available from http://www.davidblaikie.com/david_blaikie/books/baa_intr.htm; Internet, 1/21.

² *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 24 April 1907. The money for education promised by the city of Toronto is discussed at length in Chapter Four.

also made him the subject of close scrutiny by the media and amateur sports authorities. Although popular with fans, Longboat was often criticized in the newspapers as a talented but flawed man. He was accused of being lazy, uncooperative, disrespectful of amateur rules, and generally more interested in drinking and carousing than training. "There was no man living who could beat Tom Longboat when the Indian was right," the *Hamilton Spectator* reported in 1910, "but, sad to relate, there is no man living who can make the Indian train."³ It was common for Longboat to be referred to as "the Indian" or "the redskin" and some critics linked his alleged character flaws to his Aboriginal heritage. "It is the matter of condition that forms the only element of doubt where Longboat is concerned," the *Globe* reported in 1909. "He has all the waywardness and lack of responsibility of his race."⁴ The *Toronto Evening Telegram* was particularly nasty after the 1908 Olympic marathon in London. Longboat was favoured to win but collapsed well short of the finish line. "And to think Longboat had not the staying quality of a Philadelphia milk-fed chicken," the newspaper fumed. "After yesterday's happening, we suggest Longboat's name be changed to Sitting Bull."⁵

Canadians had been told to expect gold from the Onondaga runner and were disappointed by his failure. Gossip spread about Longboat throwing the race and drinking champagne the night before.⁶ J.H. Crocker, a Canadian

³ Quoted in Bruce Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* XIV, no.1 (May 1983): 34.

⁴ Quoted in Cyndy Baskin, "Tom Longboat: The Caledonia Cyclone," *Ontario Indian* 5, no. 6 (June 1982), 35.

⁵ *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 25 July 1908.

⁶ Frank Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism in Canadian Sport," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Alberta, 1973), 218.

Olympic official, contradicted these allegations, saying Longboat was “in perfect condition” the night before the marathon. And Crocker was particularly upset about the rumours that Longboat either threw the race or was “yellow” and simply quit: “This does a good runner like Longboat uneducated as he may be a great injustice.”⁷

Crocker did, however, inform the Canadian Olympic Committee that he believed “the Indian received an overdose of some stimulant.”⁸ The use of substances believed to act as stimulants, such as champagne and strychnine, was fairly common amongst marathoners at the time. Although Crocker’s report cleared Longboat’s manager, Tom Flanagan, of any involvement, rumours spread that Flanagan had slipped Longboat an overdose of the drug after betting a fortune on another runner. These rumours became part of the Longboat legend despite a lack of evidence. Longboat blamed the fiasco on the extremely hot weather - dozens of other runners failed to finish - and he gloomily announced that he had run his last race. The *Evening Telegram* bid him a hasty, hateful adieu: “Who is this man Longboat anyway? In fact, Longboat can now discard his citizen’s clothes for the regulation war paint and the fine features of the reservation.”⁹

Longboat, of course, continued competing and was soon established as one of the world’s greatest runners, winning races at various distances and setting records as an amateur and professional. The Tom Longboat Awards were

⁷ J.H. Crocker, “Report of the First Canadian Olympic Athletic Team,” *Canadian Central Olympic Committee*, 1908, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹ Cosentino, “A History of the Concept of Professionalism,” 218.

established in 1951 for Canadian Aboriginal athletes, and the runner was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame four years later. He was one of the country's first sports heroes and possibly the most famous Canadian of the early twentieth century.

But while his athletic ability was rarely doubted, his character was often called into question by journalists and the elites who controlled Canadian sport. In addition to the questions about his work ethic, many suspected him of accepting money while claiming to be an amateur. He was painted as a tragic figure because he went from being a champion athlete to raking leaves and collecting garbage for the city of Toronto. Newspaper coverage was rarely as scathing and blatantly bigoted as the *Globe* and *Evening Telegram* articles mentioned above, but such venom surfaced at various times, usually without provoking a response. He apparently didn't see the sense in holding a grudge "on account of a few inconsiderate people."¹⁰

There was little talk of waywardness or shady practices, however, as the media marked the one-hundredth anniversary of Longboat's victory in Boston. In fact, the Canadian media coverage of the 2007 Boston Marathon demonstrated how much Longboat's public image had changed. The *Toronto Star* declared the Longboat story "an illuminating window into our history" and spoke of "the inherent bigotry of the day." It also referred to him as "a victim of the era's ridiculous distinction between amateurs...and professionals."¹¹ The media presented stories about the many Canadian participants who admired the former

¹⁰ Brenda Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada* (Edmonton: GMS² Ventures Inc., 1988), 14.

¹¹ *Toronto Star*, 14 April 2007, E01.

champion. One of these runners was Shannon Loutitt of Saskatchewan. “As a Canadian,” she told the *Globe and Mail*, “this is my way of thanking Tom Longboat for the doors he opened for us as human beings.”¹² Loutitt’s reference to closed doors and denied humanity indicated that she had more in common with the former champion than their common sport or country of origin. As a Métis, she felt a kinship with Longboat the Onondaga. “He gave us a different reference point for achievement,” she said, “best in the world. It makes you push yourself that much harder.”¹³ Although Longboat had died years before she was born, Loutitt saw him as a role model both as an Aboriginal person and as a Canadian.

Most of what has been said about Tom Longboat over the past century falls within two general categories. There is the early, racially influenced view of him as a gifted but undisciplined man who needed constant supervision and guidance. And there is the current view of him as a strong-willed, independent, and innovative athlete who survived racial discrimination to become an inspiration, not just for Aboriginal people like Loutitt, but for all Canadians. How did Longboat go from being a man accused of questionable behaviour to an admired role model in just a few decades? And what does this transformation say about those who created and promoted these representations?

This thesis will examine these questions by exploring the competing narratives and the motives behind their creation. In order to understand these narratives, it will be necessary to explore the social and political contexts in which

¹² *Globe and Mail*, 14 April 2007.

¹³ *Ibid.*

they were formed. Placing these representations into the larger picture of their times will add to an understanding of the individual texts and provide a clearer picture of the society that produced them.

The early Longboat narrative was rooted in late nineteenth century attitudes about Aboriginal people. In *The White Man's Indian*, Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. has argued that, since the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere did not refer to themselves by a single name, nor consider themselves to be a single people, "the idea and the image of the Indian must be a White conception."¹⁴ Even as knowledge of Aboriginal people improved, and the existence of a variety of distinct peoples became evident, this view did not change. "Whether evaluated as noble or ignoble, whether seen as exotic or degraded, the Indian as an image was always alien to the White."¹⁵ Berkhofer's views reflect Edward Said's arguments that "the Orient was almost a European invention." In a foreword to his ground-breaking 1979 book *Orientalism*, Said described long-held Western views of the Middle East, the Arab world, and Islam as "supreme fictions" made up of "human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other."¹⁶

Mark Rubinfeld has described the notion of the Other as the assumption that, "in a world in which 70 per cent of the population defines itself, and is defined by others, as non-white, "whiteness" is somehow natural, unnoticeable, and unworthy of notation while, conversely, "non-whiteness" is different, deviant,

¹⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1, xvii

and demanding of demarcation.”¹⁷ This view did not deny Longboat status as a Canadian athlete, particularly when his accomplishments reflected well on Canada. But while the origins of non-Aboriginal athletes were rarely discussed, Longboat was almost always described in terms of his Aboriginal heritage. In fact, he was called “the Indian” almost as much as he was referred to by name. This was not always a sign of racism. Mohawk poet E. Pauline Johnson, also from the Six Nations Reserve, used the term “redskin” when describing Longboat in an essay she wrote in 1907.¹⁸ But the characterization, by Johnson and others, betrayed a belief that Longboat, and Aboriginal people in general, were not like other Canadians.

E. Palmer Patterson II has written that, “Increasingly from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century the Europeans...did not make sharp distinctions among the various aspects of their own culture – e.g. religion, economy, education, customs of dress and speech. They tended to see these as interlocking and in fact inseparable parts of a way of life which they thought, especially after the late eighteenth century, to be superior to the way of life of other peoples.”¹⁹ The early Longboat narrative, therefore, was formed at a time when many Canadians believed that European culture was superior to the Aboriginal way of life.

¹⁷ Mark Rubinfeld, “The Mythical Jim Thorpe: Re/presenting the Twentieth Century American Indian,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 2 (March 2006): 170-171.

¹⁸ E. Pauline Johnson (“Tckahionwake.”) “Longboat of the Onondagas: The Canadian Champion Long-Distance Runner,” *Canada: an Illustrated Weekly Journal*, 1 June 1907, 250.

¹⁹ E. Palmer Patterson II, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500* (Don Mills, Ontario: Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd., 1972), 22-23.

This narrative was also influenced by attitudes toward social class.

Borrowing a concept from Antonio Gramsci, Alan Metcalfe has written that white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon men tried to legitimize and maintain their privileged position by exerting a hegemonic control over Canadian sport from Confederation until the First World War.²⁰ The colonial aristocrats who preceded these middle-class elites had not needed to close ranks in this way because working people had very little free time. As the trade union movement developed in the late nineteenth century, however, workers had more time for leisure and they demanded access to organized sport. They were denied, however, through a definition of amateurism that excluded anyone who had ever accepted money, or had even entered a competition that involved an athlete who had. The prohibition on accepting money, Metcalfe says, was made the defining characteristic of amateurism in order to keep working people out of sport.²¹

Longboat was often accused of breaking the rules of amateurism and threatened with expulsion from important competitions. He was deemed suspect because he was poor and had to make business deals that amateur officials did not approve of. And as an Aboriginal, it was assumed that he would not complete for the purity of sport as a gentleman of European breeding would. The prevailing definition of amateurism, therefore, discriminated against him on the basis of his race and social class.

²⁰ Alan Metcalfe, "The Growth of Organized Sport and the Development of Amateurism in Canada, 1807-1914," in *Not Just a Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology*, eds., Jean Harvey and Hart Cantelon (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988), 34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

In his 1999 book on Quebec's tercentenary, *The Art of Nation-Building*, H.V. Nelles observed that historians write about the past "with the present and future very much in mind."²² If this is true of historians, it is likely true as well of the authors, popular historians, journalists, and other commentators who have re-shaped the Longboat story over the past thirty-five years. This transformation was undertaken by those who wished to replace the earlier, stereotyped views with an inclusiveness that rejected the perceived racism of the past. In the American context, Berkhofer has identified a period in the 1960's when non-Aboriginal American artists "increasingly employed the Indian as the hero and the White man as the villain in their efforts to raise questions about the direction of American society."²³

In Canada, views about Aboriginal people began to change in the 1970's as Aboriginal leaders began to demand more autonomy for their communities. Debates about land claims and self-government gathered momentum in the 1980's with the patriation of the Canadian constitution and negotiations over the Meech Lake Accord. The re-shaping of the Longboat story also reflected changes in the way historians portrayed marginalized people. History "from the bottom up" gradually replaced more elite-centred approaches. "Another way of thinking about the history of Indians in Canada," wrote E. Palmer Patterson II, "is to see them as a people with a distinct past of their own; to see that the coming of the whites does not change the Indian's continuity with his own past, that his

²² H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 17.

²³ Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 108-110.

story must be told in terms of his own experience with the white man, placing him at the centre of the narrative...”²⁴

Given these changing attitudes, it is likely the Longboat narrative would have evolved without the influence of any one voice. The work of Bruce Kidd, however, cannot be overestimated as the catalyst for the rehabilitation of Longboat’s public image. Kidd, a former Olympic runner, is now dean of physical and health education at the University of Toronto. He has written extensively about Canadian sport history and has exerted an overwhelming influence on the Longboat story. In fact, Kidd is still considered to be an authority on the life of Longboat. Interviewed by the *Globe and Mail* on the centenary of the runner’s Boston triumph, Kidd reminded the newspaper that the press had not always treated the champion with respect. “There was a period when he was being described as a failed athlete,” Kidd said, “or that he’d just been a natural athlete, with racist overtones, who pissed away his abilities with wayward living. In fact, he was just a superb athlete. You cannot be hung over and perform the way he did.”²⁵

In the current narrative, Longboat is portrayed as a man who fought to control his own destiny in the face of oppression and racism. While many contemporaries saw Longboat’s eventual decision to manage his own affairs as foolhardy, most now see it as a sign of independence. Like the earlier narrative, this version of the Longboat story is a product of the prevailing attitudes of the day, shaped by the beliefs of Kidd and others concerning human agency and

²⁴ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 3.

²⁵ *Toronto Star*, 14 April 2007.

attitudes toward The Other. Kidd's new approach to viewing Longboat has informed much of what has been written and said about Longboat over the past thirty years.

This thesis is not a biography of Tom Longboat. The purpose is not to uncover little-known facts about his life, or to find out exactly how much he drank, or who may have spiked his water bottle at the 1908 Olympics. It is a look at how various people and institutions have viewed these questions, and how they have chosen to portray and remember him; how they have used his life story to make their own statements about sports, ethnicity, and racism. These narratives, in fact, say more about those who promoted them than they do about Longboat.

Longboat's life has been the subject of biographies, essays, magazine profiles, academic studies, films, and countless newspaper articles and other texts. This thesis will consider a wide collection of writing and representations that will be examined for the messages they convey and the cultural assumptions behind those messages.²⁶ In this sense, every text is "an embodiment of its times," as Rubinfeld says.²⁷ And although some texts may produce similar messages, each is a separate voice that adds to the story as a primary document that only its author could have produced. It is these voices, and not the life and times of Tom Longboat, that will be studied in the pages that follow.

²⁶ Mary Jo Kane and Kimberly D. Pearce, "Representations of Female Athletes in Young Adult Sports Fiction: Issues and Intersections of Race and Gender," in *Paradoxes of Youth and Sport*, eds., Margaret Gatz, Michael A. Messner, and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2002), 72-73.

²⁷ Rubinfeld, "The Mythical Jim Thorpe," 177.

Chapter Two

Longboat The Indian – The Early Narrative

Increasingly from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century the Europeans sought to change the ideology of their non-European subjects...The desired changes could be brought about by 'educating' the native, 'converting' the native, 'administering' the native, and generally 'enlightening' the native.²⁸

E. Palmer Patterson II

After Tom Longboat won the 1907 Boston Marathon the Toronto *Evening Telegram* sent a reporter to the Six Nations Reserve to discover the place where "the great Indian spent his boyhood days." The newspaper story was published on April 24, 1907 and ran without a by-line, which was common in those days. The author began with an account of an arduous trek to find the Longboat residence, accompanied by an unidentified "Indian guide and interpreter." When told the house was "out in the bush," the reporter adopted the facetious tone of an explorer approaching the ends of the earth. Things went well at first as he saw the familiar sights of wooden fences and cultivated fields, "that give you a better opinion of civilization on the untutored savage." But then the journey became a slog through woods and swamp.

Once the Longboat residence was found, nestled in the woods, it was described snidely as a rotting, crumbling log shack in danger of catching fire at any moment, "to further celebrate Tom's victories by making a bonfire of the whole stately edifice." Longboat's brother Simon, seated "on the ruins of an old buggy," was described as wearing "overalls, a coat a few sizes too large and a

²⁸ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 22-23.

disreputable soft felt hat, and a grin.” There was also mention of the eldest Longboat daughter who lived nearby with “her husband and numerous progeny.” From out of the daughter’s house bounded “two buxom Indian lasses” who helped Mrs. Longboat²⁹ pound corn with sticks “to make that strong heavy bread that would give a white man all the varied degrees of indigestion in one bunch, but which makes the Indian fat and strong.” At one point, Mrs. Longboat was seen with an un-named granddaughter, “a merry little Indian tot of three, who hugged a rag dolly just as her white sisters do.” The idea of an Aboriginal girl amusing herself in the same way as a non-Aboriginal child seemed worthy of note.

This newspaper story reflected the view, held by many Canadians at the turn of the twentieth century, that Aboriginal people were hopelessly backward. In fact, some believed Aboriginal people were on the road to extinction, that the superior European culture would soon overwhelm and assimilate them. This notion persisted despite evidence to the contrary and Aboriginal Canadians were often portrayed as the last representatives of their dying cultures. Furthermore it was thought that these ‘primitive’ peoples were ill-equipped to adapt to the ‘civilized’ society around them, and that this adaptation could only be accomplished with the help of non-Aboriginals. Some even believed that Aboriginals were so childlike they required close supervision in order to prevent them from succumbing to the vices and corruptions of modern society. Indeed, the establishment of reserves in the early nineteenth century has been

²⁹ No first name is used for Mrs. Longboat in the article but Tom Longboat Jr. has said his grandmother was born Betsy Skye. See Brenda Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada* (Edmonton: GMS² Ventures Inc., 1988), 12.

interpreted as an attempt by Canadian officials to create “havens where Native people could live isolated from the baleful influence of their White neighbours.”³⁰

The early Longboat narrative was heavily influenced by these beliefs. The narrative generally portrayed the athlete as the product of an unsophisticated culture; a man who, while successful as an athlete, was a failure in his personal life. He was seen as being unable, or unwilling, to cooperate with the trainers and managers who tried to help him. His supposed inability to cope with non-Aboriginal society was said to have resulted in poor work habits, a drinking problem, clashes with athletic authorities, and an inability to manage his money. Longboat was often cast as a tragic figure who lived well for a while but ended up in poverty. This representation lingered long after his death in 1949.

