

Getting to Olympics difficult

in 1920

OHSWEKEN — The Six Nations Indian Reserve has produced many fine athletes over the years. While none was finer than Tom Longboat in his prime, there was another long distance runner who was good enough to go to the 1920 Olympics. That man was Norman "Trump" General.

When I was a boy, he was already middle-aged and had put on some weight. To me he looked little different from the other Indian farmers at that time, with their blue bib-overalls and rubber boots. My father said that as a young man he had been a real dandy, always dressed to the nines, as they used to say.

While training for the 1920 Olympics, Trump was said to have defeated Tom Longboat in a road race from Caledonia to Ohsweken. Tom had gone to the 1908 Olympics. Of course Trump had won various other races and at one time he had quite a collection of awards and trophies.

The 1920 Olympics were held in Antwerp, Belgium. This tiny war-torn country had been persuaded to host the first Olympics after the First World War. They lost great amounts of money on this venture, according to the book, *The Story of the Olympic Games*, by J. Kieran and A. Daley.

There were no corporate sponsors in those days so the people of the Reserve and Brant County rallied to help the local runner. The Six Nations council donated \$100 and an Olympic

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fund was started in Brantford. The Expositor assisted by publishing a list of contributors and how much each one gave. One man donated liniment and bandages. Somehow, the \$600 that was needed was raised.

While Trump was scrambling to raise money and train, things seemed much rosier in the U.S. The American Olympic Committee had collected 300 elite U.S. athletes and secured the large troop ship *Great Northern* to transport them. Just before they were to leave, the ship broke down. They had to go on the *Princess Matoika* instead. It was an army transport which was much less comfortable.

This led to the so-called Mutiny of the *Matoika*. The athletes got together and complained to the U.S. Olympic Committee about the poor food and sleeping quarters. The threats by the boxers and wrestlers were especially serious. So much for our belief that the athletes of 1920 were more high-minded than those of 1988.

Even then, their appetites came first.

Another howl went up when they got to Antwerp. Instead of a luxurious hotel, they were quartered in an empty schoolhouse. Dan Ahearne, the hop, skip and jump specialist went looking for better lodgings and found them. However, when he wasn't in the schoolhouse by 10 p.m. he was suspended. This led to another revolt by the athletes. They threatened to stay out of their events if Ahearne was not reinstated.

Ahearne explained why it was necessary to get other lodgings. He said that he didn't like the beds because the sides were too close to the middle, the mattresses were harder than corrugated iron and the pillows felt like they were stuffed with corn cob pipes. He was reinstated and the U.S. athletes went into their events.

Whether it is 1988 or 1920, Murphy's Law always seems to apply to the Olympics. If anything can go wrong, it will.

Norman General of the Cayuga Nation did not win the 26-mile marathon in the mud and rain of Belgium. But against great odds he got there and competed. That's what the Olympics is supposed to be all about.