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Apache Skirt
Carlisle Football
Comanche Moccasins
Geronimo



THE GAME

Carlisle Indian School vs West Point

November 9, 1912

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The 1912 Army-Carlisle football game pitted a feisty band of Native American students against the-much heralded West Point Cadets. Just before they left their locker room, Carlisle's legendary coach Glenn Scoby "Pop" Warner told his team: "Your fathers and grandfathers fought their fathers. These men playing against you today are soldiers. They are the Long Knives. You are Indians. Tonight we will know if you are warriors." [1]

In 1912 Alaska and Hawaii were American territories not yet states. Just ten months earlier Arizona had become a state, as were New Mexico and Oklahoma five years earlier. On the outskirts of many western towns such as Tucson local tribes maintained villages. The last major conflict between Army troopers and Native American warriors had occurred at the Battle of Wounded Knee a mere 22 years earlier. Many Natives living then still remembered the exploits of the Apache leaders Geronimo and Cochise. Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of Greasy Grass [Little Bighorn] was still fresh in the minds of tens of thousands of living Indians. The much-admired Nez Perce Chief Joseph had died just eight years earlier (1904) and Geronimo had passed on three years earlier (1909). Warner's words of motivation were designed to enhance the Indians' resentment towards a white society that had taken their lands, culture and dignity. Even the Carlisle Indian Institute School, ironically, was created by government fiat as part of a federal policy to eradicate tribal culture. Indian schools, such as Carlisle according to *This Lands Press* writer Joe Medina, had been founded as a means of indoctrinating "Native Americans into Anglo culture giving them a basic education...[and] teaching them vocational skills [so they could work] for the white man." [2]

The early November game was a battle royale. Four months earlier Carlisle's great Jim Thorpe had won two gold medals competing in the pentathlon and decathlon in the world Olympics held in Sweden. Sweden's king had called him the world's greatest athlete. Coming into the game, the undefeated Carlisle

Photo 1: The Carlisle Indian School team, 1911-1912. The printed note on the reverse side reads: 1911 & 1912 Carlisle Indian Team.
Back row: Arcasa R Hb ; Welsh Qb; Powell Fb; Thorpe L Hb.



Line: Wheelock R E ; Dietz R T ; Busch R G; Bergle C; Jordon L G; Newashe L T; Henri L E.

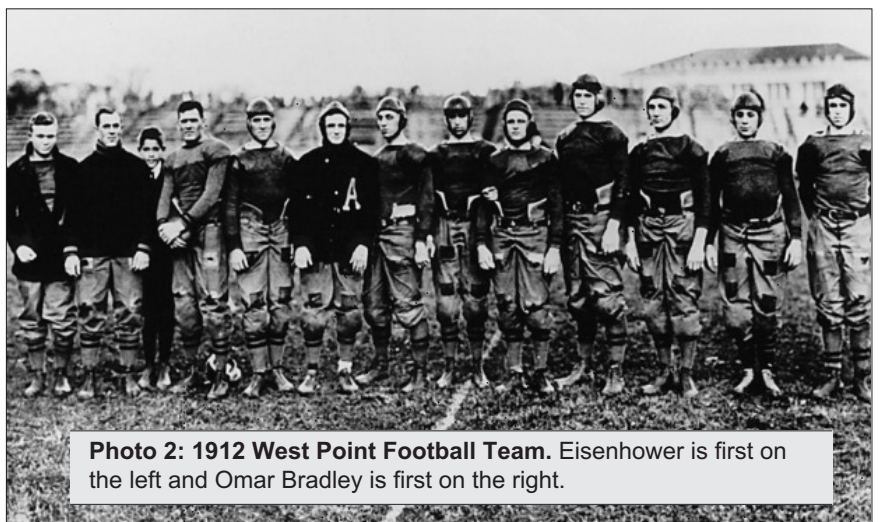


Photo 2: 1912 West Point Football Team. Eisenhower is first on the left and Omar Bradley is first on the right.