This chapter will explore the early Longboat narrative by examining texts dating from the early twentieth century until the mid-1970's when the representations of him began to change. For the most part, Longboat was judged according to the prevailing views and stereotypes about Aboriginals. As Victoria Paraschak has said, privileged members of a society view those who are different from themselves – the Others – from a distance, “matching their behaviours to our stereotypes about them.”³¹ Emma LaRoque, a Métis writer from Alberta gave examples of long-standing stereotypes in her 1975 book *Defeathering the Indian*: “Today many non-Natives still view the Indian in either

³⁰ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, B.C.: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 203.

³¹ Victoria Paraschak, “Knowing Ourselves Through the ‘Other’: Indigenous Peoples in Sport in Canada,” in *Sociology of Sport: Theory and Practice*, eds. Dr. Robyn L. Jones and Dr. Kathleen M. Armour (Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 153.

of two ways, as a sublime 'Nature-lover' or as a 'Dirty Indian.'³² LaRoque says the Nature-lover is an updated version of the myth of the noble red man. As for the Dirty Indian: "He is not dependable. He is irresponsible. He is lazy and his house is usually not clean. He is perpetually on welfare. And when he is drunk, he is usually sullen and hostile."³³

While Longboat was generally viewed through the lens of this crude stereotype, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the early narrative was influenced solely by racist views. While this might have been the most significant individual factor, it was not the only element to the story. For one thing, not everyone held these views. Sympathetic portrayals of Longboat and Aboriginals could be found alongside the many examples of bigotry. And Longboat was frequently at odds with a concept of amateurism that discriminated against him on the basis of social class. His need for financial security and his rejection of the code of the 'gentleman sportsman' led to the suspension of his amateur status on more than one occasion. So while the early Longboat narrative was deeply rooted in racial stereotypes, other factors played a role in the way he was portrayed. This chapter will explore how these factors combined to produce the early representations of Tom Longboat.

The Primitive Longboat

The *Evening Telegram* article mentioned above, featuring the visit to Six Nations in 1907, not only reflected the assumption that Aboriginal culture was

³² Emma LaRoque, *Defeathering the Indian* (The Book Society of Canada Limited, 1975), 32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 33.

fragile and inferior compared to that of mainstream Canada, it also demonstrated the related belief that Aboriginals were exotic subjects for study. There is a vivid description of Mrs. Longboat, the unknowable Other to the reporter, with her “impassive countenance” looking out on the world with “stoical indifference to the fame her son has achieved.”

Sixty-five years had turned her wealth of straight, strong Indian hair to an iron grey, but it crowned a countenance that showed hardly a wrinkle and out of which shone small shrewd eyes that her long, hard journey through life had utterly failed to dim. Hers is an Indian face and a good one. The broad nostrils of the Indian are there with the cheek bones almost rushing to meet them, the mouth is firm and the eyes are close together and rather small.

But a complexion that is as far removed from the copper color as it is from the pure Caucasian tint and the smooth folds of the iron grey hair above it lend an effect to her general appearance that is indefinably pleasing³⁴

This passage is similar to an *Evening Telegram* article about Longboat that had appeared a few days before: “He has all the characteristics of the Indian, both of form and feature. The high cheek bones, the square jaw, the loosely knit frame, all bear unmistakable evidence of his origin.”³⁵ It is possible both stories were written by the same reporter, neither article appeared with a by-line. But two different journalists could easily have chosen to provide the same pseudo-anthropological description. Anthropology was a growing social science and its practitioners, trained or otherwise, believed that Aboriginal people needed to be closely studied before European culture obliterated them. In 1899 the

³⁴ *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 24 April 1907

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 April 1907.

British Association for the Advancement of Science spoke of “the rapid extermination of savages” and encouraged travelers to report observations concerning Aboriginal culture.³⁶ Daniel Francis says the myth of the endangered Aboriginal began in the middle of the nineteenth century in Canada and continued well into the twentieth.³⁷

In the August 1908 issue of *The Canadian Magazine*, a popular general-interest publication of the time, there was an illustration of an “Indian” village, with tepees and men on horseback wearing headdresses. The image is titled “Village of a Vanishing Race.”³⁸ The illustration accompanied an article entitled “Indian Tribes of Labrador” that examined the Montagnais and Nascaupees, or Naskapi as they are commonly referred to today.³⁹ The author, Clifford H. Easton, took on the role of an amateur anthropologist and reported that the Montagnais had a “larger admixture of white blood” which made them more muscular than the Nascaupees. They had also abandoned many of their “primitive” traits. The Nascaupees, on the other hand, had limited contact with “the white man” which resulted in the characteristic build of the “pure-blooded Indian.” The women, were “short, thick set and inclined to corpulency after the age of thirty. The men, on the contrary, are often six feet tall, slightly built, with fine, clear-cut features.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Carol J. Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and The Photographic Frontier in The Pacific Northwest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

³⁷ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 57.

³⁸ Clifford H. Easton, “Indian Tribes of Labrador,” *The Canadian Magazine* XXXI, no.4 (August 1908): 294.

³⁹ José Mailhot describes the imprecise nature of the term Nascaupée, or Naskapi as it has been more often used in “Beyond Everyone’s Horizon Stand the Naskapi,” *Ethnohistory* 33, no.4 (Autumn 1986): 384.

⁴⁰ Easton, “Indian Tribes of Labrador,” 290, 295.

Easton has been described as one of “a number of explorers and wealthy sportsmen, lovers of adventure and of the exotic” who trekked through Labrador at the beginning of the twentieth century and “developed a veritable infatuation” for the Nascaupees.⁴¹ They believed, as Easton wrote, that isolation from non-Aboriginal society provided “an excellent opportunity to study the Indian in his primitive state, untouched by any of the influences of civilization, and guided by the same old customs and superstitions that governed their forefathers.”⁴² Easton describes an encounter at a fur trading post in Fort Chimo (now Kuujjuaq, Quebec) where he came across a young Nascaupée man “dressed completely in skins, with a hood formed by a large wolf’s head, the teeth resting on his forehead, and the sharp pointed ears standing erect.”

The next morning I encountered the same man who, in the meantime, had evidently traded his stock of furs for European clothing as he was togged out in a cheap suit of black with a bright blue handkerchief around his neck, and though the thermometer stood at thirty below zero and his teeth were playing together like castanets, he seemed exceedingly proud of his attire and paraded around for the benefit of everyone within sight. By dint of much persuasion, I induced him to don his skin coat and stand for a picture, but his frigid attitude due to the half-hour in civilized dress rather spoiled the effect.⁴³

Like many, Easton considered Aboriginal adaptation to European society to be somehow unnatural and certainly less interesting to observe. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. has noted that, “Since Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness as they defined them

⁴¹ Mailhot, “Beyond Everyone’s Horizon Stand the Naskapi,” 405.

⁴² Easton, “Indian Tribes of Labrador,” 294.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 297.

would forever be opposites.”⁴⁴ For those who thought this way, an Aboriginal person who accepted European ways was no longer a true Aboriginal. This contributed to the notion of the vanishing Indian.

Some articles in *The Canadian Magazine*, published at around the same time, were more blatantly racist than Easton’s. “The Mohawk’s Revenge,” for example, was a short fictional story set in New France about a young couple in love who steal away for a tryst in the woods, only to be scalped by a “bloodthirsty savage.” “Swiftly, noiselessly, the Mohawk warrior glided like a snake through the trees and shrubbery, while the straggling moonbeams shone on the nut-brown hair and golden tresses at his belt. He had meted out his revenge.”⁴⁵

On the other hand, there was an article in the publication a month before Longboat’s victory in Boston that was a legitimate attempt to understand Aboriginal religions. While the title might be somewhat off-putting - “Are Our Indians Pagans?”- and its purpose was to help missionaries recruit more souls, the author’s conclusion was that Aboriginal beliefs were no less complex or spiritual than either Christianity or Judaism.⁴⁶ This demonstrates at least some variety of opinion, and that not everyone believed in the inferiority of Aboriginal culture at the time the early Longboat narrative was being formed.

But despite the existence of views to the contrary, most Canadians still clung to the ingrained belief that Aboriginal culture was inferior and likely doomed. In his 1992 book, *The Imaginary Indian*, Daniel Francis says non-

⁴⁴ Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 29.

⁴⁵ Thomas F. Astle, “The Mohawk’s Revenge,” *The Canadian Magazine* XXVIII, no. 5 (January 1907): 290.

⁴⁶ W.E.H. Stokes, “Are Our Indians Pagans?” *The Canadian Magazine* XXVIII, no. 6 (March 1907): 604.

Natives have tended to imagine the Indian rather than to know Aboriginal people. He says Europeans projected misgivings about their own civilization onto Aboriginals and “the Imaginary Indian became a stick with which they beat their own society.” The Other, Francis says, came to stand for “everything the Euro-Canadian was not,” and was essential to the creation of a Canadian identity.⁴⁷

In his book about the celebration surrounding Quebec’s tercentenary in 1908, H.V. Nelles noted that the pageants involving Aboriginal people in traditional costume were among the most popular attractions. But attempts by Aboriginals to be seen as contemporary peoples taking part in a celebration of a shared past seem to have been misunderstood. “Native people had declared their presence and insisted that their history and future should also be recognized. Onlookers may have seen something else in their performance, confirmation of deep-rooted racial stereotypes.”⁴⁸

These views found their way into popular culture through art. Canadian painter Emily Carr considered herself to be a “documentary artist making a visual record of a condemned people.” In 1907, the year of Longboat’s victory in Boston, Carr decided to paint Aboriginal scenes and artefacts, explaining that, “Only a few more years and they will be gone forever, into silent nothingness, and I would gather my collections before they are forever past.”⁴⁹ Carol J. Williams says this “anthropological push to preserve evidence of Indian traditional culture” led to an increasingly nostalgic and romantic representation of Aboriginal people. She says North American and European photographers in

⁴⁷ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 7-8.

⁴⁸ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 168.

⁴⁹ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 31.

British Columbia, for example, would try to recreate the past by taking pictures of Aboriginals in outdated clothing and surroundings. They would often use photographic tricks to make a studio image look like an outdoor scene with totem poles, or superimpose an Indian blanket over a subject's more European clothing.⁵⁰ One practitioner of this technique, Benjamin Leeson, observed in 1914 that "the dirt and odor were eliminated in the process and...people seemed to find the photographs more interesting than the Indians themselves. The pictures have quite a little sale to tourists and others."⁵¹

In the same spirit, one of the most influential filmmakers of the early twentieth century, Robert J. Flaherty, took great pains to keep the influence of European society out of his famous film about the Inuit. Flaherty's 1922 *Nanook of the North* was a box-office smash and is considered to be a classic early documentary. It is still studied in universities and film schools around the world. The film depicts an Inuit family struggling to survive in the brutal Arctic environment. While the film has generally been called a documentary, Flaherty, like Leeson, staged much of what he shot to present an idealized picture of Aboriginal people. One of the most dramatic scenes in *Nanook* involves a dangerous walrus hunt that Flaherty insisted be conducted with harpoons even though the Inuit had long since adopted rifles.

One critic has called this approach "ethnographic taxidermy" because it implies that to portray Aboriginals "one must believe that they are dying, as well

⁵⁰ Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and The Photographic Frontier in The Pacific Northwest*, 20-25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

as use artifice to make a picture which appears more true, more pure.”⁵² While Flaherty and Carr may have had artistic motives beyond commercial gain, the notion of the doomed Indian was often exploited by tourism officials, promoters of Wild West shows, and others who wished to market anachronistic images of Aboriginals as fleeting traces of vanishing races. The obsession with studying the traits and characteristics of supposedly endangered groups permeated the popular imagination despite the fact that Aboriginal populations in Canada were actually on the rise by the 1920’s.⁵³

What had happened, according to E. Palmer Patterson II, was that the colonizing nature of European culture had weakened the ability of Aboriginal people to control their own lives. They were forced to adapt to European culture and this adaptation was misinterpreted by many observers who assumed Aboriginal people were being assimilated. “What they did not see,” Patterson says, “was the cohesiveness and tenacity of the Indian community and in most cases the capacity of the Indian to adapt without loss of identity.”⁵⁴

The *Evening Telegram* reporter who was sent to Six Nations in 1907 to interview the Longboat family would have been influenced by the notions about the supposed inability of Aboriginal culture to survive alongside the ‘superior’ European one. Indeed, many of the themes present in that text have been identified by Berkhofer as typical denigrations of Aboriginal people: “Filthy surroundings, inadequate cooking, and certain items of diet repulsive to White

⁵² Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 101-102.

⁵³ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 57.

⁵⁴ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 40.

taste tended to confirm a low opinion of Indian life.”⁵⁵ The *Evening Telegram* article included a drawing of Mrs. Longboat and her granddaughter sitting in a doorway. Even though it did not immediately suggest a dying race, the image added to the article’s overall mood of poverty and struggle. The older woman wears a care-worn expression and the little girl looks unhappily away from the artist. The article sends the message that Longboat was the product of a primitive, backward, and probably doomed culture.

The Fallen Longboat

Another theme of the early Longboat narrative was the belief that Longboat, like most Aboriginals, was unable to adapt to Canadian society without the help of European Canadians. He was a failure in his personal life, the story goes, because he did not always accept this guidance. Perhaps the most famous proponent of this scenario was sports journalist Lou E. Marsh of the *Toronto Daily Star*. Marsh was a competitive runner and actually competed against Longboat. He played rugby for the Toronto Argonauts before becoming a journalist and later became a referee in the National Hockey League. He was a popular sports columnist for the first three decades of the twentieth century and eventually became the *Star’s* sports editor. The newspaper established the Lou Marsh Award after the journalist’s death in 1936 to honour Canada’s athlete of the year.

Marsh’s treatment of Longboat was both complimentary and critical over the years. He seemed charmed by the young champion after his victory in

⁵⁵ Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 28.

Boston. "The man who says that this Indian boy is not keen of wit knows not whereof he speaks," Marsh wrote after the race. "I spent 10 hours in close contact with him yesterday, and while he is slow to warm up in a 'talk fest,' his remarks show that he is thinking all the time, and that but for his difficulty in expressing himself with facility in English, would be decidedly entertaining. His head is full of ideas, and he is one of the greatest kidders who ever came down the line to fame."⁵⁶ Even when Longboat lost, Marsh was sometimes impressed with the runner's effort. "Credit should be given to Longboat for his great race," he once wrote, "Longboat stuck to his guns with grim determination."⁵⁷

But Marsh could also be merciless toward the athlete, accusing him on one occasion of having a swelled head and neglecting "even the rudimentary rules of training."⁵⁸ He also once advocated that the runner "be taken in hand by a trainer who will handle him like a race horse...Longboat cannot be left to his own devices a moment when preparing for a race."⁵⁹ Longboat's reticence when speaking with journalists was especially bothersome to Marsh during a 1919 interview about the former-athlete's experiences during the First World War. Marsh peppered the veteran with questions about his role as a dispatch messenger in France and was met with a maddening series of curt, ambiguous replies. "In my time I've interviewed everything from a circus lion to an Eskimo chief," Marsh wrote, "but when it comes down to being the original dummy, Tom Longboat is it. Interviewing a Chinese Joss or a mooley cow is pie compared to

⁵⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 April 1907.

⁵⁷ *The Globe*, 11 February 1907.

⁵⁸ Bruce Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2004), 45.

⁵⁹ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 49.

the task of digging anything out of Heap Big Chief T.”⁶⁰ Marsh doesn't seem to have considered that Longboat simply chose, for whatever reason, to keep his thoughts to himself. His silence was considered to be yet another negative characteristic linked to Longboat's race.

Marsh was not the only journalist to criticize Longboat for his silence. An *Evening Telegram* reporter once wrote, “He is a thorough Indian. He has nothing to say. His speech usually consists of a short assenting grunt, typical of his race. The interviewer has to do all the talking, for he answers no questions. Perhaps he is wise in this.”⁶¹ While the reference to wisdom might mean the journalist recognized the possibility that Longboat chose to keep quiet for his own reasons, the athlete's silence was largely attributed to his being “a thorough Indian.”

