

Tug-of-war big in Thorndale

Photostory By Ed Heal
of The Free Press

THORNDALE — In 1893 the five-member Mighty Men of Zorra tug-of-war team brought world sporting fame to the tiny Oxford County village of Embro.

Now, 85 years later, a 14-man squad of pullers from nearby Thorndale has begun etching a mark of its own.

The Zorra pullers proved they could exert more force than anyone else on the end of a rope at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Teams from Great Britain, France, Germany and the United States fell victim to the five Embro-area farmers' might.

The Thorndale squad, organized five years ago, has yet to reach such heights but took a major stride this summer in winning the Canadian Middleweight Championship at the Canadian National Exhibition after an exhausting 17 pulls.

The championship effort was no fluke, said Mel Monteith, a tug-of-war veteran who acts as the crew's advisor.

"When these boys first got together they meant business," Monteith said.

The team — pullers, a coach and three advisors — practice twice weekly at the Thorndale fairgrounds. For two hours a night they pit stamina and timing against each other and an unwieldy 1,100-pound drum of sand.

The eight members of the Thorndale team allowed to pull at one time weigh in at 1,800 pounds — an average of 225 pounds each.

When a match starts each squad lines up facing each other behind white ribbons tied 12 feet on either side of a colored ribbon marking the rope's centre.

"Pick up the rope. Take up the strain. Pull." yells a starter who drives a stake into the ground at the centre ribbon. The two teams strain against one another until one pulls the other past the stake.



ALEX SANDY CLARK.
Wm. BILL MONROE.

ROBERT McLEOD.
E.L. SUTHERLAND.

IRA HUMASON.
ROBERT McINTOSH.

The famous Zorras tug-of-war team that won the world title in 1893 had hidden strength in their appearance. Bob McIntosh, anchor, exhibited his strength at local fairs by

showing that no two horses could pull him from position once he had dug in his cleats. Ira Hummason would carry two 120-pound anvils at arms length.



Allen Wakem, St. Marys, heaves hard to pull a 250-pound drum of concrete and steel in the air in his backyard. Like any sport practice makes a better performer. To build up stamina the drum is hard to beat. "It never gives up," said Allen.