Indians had compiled a 10-0-1 record. West Point's Black Knights boasted a 3-1 record. Army was thought to have the best defense in the nation and, according to Sally Jenkins in her book *The Real All Americans* had a "chance to be No. 1 in the year-end ratings...[and while the] Indians had the best offense in the land [sports] commentators [thought] they had run up their...scores against weaker competition." [3] Key players on the Army team were Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower at half back and Omar Bradley at the end position both of whom would go on to stellar military careers during WWII. "Ike" would become President of the

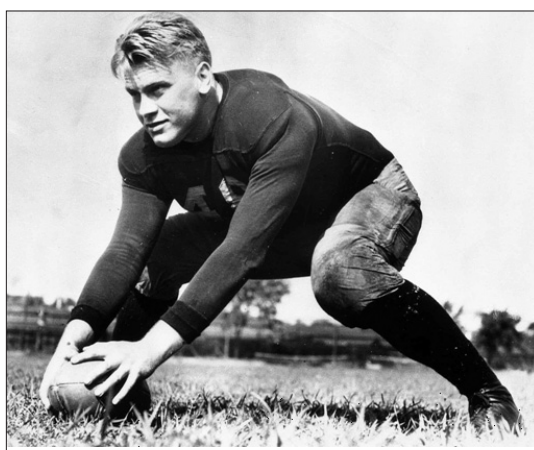
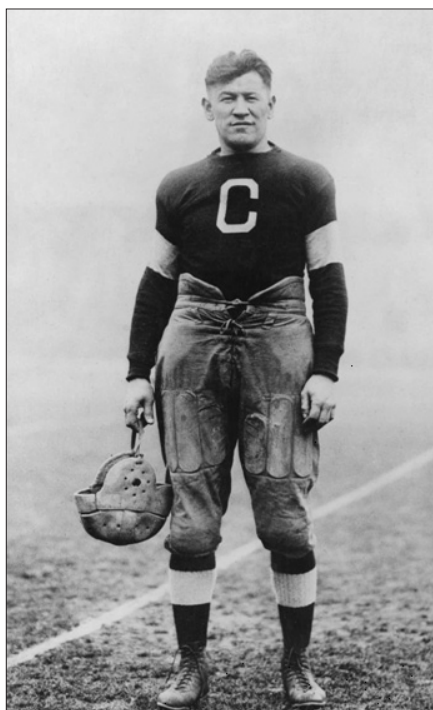
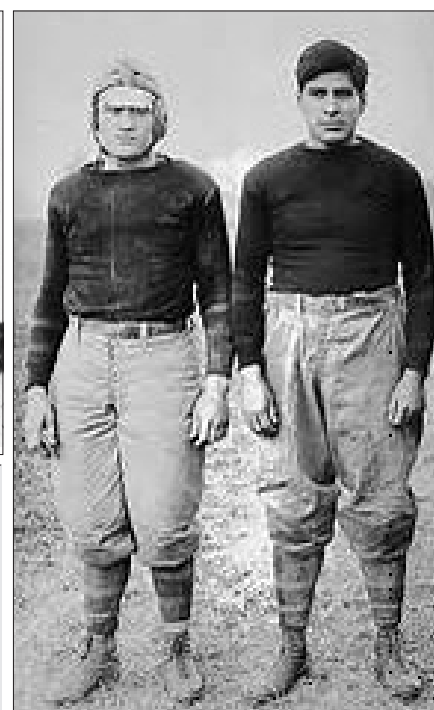


Photo 3 (left): Jim Thorpe at Carlisle.

Photo 4 (above): Dwight Eisenhower.

Photo 5 (right): HB Acasa and QB Powell.



United States. Louis Merillat, a future pro football player and Leland Hobbs—future Major General and WWII war hero, were also teammates.

The *Richmond [VA] Times Dispatch* reported the game “was marked by near rioting, rough work, slugging and a general display of bitterness such as has seldom been seen on the gridiron.” [4] The article went on to assert that Thorpe “the mighty redskin...took the scalps of Uncle Sam’s boys in gray...” [5] Boise’s *Evening Capital News* reported that Thorpe was singled out by West Point and “was half knocked out several times and was once dragged from a scrimmage totally unconscious...water was poured on his head and in a few moments...he responded and he was on his feet again as good as ever.” [6] Shortly into the game Carlisle’s fullback Stencil Powell was ejected when he “lost his temper and used his fists” to slug Army’s quarterback Vern Prichard. [7] The ejection, viewed as favoritism by the referees, “set the Indians wild, and it appeared for a time that a general fight would ensue,” reported era newspapers. [8] Taking advantage of the disruption, Army scored, but their point after conversion kick failed. A few minutes later Army’s team captain Leland DeVore was ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct. [9]