Marsh likely wrote more about Longboat than any other journalist at the time, and his views carried weight. A 1983 study of the journalist's work by Don Morrow called Marsh's column “the most widely read single piece of sport journalism in Canada and, to a certain extent, in the United States.”⁶² Perhaps the Marsh text that had the most lasting impression on Longboat's public image was a 1922 feature in the *Toronto Star Weekly* entitled “Tom Longboat The Greatest Redskin Runner of Them All.”⁶³ The article was published several years after Longboat's last competitive race. It covered most of a page and was accompanied by several photographs. The pretext of the article was to mark

⁶⁰ Blaikie, *Boston: The Canadian Story*, 17/21.

⁶¹ *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 April 1907.

⁶² Don Morrow, “Lou Marsh: The Pick and Shovel of Canadian Sporting Journalism,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* XIV, no. 1 (May 1983): 25. Morrow's analysis of Marsh's work spans from 1925 until 1936, but there's no reason to believe that the 1922 article about Longboat would have been less widely read.

⁶³ *Toronto Star Weekly*, 2 December 1922.

Longboat's thirty-fifth birthday and to report on his recent return to Toronto to take a job as a labourer for a rubber company. Its tone, however, was far from congratulatory. Longboat was portrayed as a charity case who had squandered his considerable talent and fame.

"Why isn't Longboat on easy street?" Marsh asked. "Because he did not have a white man's business brain. Longboat is no fool. Don't run away with that idea. He is wily and wise in his way. He simply could not grasp the business details which enter into the exploitation of a world-famous athlete." Marsh added that Longboat never understood why "his manager's brains were worth a quarter as much as his long legs." Longboat, he said, made things worse by being headstrong, unreliable, and generally unmanageable: "You couldn't keep track of him without handcuffs, leg irons, a straight jacket, and a regiment of Pinkertons." Marsh said Longboat had recently arrived in Toronto, cap in hand, to seek the help of Tom Flanagan, the former manager suspected of doping him at the 1908 Olympics. Like Longboat, Marsh had once been a member of Flanagan's Irish Canadian Athletic Club. And Marsh had also been part of Longboat's Olympic entourage. He quoted Flanagan extensively in the article and supported the former manager's assertion that the Olympic disaster was Longboat's fault.

Flanagan's account, as quoted by Marsh, is that the runner wouldn't train: "I couldn't handle him in Ireland, and the man I turned him over to in England 10 days before the race had all he could do to keep track of him there." Marsh confirmed this by revealing that he, in fact, was the man in charge of Longboat in England. Marsh hammered home the notion of the runner's missed opportunities

with another statement by Flanagan: "If Longboat had not failed us in the English Marathon and had won, I would have toured the world with him and he would have retired worth a quarter-million." In Marsh's article Flanagan, not Longboat, is the hero, taking his former client out to lunch and getting him a job. "They had corn (sic) beef and cabbage at Flanagan's old hotel, and then Flanagan chased around and landed him a job. Now he is working. If that isn't 'From powder monkey to admiral and back again' I'm a heathen Chinee."⁶⁴

Marsh's language is certainly racist by today's standards. But it's worth noting that even E. Pauline Johnson, the early-twentieth poet and story-teller used language that would be deemed inappropriate today. Like Longboat, Johnson was from Six Nations; she was once called "the aboriginal voice of Canada."⁶⁵ In a short essay she wrote after the Boston Marathon, she referred to Longboat as "the fleet-footed young redskin" and characterized him as a "typical present-day semi-civilized Indian living in a "clearing" in the woods. For the Onondagas are yet Pagan to a man; a race too conservative to embrace Christianity and its innovations."⁶⁶

The significance of Marsh's text, then, has less to do with the language he used than with the attitudes he expressed. He believed that Longboat, as an Aboriginal, had been unable to adapt to the non-Aboriginal world because he did not accept guidance from well-meaning European-Canadians like himself and Tom Flanagan. This theme was heard again decades later in an essay by Bob

⁶⁴ *Toronto Star Weekly*, 2 December 1922.

⁶⁵ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 113.

⁶⁶ E. Pauline Johnson ("Tekahionwake"), "Longboat of the Onondagas," *Canada: An Illustrated Weekly Journal*, 1 June 1907, 250.

Pennington, an award-winning sportswriter, who wrote that Longboat was “unable to accept the influence of good white men and was only happy among those who supported the vices that had been brought to the Indian from Europe.”⁶⁷

Marsh’s 1922 text planted the seeds for the view of Longboat as a man who went from rags to riches to rags again. Its influence could be detected in one of the most cited Longboat texts, “The Rise and Fall of Tom Longboat,” by Fergus Cronin. The article appeared in *Maclean’s Magazine* in 1956. It summed up Longboat’s life brutally: “He hated to train, and he was a fool with his money. But for half a dozen dazzling years this Canadian Indian could run farther, faster than any man alive. His downfall was just as swift.” The article was accompanied by a photograph that showed the former athlete in tattered work clothes. The photo caption included the phrase, “Garbageman Longboat was broke at forty.” The first paragraph continued down the same road, telling readers that Longboat’s life was one of Horatio Alger in reverse, a story of “Public Hero to Garbage Collector.” Even Longboat’s service during the war did not impress Cronin. Army discipline, he wrote, “did little to change the Indian’s unpredictable nature.”⁶⁸

Cronin’s article reinforced Marsh’s assertion that Longboat had squandered his athletic gifts: “Longboat blew his money on liquor, fancy clothes and foolish investments in real estate. He had no idea how to handle it.” And Cronin went beyond Marsh’s veiled references to the athlete being difficult to

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁸ Fergus Cronin, “The Rise and Fall of Tom Longboat,” *Maclean’s Magazine*, 4 February 1956, 42.

handle by stating outright that Longboat drank too much. "Tales of his drinking became legendary," Cronin wrote. He mentions Longboat's arrest for "drunkenness" in 1922 and says Longboat drank while training for the Olympics. According to Cronin, "The runner boasted later that although he did a lot of work under Flanagan's watchful eye, he was able to bribe the dairy maids into spiking his milk with Irish Whisky."⁶⁹

Cronin's account of the Olympic training apparently comes from Longboat, and while it contradicts Flanagan's charge that the runner refused to do any work, it added to the perception that Longboat had a drinking problem. As is the case in Marsh's 1922 text, Cronin's 1956 article relied on quotes from Flanagan that reflected the belief that Longboat could not cope with the larger society around him. Asked about the estimated seventeen thousand dollars Longboat was said to have won during his career, Flanagan said Longboat, like boxers Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, had been victimized by greedy managers. "Smart fellows show them how to double their money, and the smart fellows wind up with it all." Flanagan apparently didn't include himself in that category. As for Longboat's apparent failure to make the most of his talent, Flanagan, then 77, looked back half-a-century and said, "He was a better man as an Indian than he was trained as a white man. I often thought if we could have kept him on the reservation and brought him out just to run, what he could have done would have been even more remarkable."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid., 21, 40, 38.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 42.

This representation of Longboat as a flawed and ultimately failed man, presented by one of English Canada's most widely-read sports journalists and then reinforced in a national magazine years later, became a persistent theme of the early view of Longboat. These texts by Marsh and Cronin would be cited for years to come and would form a central part of the new Longboat narrative, serving as examples of the virulent racism that Longboat is said to have endured on a regular basis.

While the modern representations of Longboat often leave the impression that he was subjected to unfair treatment at every turn, there were numerous instances in the original narrative where his ability and character were praised. These cases are worth noting because they are rarely mentioned in the modern telling of the story, possibly because the power of the newer narrative lies in how Longboat overcame unmitigated racism. They are also worth noting because they demonstrate that the negative view of Longboat persisted despite the presence of alternative views.

It is certainly true that Longboat was generally criticized for not training enough, but the *Toronto World* newspaper had this to say about a 1907 marathon: "Don't think that Longboat is not training faithfully for the event. On the contrary, the big-chested Indian is at home in the country, where he conditioned for so many winning events."⁷¹ When the rising young star was narrowly beaten in a race in February 1907, after three consecutive wins, the *Toronto Globe* praised both the winner and Longboat, the "Indian Canadian runner," judging

⁷¹ *Toronto World* 8 October 1907.

that, "each man exerted himself to the utmost."⁷² And while an early Longboat manager, Harry Rosenthal, had warned that, "Someone in Longboat's confidence will have to take hold of the lad and look after him all the time, an official at the Canadian Amateur Athletic Association (CAAU) responded, "I do not think that he [Longboat] needs anything like the looking after that H. Rosenthal says he does."⁷³ While the CAAU certainly saw fit to keep a close eye on Longboat, the amateur organization was more concerned with his source of funding than his allegedly wild ways.

Within a few years of his death in 1949, Longboat was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame as well as the Olympic Hall of Fame, despite his disastrous Olympic experience.⁷⁴ In 1951 the Department of Indian Affairs joined with the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada to establish the Tom Longboat Awards for Aboriginal athletes. Janice Forsyth argues that, although the stated aim of the program was to recognize Native athletes, the awards were conceived primarily as a tool of assimilation. Forsythe says the program was intended to bring about the "appropriate integration of Native men and women into mainstream Canadian society."⁷⁵ This might also be true of an Indian Affairs filmstrip "Tom Longboat: Canadian Indian World Champion" that was produced in 1952 and shown in residential schools.⁷⁶ But even though the motives might

⁷² *The Globe*, 11 February 1907.

⁷³ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 34; Wilton Littlechild, "Tom Longboat: Canada's Outstanding Indian Athlete" (ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1976), 13.

⁷⁴ The Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame honours athletes, teams, coaches and "builders" who have made significant contributions to Olympic sports. See www.olympic.ca/EN/hof/index.shtml

⁷⁵ Janice Margaret Forsyth, "The Power to Define: A History of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001" (MA thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 2005), 92.

⁷⁶ *Tom Longboat: Canadian Indian World Champion*, filmstrip produced by Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Indian Affairs Branch, 1952.

have been less than pure, these government initiatives would suggest that many viewed Longboat as an admirable, even inspirational figure.

But the view of Longboat as a flawed, failed man persisted despite these expressions of support. The 1960 *Encyclopedia Canadiana*, for example, made no mention of the Tom Longboat Awards, nor his induction into the Sports Hall of Fame. In fact, after a very brief biographical sketch, the reference book suggested readers consult Fergus Cronin's *Maclean's* article for more information.⁷⁷ That this narrative persisted despite alternative views was due, in part, to the influence of the publications that chose to perpetuate it - the *Toronto Daily Star*, *The Evening Telegram*, *Maclean's Magazine*, and the *Encyclopedia Canadiana*.

Mark Rubinfeld has written that a similar situation influenced the public perception of Aboriginal athlete Jim Thorpe. Thorpe was one of the most accomplished athletes of the twentieth century. He won two gold medals in track and field at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. He was also a football star and eventually played major league baseball. He was forced to return his Olympic medals, however, when it was discovered that he had played semi-professional baseball prior to the Olympics.

Rubinfeld says Thorpe was "arguably, the most recognizable Native American name of the twentieth century."⁷⁸ He says he was popular with the American public but his image was often controlled by white men with their own agendas, who took it upon themselves to speak for him "through the

⁷⁷ *Encyclopedia Canadiana* 1958, 1960 ed., s.v. "Tom Longboat." (vol. 6, 199).

⁷⁸ Rubinfeld, "The Mythical Jim Thorpe," 167.

communications industries they controlled.” After he was stripped of his medals, Thorpe reportedly said, “I was not very wise in the ways of the world. I was simply an Indian schoolboy.”⁷⁹ Rubinfeld says the numerous news accounts of Thorpe’s “simple” nature, money problems, and alcoholism “became synonymous in many people’s minds with the ‘natural state’ of Native Americans.”⁸⁰

This seems to have been the case in Canada as well. Many Canadians still believed the negative stereotypes widely spread in the media. In fact, this view would be reinforced in the 1960’s by another prominent media source. Bob Pennington, a popular sportswriter, would not only portray Longboat as a man unable to adapt to the society around him, he would also conclude that Aboriginal people were unable to become part of Canadian society without falling victim to its ills and vices.⁸¹

The Impure Longboat

Robert Berkhofer has observed that, “In spite of centuries of contact and the changed conditions of Native American lives, Whites picture the ‘real’ Indian as the one before contact or during the early period of that contact.”⁸² There is evidence of this belief in the works of Robert Flaherty, Emily Carr, and E. Pauline Johnson. “What I want to show is the former majesty and character of these people, while it is still possible,” Flaherty explained, “before the white man has

⁷⁹ Rubinfeld, “The Mythical Jim Thorpe, 175.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 175-176.

⁸¹ Bob Pennington, “Of Men and Marathons,” In *Flamboyant Canadians*, ed. Ellen Stafford (Toronto: Baxter Publishing Company, 1964), 159.

⁸² Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 28.

destroyed not only their character, but the people as well.”⁸³ In a lecture given in 1923, Carr said of Aboriginal people, “In their own primitive state they were a moral people with a high ideal of right...They looked up to the whites, as a superior race whom they should try to copy. Alas, they could not discriminate between the good and the bad, there was so much bad, and they copied it.”⁸⁴ As for Johnson, she believed the Onondaga people had maintained a sort of purity through isolation from European society. “Border civilization, with its frequent trail of dissolution, has not touched this ancient nation with the white man’s corruption and disease. The Onondagas live a primitive life of extreme simplicity, morality, and exclusiveness.”⁸⁵ The implication was that Aboriginal people were like innocent children, vulnerable to the complicated ways of a more sophisticated society.

This view is clearly present in an essay published in 1964 that was condensed into newspaper columns for the *Toronto Telegram* the following year. Bob Pennington’s “Of Men and Marathons” first appeared as a chapter in the 1964 book *Flamboyant Canadians*, edited by Ellen Stafford. The book was published at a time when Canada was choosing a national flag and searching for an identity as its centenary approached. In the introduction, Stafford laments that Canadians grew up looking to the United States and Europe for their idols. To counteract this she compiled essays about lesser-known figures to debunk the

⁸³ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Documentary Film* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 43.

⁸⁴ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*, 34.

⁸⁵ Johnson, “Longboat of the Onondagas,” 250.

myth of the boring Canadian. Longboat, Norman Bethune, and Henri Bourassa are among the best known subjects of the book.

The decision to include Longboat amongst these “flamboyant” Canadians is an indication that he was considered by some to be an unconventional but important figure. “Worthy or unworthy, moral or immoral, saint or sinner,” Stafford wrote, “the one characteristic our characters have in common is a certain flamboyance of spirit, a disregard for the established and approved way, a stubborn refusal to remain in the rut of routine existence, a disinclination to accept other-imposed values.”⁸⁶ But while Longboat’s inclusion may seem like a recognition of the originality and forcefulness of his spirit, Pennington’s portrayal of the athlete contradicts the very premise of the book. Instead of celebrating Longboat’s “disinclination to accept other-imposed values,” the author considers this to be a failing, at least as far as Longboat is concerned. His essay is a comparison of the lives of Longboat and another “Flamboyant Canadian,” Joshua Slocum, a Nova Scotia-born adventurer who sailed around the world single-handedly in 1895. While Slocum’s story was one of inspiration, Longboat’s was a cautionary tale of dismal failure.

Both men were courageous, Pennington concluded, “Yet in all other things between the sober, non-smoking Nova Scotian sailor and the whisky-swilling, cigar chain-smoking Onondaga tribesman there was as big a gap as their heritage.” Both men “died with a huge question mark above their bones,” but for different reasons. The uncertainty about Slocum had to do with his death.

⁸⁶ Ellen Stafford, ed., *Flamboyant Canadians* (Toronto: Baxter Publishing Company, 1964), Introduction (no page number provided).

He set sail for South America in 1909 and was never heard from again, a fate Pennington imbues with heroic romanticism. The “question mark” about Longboat concerned his character: “proof is still lacking as to whether Longboat was doped to lose the 1908 London Olympics Marathon, probably the most controversial race of all time.”

Pennington learned his trade in Fleet Street, London’s cut throat newspaper district. He won two national newspaper awards in the 1960’s as a Toronto *Telegram* sportswriter. “Of Men and Marathons” managed to hit upon two well-worn journalistic scenarios. There is the fallen idol story with Longboat tumbling from great heights, reduced to collecting garbage in the streets “where he once stopped the traffic as effectively as did the Beatles.”⁸⁷ Then there is Slocum, the brave adventurer, whose voyage around the tip of South America was “an epic of seamanship and indomitable resolve.”

The portrait of Slocum, taken largely from the sailor’s own accounts, told of once surviving a terrible storm only to be set upon by “Fuegian savages who swarmed towards him in their canoes.” Slocum, described elsewhere in the essay as a man of “abundant humanity,” fired his rifle at them “to frighten, not to kill. His pursuers would not have held such scruples.” In order to foil these “savages” in their attempts to board his vessel, Slocum covered the deck with carpet tacks that produced “howls of pain” from the barefooted Fuegians. The illustration on the opening page of the chapter is of a loin-clothed, dark-skinned man with curly hair, large lips and a spear in his hand, grimacing in pain as he comically hops over the tacks. Slocum is also said to have been attacked by

⁸⁷ Pennington, “Of Men and Marathons,” 128.

Indians who fired arrows into his rigging, and to have narrowly escaped “Moorish pirates.” He survived, however, through cunning, bravery, and an undying faith in God - “I knew that no human hand was at the helm.”⁸⁸

It is difficult to separate these cartoon images of primitive savages from what Pennington had to say about Longboat just a few pages later. His description of the runner’s first big race had him shambling to the starting line in old bathing trunks and “hair that looked as if it had been hacked off with a tomahawk.” Then there is Pennington’s claim that, “Although a little short of teeth, this Iroquois national had become a sex symbol to white women. He looked entirely capable of carrying them off into the bush, and there were those who, it seemed, would not have protested - and the hysteria was not confined to teen-agers.”⁸⁹ This idea might have been influenced by Marsh’s post-marathon coverage of Longboat, six decades earlier, that mentions Longboat’s “predilection for the ladies.” In fact, the *Star’s* description of the Boston Marathon described young women from Wellesley College carolling Longboat’s name as he ran by. Other accounts, however, say all the runners got a cheer from the young women as they passed.⁹⁰ The greeting is a tradition that continues to this day.

The ultimate inconsistency of Pennington’s text was the depiction of Longboat’s life as a tragedy and Slocum’s as a triumph. Slocum, he said, “was

⁸⁸ Ibid., 134, 135, 137.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁹⁰ The sexual aspect to European perceptions of Aboriginal people has been noted by H.V. Nelles in his book *The Art of Nation-Building*. Nelles describes how Aboriginal groups in full costume were popular attractions at the ceremonies and pageants surrounding Quebec’s tercentenary in 1908. He says Aboriginals, for one thing, “represented powerfully repressed sexual anxieties; they were nature amidst the man-made, the mystical outside of the rational. They were, in that sense, beyond history, having been removed from it.” See Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 174.

always willing to take advice from those he respected” while Longboat fell in with Tom Flanagan, a “dubious” Irishman who drank and gambled. Yet the adventurer ignored advice about ominous weather and sailed into the middle of a deadly storm never to return. And while Slocum’s death was arguably more foolish than heroic, and even Pennington conceded “there would have been a place at the Mad Hatter’s tea party for Captain Joshua Slocum,” it is Longboat who was portrayed as a man bent on self-destruction, especially in the latter stages of his career. “Drink was now speeding Longboat’s slow rot into obvious decay,” Pennington said. “Moody after one bad bout on the booze, he became his own manager. His training was lifting a bottle in a bar.” For Pennington, Longboat was a failure because, as the product of a simplistic culture, he was easy prey to the temptations of a complex society: “Yet this story is only a twentieth-century miniature of his race. A good Indian stays good if he stays Indian.”⁹¹

The Dishonest Longboat

Newspapers and magazines were not the only sources of the early Longboat narrative. Before he turned professional (after the 1908 Olympics) amateur athletic authorities in Canada and the United States made judgements about Longboat that helped shape the way he was viewed. These officials frequently spoke of him as someone who claimed to be an amateur while acting like a professional. He was accused of pocketing prize money at informal meets and accepting more expense money than the regulations allowed. The issue to

⁹¹ Pennington, “Of Men and Marathons,” 158, 159.

explore here is not whether Longboat broke amateur rules but why he was so often accused of doing so, and how this affected the way he was portrayed.

Part of the explanation for why Longboat was the object of close scrutiny was the belief Aboriginal sport culture encouraged betting and the awarding of prize money. This might have been true at one point in Aboriginal history. An examination of European accounts of Native American life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, published in 1983, indicates that gambling was involved in “almost all Indian contests, and not merely in games of chance.”⁹² But the belief that Aboriginals had not adapted their customs to the society around them led to the assumption that, even at the turn of the twentieth century, when amateurism was the prevailing ethos, Aboriginal athletes “required incentives designed to merely encourage their participation in major athletic events.”⁹³ But assumptions about Aboriginals only go so far in explaining why the Onondaga athlete was often in trouble with amateur authorities. Prevailing views of amateurism must also be considered.

In the early part of the twentieth century the essence of the amateur ideal was that one played a sport for the fulfillment it provided and not the material rewards it sometimes offered. The sports establishment, therefore, was determined to prevent professionals from competing with or against amateurs. In 1925 Dr. A.S Lamb, a prominent figure in physical education said, “Governing bodies of amateur sport have no quarrel with the out-and-out professional...but

⁹² George Eisen, “Games and Sporting Diversions of The North American Indians As Reflected In American Historical Writings of The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* 9, no. 1 (May 1978): 70.

⁹³ Charles H. Ballem, “Missing from the Canadian Sports Scene: Native Athletes,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 14, 2 (Dec. 1983): 37.

they would infinitely rather see a man declare his intention openly to go into the professional ranks, than see the individual who is a cheat and a sneak thief, masked under the guise of amateurism...That individual is a menace to all the true ideals of Amateurism and Sportsmanship and should relentlessly be driven from cover and denied the privilege of associating with bona fide amateurs.”⁹⁴

From a practical point of view, amateur status was essential for athletes who wanted to compete in many of the important competitions of the day, such as the Boston Marathon or the Olympic Games. The problem was that these views of amateurism discriminated on the basis of race *and* social class, victimizing Longboat on both counts. In addition, Longboat often found himself in the middle of bitter disputes between rival athletic associations over jurisdiction and the very definition of amateurism. Added to these factors was Longboat's decision to associate himself with business managers who were more interested in making money than upholding the amateur ideal. All of this combined to create an image of an athlete who was not who he claimed to be. His collapse at the Olympics, and the rumours that he had been doped by Flanagan, a known gambler, added to the controversy.

Whether Longboat was respecting the letter of the amateur law or not didn't seem to worry the Canadian public. The newspapers generally treated the issue as an ongoing bureaucratic dispute between athletic bodies and the athletes they represented. The issue with Longboat was more about whether he would be eligible to compete for Canada in international events. Yet the image of

⁹⁴ Kevin G. Jones “Developments in Amateurism and Professionalism In early 20th Century Canadian Sport,” *Journal of Sport History* 2, no.1 (Spring 1975): 29-30.

him as a phoney amateur was seized upon by Cronin and Pennington many years after his death. Cronin called him a “stall-fed” amateur with “no visible means of support.”⁹⁵ And Pennington said Longboat was no more an amateur than the athletes of the Soviet Bloc: “Longboat was as spoon-fed as any Communist contender and had no other means of support than his ability to run.”⁹⁶ These views have become part of the early Longboat narrative, and they were based on the well-documented clashes between the runner and the amateur associations of the day.

Among the first Canadian associations to define amateurism was the Montreal Pedestrian Club. It declared in 1873 that an amateur could not compete in any event where money was involved or even compete with or against athletes who had. Anyone who had ever accepted money to teach or coach athletics was also considered to be a professional. And just to make sure the wrong types got the message, the club also denied amateur status to anyone who was “a labourer or Indian.”⁹⁷ One of the fears with regard to the working classes was that a bricklayer, for example, would have a physical advantage over a doctor or a banker in an athletic competition involving physical strength. The discrimination against Aboriginals was a mixture of cultural elitism and an attempt to remain competitive in the face of the growing proficiency of Aboriginal athletes.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Cronin, “The Rise and Fall of Tom Longboat,” 38.

⁹⁶ Pennington, “Of Men and Marathons,” 151.

⁹⁷ Frank Cosentino, *Afros, Aboriginals and Amateur Sport in Pre World War One Canada*. (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1998), 18.

⁹⁸ See Cosentino, *Afros, Aboriginals and Amateur Sport in Pre World War One Canada* 16, and Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 6-7.

Other athletic associations adopted similar amateur codes, and while they avoided the explicit exclusion of “labourers and Indians,” unofficial barriers remained for years. “However much discrimination [was] experienced by the Negro in Canada, the Indian seemed to suffer more,” says sports historian Frank Cosentino. In 1880, for example, the National Lacrosse League declared itself amateur and banned Aboriginal athletes, declaring them professional strictly because of their race.⁹⁹ In the case of distance running, there are stories of angry spectators physically preventing aboriginal athletes from joining non-native runners at the starting line.¹⁰⁰

But race often intersected with social class. According to Cosentino, “The urban, professional men who controlled athletics considered an amateur sportsman to be “a gentleman of breeding, of independent means, with leisure time available, and able to afford to play...The closer one was to being white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant (WASP), the more likely one was to be recognized as an amateur; the further one was from the standard, the more likely the exclusion.”¹⁰¹ Longboat was certainly not a “gentleman of breeding” in the eyes of these elites, nor was he of independent means. He needed financial support in order to compete on a full-time basis. Early in his career he hired Harry Rosenthal, a Toronto sports promoter, to handle the off-track details while he concentrated on running. Rosenthal recouped his investment by placing bets on the races.

⁹⁹ Frank Cosentino, “A History of The Concept of Professionalism in Canadian Sport,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education* VI, no.2 (December 1975): 78-79.

¹⁰⁰ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 7.

¹⁰¹ Cosentino *Afros, Aboriginals and Amateur Sport in Pre World War One Canada*, 4.

Shortly before the 1907 Boston Marathon, the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States (AAU) sent a telegram to the CAAU asking about Longboat's amateur status. The two organizations were responsible for deciding which athletes, and which competitions, respected the rules of amateurism. They were loosely affiliated but were rapidly falling out over the young Canadian marathoner. The problem started in the spring of 1907 when the CAAU became concerned about Longboat's association with his manager. Rosenthal helped Longboat with living and racing expenses, which was permitted up to a point, but he also tried to involve him in competitions that were not sanctioned by the CAAU. While the association found no reason to suspend the runner, it ordered him to stay away from events it did not approve of, starting with an unsanctioned race in New York in March 1907.¹⁰² American authorities chose to interpret this as a suspension of Longboat's amateur credentials.

The telegram from the AAU, made public just days before Longboat was due to leave for Boston, said the runner would not be allowed to compete unless Canadian officials could clarify his status. The CAAU responded immediately that any previous prohibitions had been lifted and the runner was now "in perfect standing."¹⁰³ This declaration came after the Canadian organization had forced Longboat to drop Rosenthal and join Toronto's West End YMCA. The "Y" was considered irreproachable in its adherence to amateur standards. The AAU met six days before the marathon and grudgingly allowed Longboat to run. But when

¹⁰² Daniel B. Reid, "The Amateur Athletic Union of The United States and The Canadian Amateur Athletic Union – 1897-1914: A Study of International Sporting Relations" (M.A. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1990), 77.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 81.

he broke with the YMCA shortly after the marathon, reportedly because of the rigid rules concerning training and night life, he was briefly suspended by the CAAU. He was re-instated, however, when he joined Tom Flanagan's Irish Canadian Athletic Association. Longboat could have stuck it out in the regimented confines of the YMCA but chose to join Flanagan's club because the relaxed atmosphere suited him better. Flanagan didn't mind if his athletes drank or smoked in moderation, and unlike the Y, there was no curfew.

The AAU continued to be suspicious of Longboat. Among other grievances, it likely objected to the five-hundred dollars the city of Toronto awarded the runner after his win in Boston, even though Longboat never saw any of the money. In the latter part of 1907, the president of the AAU declared that, "Longboat will never run as an amateur in the United States. He has been a professional from the time he began his athletic career. He is taken from town to town...with bands and carriages and silk hats. He runs all kinds of races at country fairs for money."¹⁰⁴ The AAU was no more fond of Flanagan than it had been of Rosenthal. It questioned Longboat's status again before the 1908 London Olympics, and that matter, too, was resolved just days before the race. On that occasion, the CAAU had to fend off attacks on two fronts because a rival Canadian group, the Amateur Athletic Federation of Canada (AAFC) sided with the Americans.

While the official dispute between the two Canadian groups was over competing views of amateurism, Don Morrow says the affair was little more than a turf war: "The battleground between the AAFC and the CAAU was sport, the

¹⁰⁴ Jack Batten, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2002), 42.

quest was national control of amateur sport and the persons who suffered most during the two and [a] half years war were the athletes.”¹⁰⁵ Longboat has often been called a pawn in this affair but he was certainly not alone. Newspapers at the time pointed out that many other Canadian athletes had their amateur status questioned as the dispute heated up before the 1908 Olympics. While the rival associations fought to control sport in Canada, petulantly disqualifying each other’s athletes, some commentators speculated that the American authorities were primarily interested in preventing Longboat from beating American runners to Olympic gold. The AAFC, they said, were dupes for their American allies by joining in the protest against Longboat.¹⁰⁶

Longboat’s talent and fame, therefore, were also a factor in his tumultuous relationship with amateur organizations in Canada. Athletic authorities were quite willing to use him to make their points about amateurism, or to vie for control of sport in Canada. And sometimes the amateur ideal seemed less important than sporting glory. The CAAU used its authority to compel Longboat to fire Rosenthal and join the YMCA, for example, so that the marathoner would be eligible to compete for Canada. “The trouble with Longboat and Rosenthal,” said CAAU president William Stark, “was that we were afraid that if he was let run around in match races, that some rival for Marathon honours would follow him up closely,

¹⁰⁵ Don Morrow, “A Case Study in Amateur Conflict: The Athletic War in Canada, 1906-08.” In *Sports in Canada: Historical Readings*, ed. Morris Mott (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 209.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

pick up something concerning his conduct in these hippodrome races, and protest him in the Olympia events.”¹⁰⁷

While there may have been some cultural prejudice at play, Longboat’s troubles with Canada’s sporting establishment had much more to do with his decision to associate with Rosenthal and Flanagan. In that respect, it was his lack of independent means and other trappings of a gentleman - his social class in other words - that led to his reputation as a man who knowingly flouted the rules of amateur athletics.

Conclusion

The early Longboat representations formed a powerful narrative that persisted for decades. In 1970, Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame asked two sport historians, S.F. Wise and Douglas Fisher, to write a book of short biographies of the athletes who had been inducted into the hall. Their entry on Tom Longboat, published in 1974, said that, “Tom had neither the judgement nor the emotional balance to handle his new situation. Kicking against the strict training rules, he was suspended from the YMCA when found drinking whiskey and smoking.” Also present in the brief text was the nagging sense that Longboat had been a failure: “He died back on the Six Nations Reserve in 1949, a victim of his own talents, the rapaciousness of promoters, the short-lived worship of the public, and his vulnerability to the corruptions of white society.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Reid, “The Amateur Athletic Union of The United States and The Canadian Amateur Athletic Union,” 79.

¹⁰⁸ S.F Wise and Douglas Fisher, eds., *Canada’s Sporting Heroes* (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Company Limited, 1974), 244, 246.

These views captured the early representations of Longboat in a nutshell. They were rooted in the idea that Aboriginals were members of backward societies that were losing ground to a superior European culture. It is likely Wise and Fisher did not have the same views of Aboriginal people common during the earlier days of the narrative, yet the image of Longboat as a talented athlete who ended up as a failure can still be seen in their work. It was a narrative that persisted despite dissenting views regarding Longboat and Aboriginals in general.

The dominance and durability of the narrative can be explained in part by the prominence of those who expressed it. At some point, however, it likely became an accepted truth that was no longer questioned. Even some Aboriginal people seemed to accept it. An article about Longboat in a 1977 issue *Saskatchewan Indian* repeated much of what had been said by Wise and Fisher. It also reflected the views stated in Fergus Cronin's "The Rise and Fall of Tom Longboat."¹⁰⁹

But changes in the way Aboriginal people were viewed, and new ideas about the representation of marginalized groups would lead to a profound reshaping of the Tom Longboat story. In fact, the statements made by Wise and Fisher quoted above, standard commentary on Longboat for most of the twentieth century, would seem glaringly out of step just a few years after their publication. Gone was the primitive, fallen, impure, dishonest Longboat. In its place was Longboat the inspirational hero.

¹⁰⁹ Louise Cuthand, "Tom Longboat....A Notable Indian Athlete," *Saskatchewan Indian* vol.7 no. 4 (November 1977): 72.