Versatile Eisenhower, a sophomore, played both offensive half back and defensive back. Early in the second half, playing defense, he and a fellow West Pointer Leland Hobbs zeroed in on Thorpe. Eisenhower had obsessed with “creating his legacy at West Point by hitting Thorpe so hard that it would knock Thorpe out of the game.” [10] Anticipating their intent, Thorpe stopped and changed direction and Eisenhower and Hobbs had “a head on collision.” [11] Hobbs was carried off the field on a stretcher “dazed and confused.” [12] Eisenhower’s knee was injured and he had to sit out the rest of the game, forced to “watch hopelessly from the sidelines as Thorpe rushed for nearly 200yards.” [13]

The following week Ike re-injured his knee during a game against Tufts University—essentially ending his football career. [14]

Thorpe, of course, was the big gun and the West Point cadets “singled [him] out as the object of [the] fiercely fighting cadets.” [15] But Carlisle was a team managed by the wonderfully creative Pop Warner. In the army game he introduced, for the first time in history, “the...double wing formation.” Minutes before the end of the first half, Carlisle drove with Joe Bergie, the team’s center, scoring the first touchdown. Bergie who was born in Warwick, North Dakota was a member of the Chippewa Tribe from the Devils Lake Band. At halftime the score was Carlisle 7 and West Point 6.

In the second half Alex Arcasa the “other” half back scored Carlisle’s next three touchdowns all set up by Thorpe runs. According to Sally Jenkins of *Sports Illustrated*, “[Thorpe] started like a streak ...shot through the line...scattered tacklers...[to] all sides of him.” [16] Arcasa, a member of the Colville Nation, was from Orient, Washington.

Beside his running skills, Thorpe contributed three points by kicking the points after touchdown. He missed the last one because “it was so dark when he made the [attempt] that he could not see the goal posts,” reported the *Boise Evening Capital News* [17] The final score was Carlisle 27 – Army 6.

Joe Medina has best summed up the game’s meaning: “[Carlisle had] not only won a football game but also a triumph for all Native Americans. They proved they were not inferior to the white man by beating him at his own game.” [18]

Ike loved football. He almost left the academy when he realized he would never play again. He wrote: “Life seemed to have little meaning; a need to excel was almost gone.” [19] Once he overcame his depression, he helped coach the squad and later became a cheerleader. [20] According to *The Daily Beast’s* Nicolaus Mills, Eisenhower came to realize “that football,

perhaps more than any other sport, tends to instill in men the feeling that victory comes through hard work—almost slavish—work, team play, self-confidence, and an enthusiasm that amounts to dedication.” [21]

Jim Thorpe’s Olympic victories were short lived. Within a year it was discovered he had played summer semi-pro baseball for pay. Olympic Committee rules at the time forbade professionals from competing in Olympic events and stripped him of all of his titles, medals and awards, declaring him a professional. There was even a suggestion at the time that an Army commission should be appointed to determine if the 1912 Carlisle win over Army might likewise be erased. [22]

Thorpe went on to become a professional baseball player (Giants, Brewers, Reds and Braves) and football player (Pine Village Pros, Canton Bulldogs) of some note. As a professional basketball player he played for the LaRue [OH] World Famous Indians. [23]

In 1963 he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In 1983 the International Olympic Committee reinstated Thorpe’s Olympic victories and awarded his children two gold medals. In 1950 the Associated Press polled 400 sportswriters who declared Thorpe the greatest athlete of the first half of the Twentieth Century and in 1999 named him third all-time athlete of the Twentieth Century (behind Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan). The town of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania was named in his honor shortly after he died. He is buried there. [24]

In a 1961 speech, President Eisenhower said of Thorpe: “Here and there, there are some people who are supremely endowed. My memory goes back to Jim Thorpe. He never practiced in his life, and he could do anything better than any other football player I ever saw.” [25]

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Photo 2: 1912 West Point Football Team.

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Photo 3: Jim Thorpe at Carlisle.

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Photo 4: Dwight Eisenhower.

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Photo 5: HB Acasa and QB Powell.

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