Chapter Three

Longboat The Hero – The Modern Narrative

*He's running like joy,
Like the joy of the wind in his face.
And the beat of his heart and his feet
Feels it's setting the pace
And his mind reaching out to what seems
Like a whole other space.¹*

This verse is from *Cyclone Jack*, a musical drama about Tom Longboat written by Carol Bolt in 1974. It was performed in theatres in Ontario and Alberta in the mid 1970's and adapted for CBC television in 1977. The title refers to a nickname Longboat is said to have chosen for himself. Despite traces of the early Longboat narrative – “*No one wanted a loser...Tom was down on his luck*”² - *Cyclone Jack* generally portrays Longboat as a man who did not allow himself to be exploited or manipulated. In one scene, a friend warns him about Tom Flanagan, the runner's manager: “He uses you. He sells you up and down the country.” Longboat agrees: “He's a fraud, he's a fake. He's a snake oil salesman.” But he explains that he does business with Flanagan because, “He lets me run...what does it matter where I'm running? If I'm running on the reservation at Brantford. If I'm running at Madison Square Garden. What's the difference? I love it...” When the friend reveals that Flanagan refers to Longboat as a drunk, Longboat says, “He likes to have someone to blame.”³

¹ Carol Bolt, *Cyclone Jack* (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1975), D5.

² Ibid., D6.

³ Ibid., D19.

Two years before Bolt's play appeared, Kevin G. Jones of York University presented a paper entitled "Thomas Longboat: A Great Canadian Sportsman." Jones began the essay by saying, "This paper is a brief study of Tom Longboat's rise and fall. It is the story of a great Canadian athlete, who, perhaps through exploitation, did not achieve the fame and fortune that his athletic prowess deserved."⁴ The essay was delivered at a symposium on Canadian sports history at the University of Windsor. The paper repeated the popular belief that the Longboat story had a sad ending. But Jones added a new dimension to the familiar fallen idol scenario. "Perhaps he was exploited by Tom Flanagan, the Canadian Army and many others," Jones wrote, "but he did not give up his sense of dignity in the face of adversity – he died a proud Canadian Indian and one of the world's most famous athletes."⁵

Jones offered no examples of the exploitation he mentioned. And one could quibble with the inconsistency of his opening and closing statements, the former saying Longboat had been denied fame, the latter calling him one of the world's most famous athletes. But his mere mention of exploitation in 1972 signalled a break from the past by suggesting that the runner's setbacks were due to something other than the supposed character flaws of his race. In addition, Jones made it clear to the sports historians gathered in Windsor that, for him, Tom Longboat had been a man of courage and dignity - someone, in fact, to be admired.

⁴ Kevin G. Jones, "Thomas Longboat: A Great Canadian Sportsman," In *Proceedings of the Second Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Windsor, Ontario: University of Windsor, 1972), 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

Wilton Littlechild presented a similar view of Longboat in his 1976 MA thesis "Tom Longboat: Canada's Outstanding Indian Athlete." He seemed to accept much of what had been previously said about Longboat: "It is true that he was a controversial athlete. It is perhaps likewise true he hated to train and would rather smoke and drink...He was a simple man, naïve to the ways of the political intrigue surrounding the amateur-professional dichotomy."⁶ And like Jones, Littlechild mentioned the possibility of exploitation only in passing, judging that "the stature of Longboat does not warrant [the] use of his career as a tool for severe social criticism."⁷ But he praised the athlete for having the courage and self-discipline to survive "in what may have been a one-man battle against the non-Indian world."⁸

These three texts, while containing aspects of the earlier narrative, were the early stirrings of a new way of looking at Longboat. Over the next three decades this emerging view would transform him from a tragic figure to a heroic one. As we have seen, the 1960 *Encyclopedia Canadiana* entry on the athlete referred readers to Fergus Cronin's 1956 *Maclean's Magazine* article that portrayed the runner as an undisciplined man unable to cope with the Non-Aboriginal society around him. But the 1988 *Canadian Encyclopedia* entry, written by Bruce Kidd, told a different story: "Longboat's desire to train himself led to several well-publicized conflicts with managers. Despite constant and sometimes racist criticism, he stuck to his own methods. He bought up his

⁶ Wilton Littlechild, "Tom Longboat: Canada's Outstanding Indian Athlete" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1976), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

contract in 1911 and ran better than ever.”⁹ Gone was the notion, central to the earlier narrative, that Longboat was a failure because he had failed to follow the advice of his managers. Now Longboat was being presented as a man who had succeeded and who had not needed the help of Non-Aboriginals to do so. Furthermore, in 1998, more than forty years after the publication of Cronin’s article in *Macleans*, the very same publication ranked Longboat among the most important people in Canadian history. The author of the feature, Canadian historian J.L. Granatstein, called Longboat “Canada’s greatest marathon runner, and arguably Canada’s premier athlete of all time.” Granatstein said Longboat had “a shrewd eye for publicity and money” and that he had the “courage and persistence to succeed in the face of racist attacks and slurs.”¹⁰ A further tribute was bestowed in 2000 when Canada Post issued a commemorative Tom Longboat stamp.

This chapter will explore the dramatic shift in the Longboat narrative. It will trace the evolution of the current representation and how it came to reject the negative aspects of the earlier story. Indeed, much of the new narrative directly contradicts the earlier, mostly negative portrayals. Longboat was *not* lazy, according to this newer view, but diligent and innovative in his training. He did *not* flout amateur rules but was scrutinized by amateur authorities because of the shady practices of his managers. He was *not* uncooperative and headstrong but merely tried to control his own destiny. With respect to his post-athletic life, the new narrative overwhelmingly rejects the previous depiction of him as a fallen

⁹ Bruce Kidd, “Longboat, Thomas Charles,” In *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 1988 ed.

¹⁰ J.L. Granatstein, “Tom Longboat,” *Macleans*, 1 July 1998, 51.

idol toiling at menial jobs and ending his days in poverty. That image has been replaced by one that emphasizes that he was steadily employed throughout most of his post-athletic years, including the economically-depressed 1930's. And if the notion that he liked to drink was not completely dispelled, the earlier view of him as an habitual binge drinker was no longer taken for granted. This was noted in 2007 by Dave Feschuk, a columnist at the *Toronto Star*, who wrote, "And though the story has been told that he died an alcoholic, various chroniclers have disputed that demise, pointing out that he was a reliable employee of the city, not to mention a diabetic, who died of pneumonia."¹¹

This profound transformation will be explored by looking at various representations of Longboat that have been produced over the past thirty-five years. These texts will be examined in the context of the evolving representations of Aboriginal people in Canada and the changes in how historians and others think about minority representation and human agency.

During the 1970's and 1980's, when the legend of Tom Longboat changed dramatically, Aboriginal people became more vocal in their demands for constitutional rights and self-government. Their political activity contradicted the earlier assumption about the inevitable assimilation or even demise of Aboriginal people. This was also a time when many historians embraced the "new social history" and began to pay greater attention to marginalized people. As the public profile of Aboriginals changed from a supposedly conquered people to an assertive political collective, and as the telling of Canadian history began to

¹¹ *Toronto Star*, 14 April 2007, E01.

include minority voices, the view of Tom Longboat evolved accordingly. In the way that he had been a symbol for the wayward Indian in the earlier narrative, he became a symbol for the mistreated but unconquered Aboriginal person in the newer version. Moreover, once Longboat's public image was transformed from failure to hero, he began to be described as an inspiration to all Canadians.

Given the context, it is likely that the Longboat narrative would have changed without the work of Bruce Kidd. But it is unlikely that it would have been re-cast in quite the same way without the thorough re-thinking of accepted views that Kidd provided. His version of the Longboat legend is a complete rejection of the previous representation. Like Longboat, Kidd was an elite-level runner, competing for Canada at the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games in the early 1960's. He won the Lou Marsh Award for athlete of the year in 1961, and was named Canada's outstanding athlete in 1962 and 1963. His views were influenced by his desire to consider the agency of marginalized people, but also by his sense of identification with Longboat. Kidd once compared himself to the Onondaga athlete by saying they both had been at odds with the sports establishment: "We were both left...with that awful tag 'controversial' hanging around our necks. I guess that's one of the reasons why I've come to identify with Longboat so strongly."¹² In addition to presenting the social and political context of the new narrative, this chapter will also consider the influence of Longboat's most ardent, and prolific defender.

¹² Brenda Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada* (Edmonton: GMS² Ventures Inc., 1988), 9.

Changing Currents of Thought

In 1969 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau issued a White Paper on “Indian Policy” that led to anger and increased activism on the part of Aboriginal people. The document reflected Trudeau’s beliefs that all Canadians should be treated alike and that no group should have special status under the law. It proposed repealing the Indian Act and abolishing the Department of Indian Affairs. The Indian Act had been adopted in 1876 and gave the government control over many aspects of Aboriginal life, including the granting of Indian status.¹³

Many Aboriginal people saw the act as an unwelcome intrusion in their lives. Scholar Janice Forsyth, a past winner of the Tom Longboat Award, has described how her mother lost her status after moving off her reserve and how she was reinstated only after a complicated and lengthy process. As a result, Forsyth was granted status at the age of fourteen. She describes the contradiction between government policy and Aboriginal beliefs in simple terms. “I did not need the government to tell me who I was,” she wrote in her 2005 PhD dissertation. “Despite the fact that Native status is a governmental distinction, my mother was certain it was ours by birthright and no one had the right to take it away.”¹⁴

But even though many Aboriginals resented the Indian Act, the government’s unilateral decision to abolish it seemed like abandonment. A group of chiefs from Alberta called the White Paper “a scheme whereby within a generation or shortly after...our people would be left with no land and

¹³ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 40.

¹⁴ Forsyth, “The Power to Define: A History of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001,” 202.

consequently the future generation would be condemned to the despair and ugly spectre of urban poverty in ghettos.”¹⁵ As for Indian Affairs, Aboriginal leaders felt that joint action to improve the department made more sense than simply getting rid of it.¹⁶ The president of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood told an Anglican General Synod that, “No single action by any Government since Confederation has aroused such a violent reaction from Indian people – never have Indians felt so bitter and frustrated as they do today.”¹⁷ Daniel Francis believes the uproar over the White Paper “went a long way towards finally discrediting assimilation as an acceptable foundation for Indian policy.”¹⁸ So violent was the reaction, the government decided to retract the controversial policy paper.

Sally M. Weaver says Canadian Aboriginals became increasingly vocal in the wake of the White Paper fiasco, insisting that governments consult Aboriginal communities *before* setting policies that affected them. She says this increased activism was perhaps influenced by events in the United States “where the violence of Wounded Knee had inspired more militant uprisings.”¹⁹ In February 1973 two Aboriginal protestors were killed and a federal marshal seriously injured during the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee, a small town in South Dakota. Later that year peaceful protesters in Canada occupied the offices of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Ottawa, and a more

¹⁵ The Indian Chiefs of Alberta, *Citizens Plus* [The Red Paper] in *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Post-Confederation Reader*, 3rd edition, eds. J.M. Bumsted, Len Kuffert Bumsted (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2005), 500.

¹⁶ Forsyth, “The Power to Define: A History of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001,” 38.

¹⁷ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 178.

¹⁸ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 218.

¹⁹ Sally M. Weaver, “Developments after the White Paper” in *Interpreting Canada's Past: A Post-Confederation Reader*, 3rd ed., eds. J.M. Bumsted, Len Kuffert Bumsted (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2005), 507.

militant demonstration took place at the department's Calgary office the following year. The protesters wanted the federal government to consult Aboriginal leaders about any policy initiatives involving their communities.²⁰

A further incident occurred during the summer of 1974. A protest turned violent when Aboriginal people from Canada and the United States attended a conference at a park near Kenora, Ontario. The gathering was to discuss perceived government neglect of the Ojibway people. It escalated into an armed standoff between masked protestors and the Ontario Provincial Police. The occupation of the park ended with fourteen arrests. The summer of protest continued with the gathering of a Native People's Caravan on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The group had traveled all the way from Vancouver to speak out about Aboriginal concerns.

Weaver believes many Canadians became sympathetic to Aboriginal issues during the early 1970s, particularly over the question of massive energy projects proposed for James Bay and the Mackenzie Valley. "Indians and white supporters organized in unprecedented fashion," she says, "pressuring the federal government through the courts and the press to make land claims settlements in Quebec and the Arctic." Weaver says this pressure forced the Trudeau government to become more responsive to Aboriginal concerns. The government began to provide money for groups to research the land claims they would eventually put before the government.²¹ And in 1974 Trudeau appointed Justice Thomas Berger to study the environmental impact of the proposed

²⁰ Ibid., 506-507

²¹ Ibid., 504-505.

Mackenzie Valley pipeline on the Inuit and Dene.²² Berger's recommendation to halt the project was a further example of increased sympathy for Aboriginal concerns.

The fact that education authorities in Toronto named a public school after Longboat in 1978 also indicates a change in the way Aboriginal people were being viewed. And the same could be said of the formation of the Longboat Roadrunners running club in Toronto in 1980, located on a stretch of road named for the Onondaga athlete.

Several years of highly publicized protests and sometimes bitter negotiations with Canadian governments, over issues such as the 1982 patriation of the constitution and reforms proposed by the Meech Lake Accord, increased the visibility of Aboriginal people and their concerns. The summer of 1990 provided two particularly dramatic examples of how these concerns could affect all Canadians. Elijah Harper, the only Aboriginal member of the Manitoba legislature, used procedural methods to help prevent the passage of the Meech Lake constitutional deal. Later that summer, a dispute over land near Oka, Quebec turned into a violent confrontation between Mohawk Warriors and the Sûreté du Québec. A police officer was killed and the military was called in. In the end, the development project that had angered the Mohawk community was cancelled.

By now it was clear that Aboriginal people had acquired a level of political power they had not enjoyed twenty years before, let alone in Longboat's day.

²² Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, *History of the Canadian Peoples: Volume 2 1867 to the Present*, 4th ed., (Toronto: Pearson Longman, Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2006), 406.

And while the earlier narrative was constructed at a time when many believed that Aboriginal people were on the road to assimilation, it would be difficult to imagine any Canadian still believing such a thing as the 1980's approached.

This shift in perception coincided with a time when many historians were dissatisfied with historical accounts that focused mainly on elites. They preferred a more inclusive approach that some called "the new social history." The approach had been heavily influenced by E.P. Thompson's groundbreaking 1964 book *The Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson rejected the "prevailing orthodoxies" that paid little attention to what he called "the agency of working people, the degree to which they contributed by conscious efforts, to the making of history."²³ Peter Novick has said of Thompson's book that, "Surely no work in European history ever so profoundly and so rapidly influenced so many American historians."²⁴ Novick says dissertations in the style of social history quadrupled in the United States between 1958 and 1978.²⁵ The principle of "history from below," and the practice of emphasizing human agency, were soon applied to marginalized groups other than working class men, from women to racial and ethnic minorities.

In Novick's 1988 book *That Noble Dream*, he describes an era in American historical study, beginning in the 1960s and reaching a peak in the 1980s, when the ideals of universal truth and objectivity were challenged by

²³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Victor Gollancz, 1963; reprint London: Penguin Books, 1991), 11-12.

²⁴ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 440.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 440.

“particularistic sensibilities.”²⁶ Social scientists began to look at history of marginalized groups in a way that went beyond simply documenting racism and sexism. The new approach sought to portray these groups as having been the target of oppression but not necessarily its victim. It attempted to avoid the demeaning connotation of victimization by focusing on how these groups exercised control over their lives *despite* oppression.

In the study of African-American history, for example, any act of resistance by slaves, however subtle, was emphasized to the point where one critic referred to it as the myth of the “utopian slave community.” The problems of poverty and ghetto life were also given a positive interpretation. In the words of one African-American sociologist, “Ghetto families were described as resilient and as adapting creatively to an oppressive racist society.”²⁷ Novick says women’s history in the United States also went from documenting discrimination to describing how women functioned in a male-defined world on their own terms.²⁸

In Canada, dissatisfaction with the elite-centred approach to history was expressed by E. Palmer Patterson in his 1972 book, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*. Patterson noted that, “Most of the histories of the nations which include a greater or smaller aboriginal population have been written by the descendants of the conquerors. Their emphasis has been on the white majority (or the white population, even where it is in the minority), and in

²⁶ Ibid., 471.

²⁷ Ibid., 488-489. The sociologist wondered if the “new emphasis on the positive aspects of the black experience tended to crowd out older concerns,” such as the lasting negative effects of racism.

²⁸ Ibid., 500-501.

Canada...Indians are treated as one factor in the history of that majority." He suggested looking at Canada's Aboriginals as "a people with a distinct past of their own; to see that the coming of the whites does not change the Indian's continuity with his own past, that his story must be told in terms of his own experience with the white man, placing him at the centre of the narrative, regardless of the fact that he has ceased to occupy the centre of Canadian affairs."²⁹ Patterson spoke of the emerging "decolonization of history" and the telling of history from different points of view. "Out of this new history emerges new heroes, new events of significance, new information, and especially a new view of history."³⁰

Many Canadian historians accepted these new views. In 1993 the authors of a university text book on Canadian history identified themselves as adherents to the "new social history." In their introduction to *History of the Canadian Peoples*, Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel and Cornelius Jaenen lamented that Canadian history tended to be written by "a small elite of educated white men to be read by others like themselves."³¹ They said most academic history written before 1970 either ignored or marginalized minority groups or treated them unsympathetically: "For example, a lesbian native woman reading published historical texts, would have found only disparaging or condescending remarks about Native People, virtually no information about women's culture, and

²⁹ Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500*, 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

³¹ Margaret Conrad and others, *History of the Canadian People: Volume 2/ Beginnings to 1867*, (Mississauga, Ontario: Copp Clark Pitman, 1993), xv.

complete silence on homosexuality.”³² The authors committed themselves to revealing how people “sought in various ways to transcend the limits placed on their lives,” and to showing that they were not “hopeless victims of forces beyond their control.”³³

This shift in academic thought, along with the changing attitudes Canadians demonstrated toward Aboriginal people, created a climate that allowed the Longboat narrative to be transformed. And if Wilton Littlechild was unwilling to use Longboat’s story as a tool for “severe social criticism”, others did not hesitate. In his 1980 biography *Tom Longboat*, Bruce Kidd used the Longboat story to reject the earlier views of Aboriginal people.

Some Canadians clung to the outrageous idea that Aboriginals were incurably primitive and used this argument to justify denying them many of the opportunities afforded by Canadian society...At the other extreme, many non-Aboriginals believed that Aboriginals could prove intelligent and industrious, but only if they embraced the ways of the dominant culture. These people refused to accept that the Aboriginal could develop his or her own response to the changes in North America brought about by European settlement.³⁴

In terms of Longboat, Kidd broke new ground by portraying him as a man who had overcome “the vicious racism of his age.”³⁵ Kidd’s view was influenced by the emerging approach to history but also by a sense of spiritual kinship with the Onondaga athlete. The biographical notes on the back cover of the 2004 edition of *Tom Longboat* are brief but telling: “Bruce Kidd won the Six Miles in the

³² Conrad and others, xv. Reviewer Ged Martin took issue with this statement, saying the text actually contains little about homosexuality especially relating to women, “whether Native or otherwise.” See Ged Martin, “History of the Canadian Peoples. Vol. 1: Beginning to 1867,” *The English Historical Review* 110, no. 435 (February 1995): 132.

³³ Conrad and others, xxiii.

³⁴ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, back cover.

1962 Commonwealth Games and competed in the 1964 Olympics. In 1963 the Council Fire of the Iroquois Confederacy named him an Honorary Warrior and Runner of Messages in recognition of his many racing triumphs.³⁶ Longboat was considered to be a Runner of Messages as well. The title refers to an earlier time when the sprawling Iroquois Confederacy needed runners to carry important news from one community to another.³⁷ The blurb demonstrates Kidd's identification with the runner as an athlete and as an individual. In her book *To Run With Longboat*, Brenda Zeman provides a brief profile of Kidd, who is clearly more proud of the Iroquois tribute than of his Lou Marsh Award, which is not even mentioned on the back cover of his book. Kidd told Zeman, "I kind of think the Onondaga saw me as a young Longboat in the making. But that's not the kind of thing that suits conventional thinking. I had to wait to tell that story myself."³⁸

In a 2004 newspaper interview, Kidd described the early Longboat narrative in brutal terms: "When he won, he was portrayed as a proud Canadian. When he lost, he was portrayed as a drunken Indian."³⁹ This oversimplification was likely offered to accommodate the sound-bite culture of journalism, but it demonstrated Kidd's anger at the way Longboat had been portrayed. This sense of injustice is evident in both Kidd's biography *Tom Longboat* and his 1983 article "In Defence of Tom Longboat," published in the *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*. Although *Tom Longboat* was aimed at younger readers, it is one of the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 12-13.

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

³⁹ *Hamilton Spectator*, 25 June 2004.

most often cited sources in other Longboat texts. "In Defence of Tom Longboat" was aimed at an academic readership and is cited less often, but it is a main source of information about Longboat in the 2005 university text book *Sport in Canada: A History*.⁴⁰ These texts were the beginning of the new narrative, and they are the foundation upon which the modern story continues to be built. In terms of his approach to the story, Kidd told Zeman, "It took me quite a while to get rid of the stereotype. I mean, it's such a powerful image for Canadian sport, Longboat, the star who didn't quite make it."⁴¹

Transforming the Narrative

In both *Tom Longboat* and "In Defence of Tom Longboat," Kidd argues that his subject adapted well to life outside the Six Nations reserve, and succeeded in that world, while resisting the pressure to embrace the dominant culture. Longboat's brief time in an Anglican Mission school in Brantford was described as a nightmare for young Tom because he was forbidden to speak the Onondaga language and was expected to abandon the Longhouse religion. "Though his house was only a few kilometres away," Kidd writes, "he felt captive in a foreign country." As a result, the young boy ran away from school. "The teachers quickly caught and punished him. But before long, Tom got a second chance and made it to the home of an uncle."⁴² Kidd says that even though Longboat had been baptized in order to get married in a church, "he had kept to

⁴⁰ Don Morrow and Kevin B. Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2005), 78-79, 210, 226, 228, 256.

⁴¹ Zeman. *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 4.

⁴² Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 11-12

the Longhouse religion all his life. His god was still the Great Spirit, and he was buried according to the traditional faith.”⁴³ Attempts to assimilate him, in other words, had failed.

Kidd rejects any suggestion that Longboat was exploited or thwarted by those around him, and emphasizes the athlete’s agency. With respect to Longboat’s expulsion from the YMCA, for breaking curfew, he characterizes the situation as a case of mutual dissatisfaction: “He never enjoyed the Y – its training rules prohibited alcohol and sex, and his coaches were always preaching to him about discipline and self-reliance. It reminded him of the Anglican boarding school.”⁴⁴ Kidd says Longboat had “sought his release” from the YMCA three months before the expulsion, and that he “wanted to conduct his own training and be consulted about the races he would run.”⁴⁵

Kidd believes Longboat’s desire to control his own affairs alienated his business managers. In the case of Harry Rosenthal, he and Longboat parted company before the Boston Marathon at the urging of the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union. At the time Rosenthal said, “If he could be handled like a white man, don’t you think I would have stuck to him? You bet I would. I told Flanagan when I left him (Longboat) what he was, and now Flanagan knows. He is a terror...He would be worth ten thousand dollars if he would behave himself.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁵ Kidd, “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” 39.

⁴⁶ Blaikie, *Boston: The Canadian Story*, 12/21.

Kidd's version, however, describes the break as "a difficult decision," hinting that it was Longboat who made that decision for the good of his career.⁴⁷

And although manager Tom Flanagan sold the runner's contract without consulting him, also complaining that the runner was unmanageable,⁴⁸ Kidd argues that while this angered Longboat it did not adversely affect the runner's career. He points out that following the break with Flanagan Longboat defeated English runner Alfred Shrubbs and was recognized as the best professional marathoner in the world. In fact, Kidd says Flanagan might have done more harm than good. He says the manager was responsible for getting Longboat involved in a race that cost the runner his amateur status in the United States, a situation that prevented him from defending his Boston Marathon title.⁴⁹

Kidd says Longboat was in no hurry to hire a new manager after Flanagan sold his contract. When the New York promoter who bought the contract tried to organize a rematch with Shrubbs, Longboat refused to participate. Kidd says Longboat avoided the rematch because he had not yet recovered from the first race, and though this "rebellion" was "widely interpreted as irresponsibility," he suggests two alternative explanations: "An intelligent athlete who knew the limits of his own body? An early proponent of athlete's rights?"⁵⁰ When the promoter organized another event involving some of the best-known distance runners in the world, Longboat held out for a better deal, which Kidd says illustrated "how

⁴⁷ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 April 1909.

⁴⁹ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 42, 28.

⁵⁰ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 41.

shrewd he had become.”⁵¹ Kidd concludes that while it was often said that Longboat gave his managers a hard time, “Longboat received a great deal of trouble from his managers and succeeded in getting them out of his hair.”⁵²

In both texts, Kidd offers a new way of looking at the charges that Longboat drank too much, trained too little, and eventually paid for his sins with poverty and degrading work. As recently as 1980, in fact, *The Globe and Mail* called the runner “a fleet genius with a well-bent elbow. He ran and drank and roistered.”⁵³ As for the athlete’s alleged alcoholism, Kidd finds the evidence “weak and unlikely.”⁵⁴ While noting that Longboat was arrested for alcohol offences four times, he argues that the Indian Act effectively prohibited Aboriginal people from buying alcohol in Longboat’s day, and the arrests could have simply been breaches of that regulation. He speculates that “enemies” such as Flanagan could have used this law to have Longboat arrested as a means of controlling him. Kidd argues that Longboat could not have been as successful an athlete had he suffered from alcoholism. “Despite the ‘tales’ of his drinking,” he concludes, “no one has offered evidence that Longboat was incapacitated for a specific race.”⁵⁵ This position was echoed by Jack Batten in his 2002 biography, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone: The Story of Tom Longboat*. “Longboat was hardly an alcoholic” Batten wrote. “If he were, he could never

⁵¹ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 45.

⁵² Kidd, “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” 52.

⁵³ Blaikie, *Boston: The Canadian Story*, 1-2/21.

⁵⁴ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 48.

⁵⁵ Kidd, “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” 42. For more on the prohibitions on the sale of alcohol to Aboriginal Canadians see Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Cod: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

have run so many wonderful races nor, in later life, held jobs in the workplace so consistently.”⁵⁶

Another claim that Kidd seeks to debunk is that Longboat was lazy and unwilling to train. He concedes that “Longboat definitely disliked having a trainer crack the whip, and on several occasions took time off to celebrate a heady victory.”⁵⁷ But he says there is no reason to believe that Longboat had poor work habits. In fact, he says, texts used by others to suggest this often contained evidence to the contrary. He offers a 1908 *Toronto Daily Star* article about Longboat’s training regimen as an example. The report mentions long walks and other low-intensity activities but little running. It gives the athlete’s training routine an air of laxity, citing a two-and a half-hour period when the athlete “lounges around.”⁵⁸

Kidd provides a much different interpretation. He argues that Longboat was ahead of his time, employing the now accepted practice of alternating strenuous and more moderate training sessions. It looked like a leisurely routine at the time because observers didn’t understand what they were seeing and were blinded by the stereotype of the lazy Indian. His interpretation of Longboat’s training strategy has been widely-repeated. On the centenary of Longboat’s 1907 Boston Marathon victory the *Toronto Star* mentioned how “present day gurus recognize an intuitive wisdom in Longboat’s methods.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Jack Batten. *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone: The Story of Tom Longboat* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2002), 76.

⁵⁷ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 47.

⁵⁸ Kidd, “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” 37-38.

⁵⁹ *Toronto Star*, 14 April 2007.

In the case of Longboat's life after sports, the earlier representations generally report that he was a failure, spending his money foolishly and struggling for years before finding a degrading job as a garbage collector. For Kidd, such "inexcusable condescension" was simply a case of class prejudice. He says that Longboat did not find the job demeaning because he was from a working-class background and did not share the "derogatory distinction between mental and physical work." Nor did he struggle financially: "Working as a garbageman did not cramp his style. In the 1930's, when more than a million men and women were unemployed, Longboat and his family lived in a comfortable house in a respectable neighbourhood, ate and dressed well, entertained regularly, and drove their own car back to the reserve for weekends."⁶⁰

With regard to the claims that Longboat spent lavishly and made foolish investments, Kidd concedes that the athlete "was not really interested in the world of business or real estate and made decisions carelessly."⁶¹ Whatever money problems he had, therefore, were the result of inattention and not inability, and Kidd offers an alternative scenario that emphasizes the athlete's agency: "It is more likely that Longboat and his family spent their savings on an opportunity that capitalism systematically discourages: leisure." Longboat was called a failure, he argues, "because he did not embody the qualities the sports leaders and opinion-makers believed he should. He made his own decisions about

⁶⁰ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 47.

⁶¹ Kidd, *Tom Longboat*, 49.

training, racing and the conduct of his life: the criticism he received was a measure of his independence and self-determination.”⁶²

Perhaps the most startling claim Kidd makes involves the debate over why the runner collapsed at the 1908 Olympic Games in London. He says if anyone slipped Longboat a stimulant, for whatever reason, the most likely culprit was journalist Lou Marsh, who was part of Longboat’s race team and followed the runner through the streets of London on a bicycle. And since Flanagan was in charge of the team, he too is implicated by the allegation. Kidd says Marsh, a former runner, had been humiliated by Longboat during an exhibition race and began attacking him in print “with all the bitterness of a rejected hanger-on.”⁶³ In fact, he blames Marsh for helping create the perception that Longboat was a failure.

It could be argued that the proof offered against Marsh is no more convincing than the evidence of Longboat’s shortcomings that Kidd rejects. This is especially true since the only indication of any wrongdoing at the Olympics came from the report by a Canadian Olympic official who was trying to explain to his political masters why an athlete under his supervision had failed to perform as expected. But this observation misses the point. As the title of the article “In Defence of Tom Longboat” would suggest, Kidd’s goal is to plead Longboat’s case. There is a sense that Kidd feels free to speculate now and then, and to offer alternative theories, since much of what had previously been said about Longboat was based on unfounded notions about the inferiority of Aboriginal

⁶² Kidd, “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” 46-47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

people. His charges against Marsh and Flanagan, Canadians of European descent, are another example of Kidd turning the tables on the previous narrative. Longboat *did not* fail in London because of poor training habits, it was his meddlesome and greedy managers who were to blame. And as with most of what Kidd has written about Longboat, the theory that he was doped by a manager or coach is often repeated. It appears on the very first page of Janice Forsyth's 2005 dissertation on the Tom Longboat Awards."⁶⁴

In the years following the publication of *Tom Longboat*, Kidd's influence could be found in just about everything that was said about the runner. When Brenda Zeman went to the Six Nations reserve in the mid 1980's, to interview Tom Longboat Jr. about his famous father, the runner's son handed her a copy of *Tom Longboat* and said, "It's all in here, I don't know what more I could tell you."⁶⁵ In 1988 George Beaver, a Six Nations columnist for the *Brantford Expositor*, told his readers, "Bruce Kidd accurately portrayed the discrimination Tom had to face as an Indian. His white managers tried to treat him like a money-making, running machine."⁶⁶ A 2001 article in the publication *The Beaver* said Longboat "fled the infamy of the residential school system," and "negotiated the minefield of the dominant culture and even used it to his advantage." The author of the article, Peter Unwin, praised Kidd for replacing Fergus Cronin as the foremost interpreter of the Longboat legacy. He said Kidd's biography "is now the standard source on Longboat in high-school and public libraries across

⁶⁴ Forsyth, "The Power to Define: A History of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001," 1.

⁶⁵ Zeman, *To Run with Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 12.

⁶⁶ George Beaver, *Mohawk Reporter: The Six Nations Columns of George Beaver* (Brantford, Ontario: Brant Historical Society, 1993), 81.

Canada. Cronin's racist brooding has been confined to microfilm.⁶⁷ In the 2005 children's book *Tom Longboat: Born to Run*, author Leslie Garrett writes, "Some people made nasty comments or treated him unfairly because he was an Aboriginal person. Even Lou Marsh, the famous sports editor who seemed to be Tom's friend, often wrote unkind comments."⁶⁸

Kidd's biography of Longboat was the basis for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation film *Wildfire: The Tom Longboat Story*, broadcast in 1984 and 1985. And the author worked as an advisor and bit player on the project. Although Longboat's children were upset that producers had not consulted them about the film,⁶⁹ they could not have been too unhappy with the treatment of their father. He is portrayed as a man fighting to control his own destiny. He leaves the YMCA because he is unhappy with the way he is treated. And he makes his own business arrangements, telling a trainer, "I don't need your help. I win don't I?" When reminded of his contractual obligation Longboat replies, "It don't say nowhere you own me."⁷⁰ The film treats Flanagan as a manipulator and a bigot. It also hints that if anyone drank too much it was the Irish businessman and not the Onondaga athlete. Flanagan has a drink in his hand in almost every scene. Longboat, on the other hand, is portrayed as a social drinker except when, distraught at the failure of his marriage, he drinks too much in a tavern and fights with racists who taunt him. In the scene depicting the

⁶⁷ Peter Unwin, "Who do you think I am?" *The Beaver*, April/May 2001, 26.

⁶⁸ Leslie Garrett, *Tom Longboat: Born to Run* (Don Mills, Ontario: Pearson Education Canada Inc., 2005), 11.

⁶⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, 13 September 1983, E5.

⁷⁰ *Wildfire: The Tom Longboat Story*, television movie produced by David Tucker, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1983.

Olympic marathon, an unidentified man on a bicycle hands the running Longboat a small bottle. The runner drinks from it and collapses moments later. To those aware of Kidd's thoughts on the matter, the unidentified attendant can only be Lou Marsh. A subsequent scene has Flanagan more or less admitting to slipping Longboat a dose of strychnine, a substance often used as a stimulant at the time. When asked, "What in the world possessed you to give him so much?" Flanagan responds, "I suppose you'd have done better. None of us was counting on that kind of heat."

Longboat biographer Jack Batten agrees with Kidd on more than just the view that Longboat was not an alcoholic. The back cover of his book, which is aimed at young readers, mentions the athlete fighting stereotypes and prejudice without compromising his dignity. Lou Marsh and Tom Flanagan are the villains of Batten's story, Marsh for his "consistent characterization of Longboat as hopelessly monosyllabic and correspondingly stupid," and Flanagan for treating Longboat "as his house pet in ways that now seem patronizing and offensive."⁷¹ If Longboat was doped at the Olympics, he says, it was likely Marsh who administered the drug at Flanagan's bidding.⁷²

These examples give a sense of how Kidd's version of the Longboat story became the new paradigm. It would be a misguided exaggeration to describe the change in the way one person has been represented in terms of Thomas Kuhn's far-reaching theory of scientific revolutions. But Kuhn's concept of paradigm shift

⁷¹ Batten, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone: The Story of Tom Longboat*, 38.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 52-53.

provides a useful rhetorical device for illustrating the abrupt and profound shift in the Longboat story.

Stated in simple terms, Kuhn defined a paradigm as a set of received beliefs or accepted scientific practices or models for research. These accepted ideas are questioned when a discrepancy between theory and fact is detected. A new paradigm then emerges and the older one is completely discarded. When this happens, those who cling to the older views “are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ignores their work.” The field is then reconstructed by placing old information in a new framework which has also been described as, “Picking up the other end of the stick.”⁷³

To the degree that these ideas about scientific revolutions can be applied to a small revolution of public perception, it can certainly be said that Kidd found a discrepancy between what had previously been said about Longboat and what he considered to be true. In addition, his new theory became so widely accepted, the previous version was all but “read out” of the story. Kidd, in effect, “picked up the other end of the stick” and placed past events in the new framework of historical thought, thus creating a new paradigm for the way Longboat is portrayed. Subsequent representations of Longboat overwhelmingly reflect these new beliefs. But the transformation of Longboat’s public image is only part of the story. It is also essential to consider how this agreed-upon narrative, this new paradigm, has been used to transform Longboat into an inspirational Canadian hero.

⁷³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 10, 19, 85.

Longboat the Inspiration

In the years since the publication of *Tom Longboat* and “In Defence of Tom Longboat,” dozens of texts and representations about the athlete have appeared in books, newspapers, magazines and on television. Those looking for information about Longboat on the internet can find dozens of relevant sites by simply typing the runner's name into popular search engines. The view of him as a great athlete who overcame racism is now the premise for virtually every Longboat text. And the moral of the story is usually that Longboat is an inspiration and a role model for all Canadians. His story is told to instil pride in young Aboriginal people, to promote Canadian unity, and to portray Canada as a nation that embraces diversity.

From the Aboriginal perspective, *Ontario Indian* published an article in 1982 that was a rehash of Kidd's biography but with the added point that, “Although Tom was a victim of the fickleness of both the public and the press, who loved him when he won and hated him when he lost, he lives on as one of the greatest athletes to ever represent this country. We have much to be proud of in the memory of Tom Longboat and he is an inspiration to all young native athletes.”⁷⁴ In 2004 *Windspeaker Magazine* said that “almost 100 years after he ran his first race, the name of Tom Longboat continues to inspire.”⁷⁵ The Aboriginal Sport Circle, the group in charge of the Tom Longboat Awards, strikes

⁷⁴ Cyndy Baskin (From the files of Bruce Kidd), “Tom Longboat: The Caledonia Cyclone,” *Ontario Indian* 5, no. 6 (June 1982): 53.

⁷⁵ Cheryl Petten, “Tom Longboat: Athlete Continues to Inspire,” *Wind Speaker* 21, no.10 (January 2004): 34. Article also at “Buffalo Spirit,” Aboriginal Multi-Media Society web page accessed 9 October 2008; available at www.ammsa.com/buffalospirit/2004/footprints-TomLongboat.html

a similar chord on its internet site. A brief text by Bruce Kidd describes the athlete as “one of the most celebrated and accomplished athletes in Canadian history...Throughout his life, Tom Longboat spoke proudly of his First Nations heritage and held his head high in times of great adversity.”⁷⁶

A television program called “Chiefs and Champions,” broadcast on the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN) in 2005, profiled Aboriginal athletes who, according to the program’s promotional material, “have gone on to become important leaders in their communities and countries, role models and advocates, on international levels.”⁷⁷ The episode on Longboat featured an interview with the runner’s grandson, Brian Winnie, who says his grandfather was successful because “he just kept proving himself and running forward.” Winnie said the message for young people is that “you’re going to face obstacles all the time and you’ve just got to keep going, keep moving forward, keep running.”⁷⁸

There is a scene in the program where an Aboriginal woman from the Six Nations reserve expresses her admiration for Longboat. As she speaks, three Aboriginal youths jog side-by-side along a tree-line dirt road on the reserve. “It’s not easy to do a marathon,” the woman says. “And people can look and say, ‘yeah we remember Tom Longboat,’ but when you’ve done a marathon and you’ve run that distance yourself and you run some of those same roads. It’s a really great feeling to think... he’s accomplished that in the time period that he

⁷⁶ Bruce Kidd, “Honouring the Tom Longboat Legacy,” accessed October 9, 2008, available at www.aboriginalsportcircle.ca/tomlongboatawards.html; internet.

⁷⁷ *Chiefs and Champions - Big Red Barn Entertainment*, accessed 15 October 2008; available at brb.com/ent/pastProd/chiefsChampions.html; internet.

⁷⁸ *Chiefs and Champions*, accessed 25 October 2008; available at www.chiefsandchampions.ca/node/312; Internet.

did. He fought a lot of racial discrimination in that time. So when I run, especially on the reserve and on these roads, yeah, you're following right in his footsteps."

She also speaks about the benefits of running. "You get out there for a mile or two and you get a runner's high. It does exist. You feel really, really well. You're feeling positive about yourself. ...It's a natural high....which is what a lot of people need. Especially to get out in the sun and know that you're out there in the elements...To me that's really the best medicine you can have."⁷⁹ The scene connects Longboat with notions of self-esteem, Aboriginal pride, and the physical and spiritual benefits of being outdoors and participating in physical activity. The reference to a "natural high" hints at lifestyle and addiction concerns that Aboriginal communities often express regarding young people.

From the perspective of Canada as a whole, many texts over the past three and half decades have portrayed the Onondaga athlete as an example of perseverance and courage for all Canadians to admire. *Maclean's* published a special Canada Day issue in 1998 that listed "The 100 Most Important Canadians in History." The selection panel was made up mostly of academics and journalists, including Bruce Kidd. Longboat was rated ninth overall by the magazine and called "the greatest Canadian star," ranked ahead of Wayne Gretzky and Céline Dion.

The purpose of the *Maclean's* feature was explained by its author, J. L. Granatstein:

Canadians are a strange people. We complain that our history is boring, because we have no Lincolns or Churchills, no Civil Wars and no

⁷⁹ *Chiefs and Champions*, accessed 25 October 2008; available at www.chiefsandchampions.ca/node/162; Internet.

Dunkirks...And somehow, to judge by the carping of critics and separatists, we have come to believe that this nation is a failure.

In fact...Canada is a huge success, a nation that has overcome most of the problems of geography and regionalism, race, religion and class to build a garden in the wilderness...These undeniable achievements were...the product of the efforts of countless millions of ordinary women and men, the native people who lived here from time immemorial and the immigrants who began pouring into this land from the 16th century onwards.”⁸⁰

Naming Longboat one of the most important Canadians in history

emphasizes the diversity, or “partnership” involved in the creation of Canada, the so-called “garden in the wilderness.” Longboat’s triumph is used as an example of the triumph of Canada, with both the athlete and the nation overcoming obstacles to become, in Granatstein’s words, “a huge success.”

Trailblazing Sports Heroes (2003), by Joan Dixon, presents a similar message to its younger readers. It is a collection of brief biographies about “Exceptional Personalities and Outstanding Achievement in Canadian Sport.” In addition to Longboat, Dixon writes about Ned Hanlan, a world champion rower; James Naismith, the inventor of basketball; Father David Bauer, a founder of Canada’s amateur hockey movement; Herman “Jackrabbit” Smith-Johansen, a Norwegian-born ski pioneer; and Olympic gold medalists Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld and Nancy Greene. “They are not part of an exclusive club, but merely a sample of Canada’s rich sport history,” Dixon says. “Each pioneer also represents various segments of the Canadian mosaic: Old-world immigrants,

⁸⁰ J.L. Granatstein, “100 Canadians,” *Maclean’s*, 1 July 1998, 14.

refugees, Native peoples, priests, professional men, amateur women... Their amazing stories will undoubtedly continue to inspire generations of Canadians.”⁸¹

The Canadian government has also used the new Longboat narrative to promote inclusiveness and Canadian unity. A 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples points to Longboat and other Aboriginal athletes as proof that, “When Aboriginal athletes compete, they send a strong message that their people are part of the fabric of the Canadian and international communities. They are role models for the youth of all nations.”⁸² In the Senate debates of June 10 1998, a discussion about the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame prompted Senator J. Trevor Eyton to declare that, “The stories of Terry Fox, Sylvie Bernier, Tom Longboat and Sheldon Galbraith are an inspiration to us all – young and old, French and English, Maritimer and British Columbian – for their achievements speak to the fundamental values such as hard work, personal courage and commitment to excellence; the same values that helped build this nation and, God-willing, will hold it together in the years to come.”⁸³

Longboat is praised by Veterans Affairs Canada for serving his country as a dispatch runner in France during the First World War, an appropriate role considering the Iroquois tradition as Runners of Messages. “Thomas Charles Longboat did not receive any awards for bravery,” the department web page reports. “He was not killed in the thick of battle while performing a daring feat

⁸¹ Joan Dixon, *Trailblazing Sports Heroes* (Canmore, Alberta: Altitude Publishing Canada Limited, 2003), 128-129.

⁸² *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Volume 4, Chapter 4, section 3.4, accessed 23 October 2008; available at www.ainc.inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sj17_e.html; Internet.

⁸³ *Debates of the Senate (Hansard)*, 1st Session, 36th Parliament, Volume 137, Issue 71, Wednesday, June 10, 1998. Accessed 23 October 2008; available at www.parl.gc.ca/36/1/parlbus/chambus/senate/deb-e/071db_1998-06-10-E.html; Internet. Note: Sylvie Bernier is an Olympic diver and Sheldon Galbraith was a figure skating coach.

above and beyond the call of duty. Rather, he is an example of the selfless response of Canadians to the chaos spreading throughout Europe.”⁸⁴ The understated case for Longboat as a war hero is made in order to praise the Canadian war effort, and to portray Aboriginals as key participants in that struggle.

While these examples deal with how Longboat’s story is being used today, there is an interesting example of how the story is being used to shape the future. The Historica Foundation of Canada was established in 1999 to “help all Canadians come to know the fascinating stories that make our country unique.” The foundation’s web site has a section called “Programs to inspire students and teachers.” The section has a suggested lesson plan involving Longboat and Steve Collins, an Aboriginal ski jumper who competed for Canada at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics. The lesson plan says, “Tom Longboat’s image in the eyes of history has changed significantly since the early 20th century, as has our perspective on First Nations people as a whole...it is also the case that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal media told two different stories about Steve Collins’ mid-career difficulties with alcohol.”

Teachers are urged to lead a class discussion on the following question: “Why would Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal media focus on different aspects of Collins’ story? To what extent does the perspective, history, and culture of the

⁸⁴ “Native Soldiers – Foreign Battlefields,” accessed 16 October 2007; available at www.vac.acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=history/other/native/longboat; Internet.

person telling the story affect the conclusions that they draw?”⁸⁵ This lesson, in fact, goes beyond simply promoting inclusiveness, or using the Longboat story to denounce the racism of the past. It is an attempt to help students understand how a narrative is formed and, in the process, to prevent the bigotry that Longboat faced from being repeated.

Conclusion

*When I see the picture of Tom and Alf,
It makes me happy to be myself.
Whenever Tom lined up for a start,
He gave his people hope and heart.*⁸⁶

This verse was written by Landon Longboat, Tom Longboat’s grandson. It refers to Longboat’s dramatic victory over English runner Alfred Shrubbs in 1909. The victory solidified Longboat’s reputation as the best marathoner of his era. Landon recited the verse to Brenda Zeman when she visited the Six Nations reserve to gather information for her 1988 book, *To Run With Longboat*. Zeman spoke with Tom Longboat Jr., who shared his memories of the champion marathoner, and told her about the religious and social traditions of the Iroquois people. Zeman also spoke with twelve-year-old Landon. The two had lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Oshweken. “I’m not into running. I’m into writing poetry and computers,” Landon told her.

⁸⁵ “First Nations Athletes, in History and in the Media: Tom Longboat and Steve Collins,” accessed 21 October 2008; available at www.histori.ca/minutes/lp.do?id=1295&cvview=pf; Internet.

⁸⁶ Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 17.

Zeman's visit to Six Nations demonstrated how much had changed since the Toronto *Evening Telegram* sent a reporter to Oshweken in 1907. The *Telegram* report, described at the beginning of the previous chapter, was filled with demeaning assumptions about Aboriginal people and derisive comments about the Longboat family. Zeman's account of her visit, eighty years later, reflected her interest in the people and customs of the Six Nations community. Her story reflected how Aboriginal people had succeeded in demonstrating the strength of their political and social culture. It was also a time when historians and the media placed marginalized groups at the centre of their own narratives. Bruce Kidd, with his background as a runner, and his adherence to this new approach, became the catalyst for the transformation of the Longboat story. Once Longboat became an inspirational hero, the new narrative was the foundation for declarations that revealed more about those making the statements, and the society they lived in, than they did about the man they professed to describe.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

The truth about stories...is that they are all that we are and all that we have and it is up to us to decide which stories we want to tell and how we will tell them.¹

Janice Margaret Forsyth

Just hours after 19-year-old Tom Longboat crossed the finish line to win the 1907 Boston Marathon he received a telegram from Toronto alderman J.J. Graham that said, "The mayor and citizens congratulate you on your magnificent victory."² Although the race was barely over, Graham was already organizing a civic reception for the new champion. The city of Toronto enjoyed honouring sports heroes. It had given Hamilton runner Billy Sherring a civic reception the previous year for winning the 1906 Olympic marathon in Athens.³ When it was decided that Longboat would be honoured too, one disgruntled alderman said, "We recently very properly recognized the Mendelssohn Choir. I would just suggest that in future we recognize achievement along other lines as well as sport - perhaps higher lines and certainly as worthy of reward."⁴

But the committee recognized that Longboat, a member of Toronto's West End YMCA, had brought fame to the city. It was decided that Mayor Emerson Coatsworth would receive the champion at city hall, say a few words in tribute, and then present him with a gold medal inscribed for the occasion. The

¹ Forsyth, "The Power to Define: A history of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001, xiv.

² *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 April 1907.

³ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat, 61.

⁴ *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 April 1907.

committee also established a fund for Longboat's education and made an initial contribution of five hundred dollars. The money was to help Longboat "take a position in life."⁵ One committee member expressed the belief that the young athlete had the capacity and willingness to learn despite a lack of formal education.⁶

The decisions made by this committee, and the discussions and events that surrounded the tribute to Longboat, illustrate many of the issues discussed in this thesis. In fact, the athlete's Aboriginal heritage was a key factor in the way his victory in Boston was portrayed. Although the city had honoured athletes before, Longboat was considered to be a special case. Controller John Ward said, "I have been thinking of the silver cabinets, etc. which other winners have received, and I have decided that they are not fitting for this young man, who has practically no home but a boarding house." Education, he said, was a more appropriate gift. But if Longboat's poverty was the main concern, why not give him the money to spend as he saw fit? Sherring had been short of money as well, reportedly raising part of his passage to Athens by betting on horses.⁷ Yet the city gave him four-hundred dollars with no strings attached while Longboat's gift was tightly controlled. The double standard demonstrated the prevailing view that Aboriginal people needed the help of non-Aboriginals in order to succeed.

Longboat's "otherness" also explains why the committee members decided to include in the celebrations local boys Charlie Petch, who finished sixth in the Boston Marathon, and Hugh Kerr, who finished eighteenth. The committee

⁵ Batten, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Anyone*, 42.

⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 April 1907.

⁷ See note 67 in Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 61.

was reluctant to let the unfamiliar Longboat have the spotlight all to himself. In fact, one member thought Petch deserved almost as much recognition as Longboat, and the mayor himself spoke up for Kerr.⁸ It was agreed that the two Toronto athletes would be part of the civic reception and would receive medals similar to Longboat's. But while the committee was clearly preoccupied with Longboat's schooling, no one seemed concerned about the state of Petch or Kerr's education, or their capacity for learning.

The committee members surely felt they were doing Longboat a great service by granting him access to European-style education. The gesture has been described aptly by Bruce Kidd as "well-meaning paternalism." But if Graham expected Longboat to be effusive in his thanks for the education fund, he was likely disappointed. As soon as the committee business was settled, Graham caught a train for Niagara Falls to greet the conquering hero as he arrived on Canadian soil. "The City of Toronto is proud of you and I am delighted indeed to shake you by the hand," Graham told Longboat when they met. "How do you like the idea of going to college?" Longboat's brief, possibly ironic reply was. "Great, just what I want."⁹

Graham accompanied Longboat on the train ride home, and Controller Ward joined the entourage when the Grand Trunk train stopped in Hamilton for a short reception. Supporters of the West End YMCA added to the party by hopping on board as the train neared Toronto. The rolling celebration became an opportunity to rub elbows with the champion and to cash in on his fame.

⁸ *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 April 1907.

⁹ *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 April 231907.

Politicians shook his hand, journalists mined him for quotes, and sports promoters urged him to come to their towns to compete. Organizers of a ten-mile event in Woodstock, Ontario, promised expensive prizes should he agree to run. There was a belief at the time that, while Canadians of European descent competed for the love of sport, Aboriginals needed financial incentives. Longboat disappointed them, however, by saying the only race he'd be attending in the near future involved Aboriginal runners near the Six Nations reserve. "I want to see them run," he told Lou Marsh of the *Toronto Daily Star*. "I am not the champion runner of Six Nations you know. They have faster men than I am there."¹⁰

Marsh sat with Longboat on the train, coaxing comments from the quiet young man when he could. He reported that Longboat broke his silence at one point and said, "I wonder what I can make of myself after going to college?" The comment might indicate that Longboat took the offer of education seriously. But Marsh's articles often featured exchanges that leave the reader wondering whose thoughts were being expressed. After Longboat's musing about college, the journalist reportedly suggested a few career possibilities, including farmer, businessman, machinist and doctor.¹¹ The article sheds little light on what Longboat thought, but leaves the impression that Marsh agreed with the members of the civic reception committee that the young athlete needed a profession in order to "make something of himself." And like the committee, Marsh expressed no such concerns about Petch or Kerr.

¹⁰ *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 April 1907

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The lavish celebration in Toronto began as soon as Longboat's train rolled to a stop at Union Station. He was greeted by thousands of fans, some lining the road and others hanging out of windows. "Worst crowd I ever tried to handle," a police officer said. "They picked Mr. Graham and me off our feet and carried us with them when we tried to usher Longboat to his carriage."¹² Two hundred torch-bearers lit the way as Longboat was driven through the streets of Toronto in an open car. There was pandemonium along the way. One of the torch bearers accidentally lit a woman's dress on fire and a small boy was almost run over.¹³ Through it all, the 48th Highlanders Band, the Governor General's Body Guard Band, and the Queen's Own Band marched alongside, heralding the champion's arrival at City Hall.¹⁴

Longboat met with Mayor Coatsworth privately while admirers swarmed the lobby of City Hall and gathered at the foot of the main staircase. Longboat and Coatsworth emerged from the mayor's office and addressed the crowd from an upstairs landing. Coatsworth congratulated Longboat for being the "Champion Long-distance runner of America."¹⁵ He pinned a gold medal on the athlete's lapel and announced that the city would contribute five hundred dollars to his education. The mayor also read a message from the principal of Harbord Collegiate Institute, a Toronto high school, promising that the school's students would also contribute to the fund.¹⁶ Longboat, a Union Jack draped over his shoulders, expressed his thanks in a voice so low members of the crowd shouted

¹² *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 24 April 1907.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Globe*, Toronto, 23 April 1907.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 April 1907.

¹⁶ *The Globe*, Toronto 24 April 1907.

for him to speak up. The *Evening Telegram* reported that Coatsworth butted in and told the crowd that Longboat “thanked the people of Toronto and would try always to be worthy of their good will.”¹⁷ Petch, whose worthiness was not in question, told the crowd that he had done his best to make the race “first and second” for Toronto.¹⁸

In the days following the marathon, the Toronto newspapers made sure that the exploits of the eighteen-year-old Petch were not forgotten. He had briefly challenged for the lead in Boston but wilted when Longboat loped past him, on a hill, with only a few miles to go. The *Evening Telegram* played up the brief duel with the heading: “PETCH NECK AND NECK WITH THE INDIAN.” The *Toronto Daily Star* ran a photograph of Longboat and Petch running side by side, passing a prominent American runner. Marsh, who covered the race and served as one of Petch’s trainers, spun a tale of how the two “canucks” collaborated to beat the American competition: “‘This is great Tom,’ said Petch; ‘I guess we got ‘em.’ ‘Yep,’ said the Indian. ‘Let’s make it first and second.’ ‘All right.’ said Petch, and they snuggled up alongside of each other like a pair of team mates and surged along over the rolling course.”¹⁹ As Marsh saw it, the challenge mounted by Petch, “this game little Toronto bantam,” spurred the “wily redskin” on to victory.²⁰ Once again there is a reluctance to let Longboat dominate the scene. Furthermore, Marsh leaves the impression that Longboat would not have done as well without the help of a non-Aboriginal.

¹⁷ *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 24 April 1907.

¹⁸ *The Globe*, Toronto, 24 April 1907.

¹⁹ *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 April 1907.

²⁰ *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 April 23 1907.

After the ceremony at City Hall, Charlie Petch was feted at the North End Athletic Club where he trained. The club members sang a tribute: "Hello Charlie. You're the boy for us. Hello Charlie you made those Yankees rush. That was a beautiful race. For twenty-two miles you set the pace. And finished strong in sixth place." The president of the club awarded the young gentleman a silver tea service and said, "I think we have here the only man in the world who can trim Longboat. We have the best white distance man in Canada anyhow." Petch was more humble in his assessment: "I think that undoubtedly the better man won at Boston. I did my best, but Longboat was too good for me."²¹

Meanwhile, the marathon winner visited the West End YMCA where he was serenaded with a song that included the phrases, "Tommy Longboat, Tommy Longboat, he's our Indian man...when it comes to running, he keeps them humming, Tommy, our Indian man." Then Longboat attended a small dinner party organized by the YMCA and Harry Rosenthal, the runner's former manager. City officials Ward and Graham were there. The affair was reported to be "quite jolly" with the drinks and tributes flowing. One toast in particular thrust another figure into the spotlight that the champion was being forced to share. In the midst of all the fuss about Longboat, Ward lamented that Rosenthal's role "in bringing the Indian to Toronto" had been overlooked.²² Once again, the point was made that the story of Longboat's success should include the non-Aboriginal figures who helped him succeed.

²¹ *Toronto Daily Star*, 24 April 1907.

²² *Ibid.*

On the day after the civic ceremony the *Evening Telegram* let its readers know what it thought of the event in a brutal, front page cartoon. The image showed city officials dancing in front of the "Civic Wigwam" wearing "Indian" buckskin and literally bending over backwards to honour the new celebrity. One figure says, "He Big Injin. Me Big Injin Too." Another says, "Make Heap Good Alderman." Mayor Coatsworth is seen in top hat and tails, but shirtless with tattooed arms and wearing buckskin pants. The cartoon takes up a quarter of the page and spreads across three columns. It is accompanied by the caption: "MAYOR COATSWORTH: - "Ugh! Ugh! Heap big Injun all of us."²³

The cartoon is a vicious jab at politicians trying to bask in the popularity of a new hero. But although the image is filled with ignorant clichés about Aboriginal people, Longboat is portrayed as the only figure with any poise or dignity. He is seen in the middle of the cartoon, in his track clothes, a medal pinned to his chest, facing forward, arms crossed causally, looking confidently at the viewer. His eyes give the impression of resigned exasperation at the political spectacle going on around him. It seems as if the artist has understood that the ceremony was not really about Longboat, but about the politicians who organized the event for their own glory.

Longboat may have felt the same way several months later when he tried unsuccessfully to get the money he had been promised. In addition to the five hundred dollars donated by the city, another two-hundred-and-fifty dollars had been pledged from private citizens, including the students of Harbord Collegiate.

²³ *Evening Telegram*, Toronto, 24 April 1907. The cartoon uses the term "Injin" in some instances and "Injun" in others.

Longboat was wary of accepting the money while still an amateur, but he wanted to build a house for his mother on the Six Nations reserve. He wrote to the city treasurer in November 1907, seven months after the fund was announced. He suggested that, "The money could be spent by the Trustees, my mother to have the house for life and after her death it to go to me."²⁴ With regard to the stipulation that the fund be used for education, Longboat said, "I do not want to accept it that way, as I am in business now and am getting enough education every day, and I am daily trying to improve myself in every way." Longboat was associated with Tom Flanagan by this time, and the promoter had set him up in a cigar store in Toronto. Flanagan hoped the job would keep nosy amateur officials from wondering where the athlete got his money. Longboat ended the letter by saying, "I am told legislation will have to be obtained to sanction this...Kindly do what you can for me as above, and oblige."²⁵ But the city did not oblige.

Longboat asked for the money repeatedly after turning professional in 1908 but was denied each time, the city insisting it was for Longboat's education. The private donors who had pledged the two hundred and fifty dollars had backed away as well. Bruce Kidd believes Longboat was being punished for turning professional: "He was no longer seen as running unselfishly for Canada, but for personal gain."²⁶ Longboat eventually hired a lawyer and forced the city to collect the private pledges. Even the principal of Harbord Collegiate had to be leaned on to make good on the thirty-five dollars pledged by his students. But

²⁴ Batten, *The Man Who Ran Faster Than Anyone*, 41.

²⁵ Ibid. Batten speculates that the letter might have been a ploy by Tom Flanagan to help Longboat pay training expenses. But it has been taken at face value by other texts.

²⁶ Kidd, "In Defence of Tom Longboat," 45.

although Longboat eventually received the private donations, he would never see a penny of the five hundred dollars promised by the city of Toronto. The unpaid money was a source of frustration for the Longboat family for decades. How it would eventually be resolved reflected the changing attitudes toward Aboriginal people.

When Tom Longboat Jr. told Bruce Kidd about the unpaid money in 1980, Kidd brought the matter up with John Sewell, the mayor of Toronto. The two had been on the same high school track team and Kidd had worked on Sewell's mayoralty campaign. "I told John what I thought the city ought to do about Longboat." Kidd told author Brenda Zeman. "I'd calculated the interest rate at which dividends on municipal bonds were paid out, and it came to \$14,500." Sewell apparently told Kidd that city council would not like the idea of simply writing a cheque to the Longboat family, especially for an amount that big. He suggested honouring the debt by setting up a ten-thousand-dollar scholarship for young athletes. Kidd fine-tuned the idea by suggesting the money be used to provide financial gifts for winners of the Tom Longboat Awards. He was sympathetic to the Longboat family but opposed the practice of inheritance, which he believed to be "neo-conservative" and "reactionary."²⁷ In March 1980, the city's executive committee took Kidd's advice, recommending the money be given to the National Indian Brotherhood, the organization responsible for the Tom Longboat awards at the time.²⁸

²⁷ Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 8-9.

²⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 20 March 1980, P5.

The matter became a media cause, with some commentators arguing the money should go to Longboat's three children: Tom Longboat Jr., Ted Longboat, and Phyllis Winnie. Some reporters urged Tom Jr. to fight the recommendation before it was adopted. Part of this had to do with reporters looking for a good story, no doubt, but the media might also have sensed that the public would side with the Longboat family. There was a growing feeling in Canada that Aboriginal people were often treated unfairly.

Tom Longboat Jr. was grateful to Kidd for pursuing the matter. But he didn't agree with what Kidd wanted to do with the money. He began to have the same feelings of resentment his father had experienced:

First, it bugged him when they tried to tell him how he had to use the money. Then Toronto people told him he could only use it for his 'future education'...Then it really upset him, after he turned pro and was able to use the money, that the city wouldn't hand it over to him. After I told Bruce Kidd about it and the City came up with \$10,000, I took the same attitude as my Dad. Why should I have to use the money the way other people say? My dad would have wanted us to have the money.²⁹

In March 1980 Tom Longboat Jr. walked into the newsroom of the *Globe and Mail* unannounced and told his side of the story. "This is a matter of principle, not just money," he said. But he didn't hide the fact that the money would be useful. "All I get is a \$585-a-month war veterans allowance for me, my wife and my five year old son."³⁰ Then he told CBC Radio that his brother Ted had a disability and could use the money as well.³¹ Tom Jr. made his case forcefully but without backing the city into a corner. When asked why his father

²⁹ Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada* .14.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ CBC Radio's *Our Native Land*, 29 March 1980.

never got the money, he said the city may have simply forgotten about it.³² A few days after the interviews on CBC Radio, the City of Toronto announced it would give the ten thousand dollars to the Longboat heirs. Tom Jr. spent his share on a washing machine and some other things his family needed.³³

In her dissertation about the Tom Longboat Awards, Janice Forsyth speaks about “the power to define.” What she means by this is “our ability to exert control over our own representations and shape the meanings attached to them.”³⁴ The fight to get the money from the city of Toronto marked a point when the Longboat family exerted control over their father’s story. In fact, one of the important aspects of the transformation of the Longboat story has been the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in the discussion of who Tom Longboat was.

Longboat had always been a source of pride for Aboriginal Canadians. His photograph was mounted on the wall of the Council House of the Six Nations Confederacy soon after he won the Boston Marathon.³⁵ And one observer has written that, “The influence of this ‘Champion of the World’ was to be felt throughout the country as Indian athletes moved with resolve to compete in road races and marathons.”³⁶ But as the Longboat narrative evolved, Aboriginal people began to be more vocal in saying what the story of Tom Longboat has meant to them.

³² Ibid.

³³ Zeman, *To Run With Longboat: Twelve Stories of Indian Athletes in Canada*, 15.

³⁴ Forsyth, “The Power to Define: A History of the Tom Longboat Awards, 1951-2001” xiv.

³⁵ Robert Stacey, ed., *Iroquois Fires: The Six Nations Lyrics and Lore of Dawendine* (Bernice Loft Winslow) (Ottawa: Penumbra Press, 1995), 36.

³⁶ Charles Ballem, “Missing From The Canadian Sport Scene: Native Athletes,” *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* XIV, no.2 (December 1983): 34.

Wilton Littlechild helped lay the groundwork for this with his 1976 MA thesis "Tom Longboat: Canada's Outstanding Indian Athlete." The thesis was written at a time when Longboat was still suspect in the eyes of many Canadians. Littlechild, however, was less concerned with what people had said about Longboat than with the story's ability to inspire young Aboriginal athletes. Tom Longboat Jr. also staked a claim on his father's legacy by walking into the offices of the *Globe and Mail* and taking up the fight his father had started more than seventy years before. These actions set the tone for an Aboriginal point of view that is now a central part of the Longboat story. Shannon Loutitt, the Saskatchewan Métis woman mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, devoted her performance at the 2007 Boston Marathon to the man who had won the race a century before, and whose story inspired her.

This particular aspect of the evolving Longboat narrative will likely become even more important in the years to come. The Aboriginal Sport Circle, for example, is in the process of creating a web presence for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. One of the ideas the organization is working on is a tribute to the Aboriginal athletes who have left their mark on Canadian sports. The Aboriginal Sport Circle plans to make Tom Longboat a prominent part of that story.

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