

# Rocky Mount stop cost Thorpe

Sports great lost Olympic medals over semipro baseball pay

By RYAN WHIRTY  
Correspondent

In 1909, Jim Thorpe – who died 61 years ago Friday – was an average baseball player in Rocky Mount, where he pitched for the Railroaders of the tiny Eastern Carolina League.

While competing for the Railroaders during the 1909 and 1910 seasons, Thorpe, then 21, and not yet the track and football star he would become, earned \$2 a game and, at a high point, \$35 a week, figures that were considered semi-pro salaries at the time.

It would be that meager payout that, in 1913, resulted in Thorpe being stripped of his two Olympic gold medals, which had earned him the title of greatest athlete in the world at the Stockholm, Sweden, games in 1912.

Thorpe's time in Eastern North Carolina was brief and, ultimately, damaging. But current Rocky Mount officials and community leaders embrace the connection to the Native American athlete who changed the face of American sports forever.

"Jim Thorpe's significance to Rocky Mount is that, though he came to Rocky Mount as an adult, he played semipro ball here," Rocky Mount City Councilwoman Chris Miller said. "He was a natural athlete who went on to become a great Olympic medal winner. Rocky Mount is proud of his connection to our community."

Thorpe's tenure in Rocky Mount also stirs pride among local Native Americans, including Barry Richardson, a member of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe who for more than two decades has hosted regional powwows in Eastern North Carolina. In 2011 and 2012 – the 100th anniversary of Thorpe's Olympic triumphs, which were officially restored by the International Olympic Committee in 1983 – Richardson organized festivals in Rocky Mount to recognize Thorpe's contributions.

"He was important not only for Native Americans, but the whole country," said Richardson.

"He symbolized what's good about America," Richardson said, "what hard work can achieve. He symbolized what people can do when they work hard. He rose to greatness out of poverty. His isn't just an Indian story, it's an American story."

## Pitching for Rocky Mount

Thorpe's Rocky Mount saga had its genesis in February 1909, when a



1912 AP FILE PHOTO

Jim Thorpe returned to play football in Pennsylvania after a baseball stint in North Carolina.

company was formed in the city to place a new team, the Railroaders, in the Eastern Carolina League.

At the same time, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania – where Thorpe first burst onto the national sporting scene as a member of the school's football team – was in the process of eliminating its baseball program.

The Railroaders assembled a team, and by mid-June, Thorpe had been signed and had taken the mound for Rocky Mount. He earned the win in a 1-0 victory over Wilson on June 19.

"Thorpe, the Carlisle Indian pitcher, for the second time this week proved his effectiveness and, while he gave up four hits, he was not to be touched when a hit was needed for run-getting," a report in The Charlotte Daily Observer stated.

Unfortunately for Rocky Mount hardball enthusiasts, the Railroaders were generally awful all season, mired in last place for much of the campaign, and by late August their season was over.

The New York Tribune reported that Thorpe batted .263 and went 9-10 during the 1909 season.

The team brought Thorpe back in 1910, but he was shipped off to play for the Fayetteville Highlanders later in the season.

After the 1910 season, Thorpe focused on football and track at Carlisle, leading the college to football success and winning Olympic medals.

## Professional athlete

But in January 1913, reports surfaced about the time Thorpe spent on the Railroaders' payroll, triggering a series of investigations by the Amateur Athletic Union and

the IOC that led, ultimately, to Thorpe being declared a "professional athlete" and having his medals taken away.

Several players and coaches who reportedly played against or with Thorpe came out of the woodwork to not only testify that the Olympian had played for pay, but also that he simply wasn't even that good a baseball player. In a headline in its Feb. 2, 1913 issue, the Boston Globe blared, "Thorpe a Joke on Ball Field."

Thorpe admitted to his transgression – the payments nowadays would no longer disqualify him from the Olympics – in a letter to AAU registration committee chairman James E. Sullivan on Jan. 26, 1913, when he told the official that he had indeed played for the Railroaders and later the Highlanders.

Thorpe wrote that many college players from the North had competed with and against him the the Eastern Carolina League, but that they knew to use false names to protect their amateur status, unlike he did.

"I never realized until now what a big mistake I made by keeping it a secret about my ballplaying, and I am sorry I did so," he penned. "I hope I will be partly excused by the fact that I was simply an Indian schoolboy and did not know all about such things. In fact, I did not know that I was doing wrong because I was doing what I knew several other college men had done ..."

A century later, Rocky Mount leaders refuse to let the scandal define Thorpe's connection to their city. In 2005, Thorpe was inducted into the Twin County Museum & Hall of Fame, and Rocky Mount's Braswell Memorial Library holds a collection of newspaper clippings and other ephemera from the Olympian's time there.

Braswell Memorial local history librarian Traci Thompson said she receives occasional visitors and research looking into Thorpe's time in Rocky Mount, and she added that the majority of the city's population is aware of the athlete's Rocky Mount connection.

"I think most people know," she said. "He's been honored here in various ways over the years."

Organizer Richardson said Native Americans and Rocky Mount residents should take pride in the fact that such a special athlete spent time in their community.

"In history, you'll see that type of injustice," he said. "But he was a great player, and by all accounts a great guy. To me, (the Rocky Mount scandal) is just an unfortunate part of history."

# Athletics directors gather for discussions



High Schools  
Tim Stevens

The N.C. Athletic Directors Association held its annual conference this week in Asheville. More than 200 high school athletics directors from across the state gathered to share common problems and discuss possible solutions.

"There was a lot of discussion about the impact the weather has had this spring, especially involving the basketball championships," said Darren Coe, the Wake County Schools senior administrator for athletics. "We talked about if there is anything we can do on the county level to help in those situations."

The basketball regionals were impacted this year. Games had to be postponed because of travel conditions.

"There are a lot of factors that go into whether our students can participate, but the No. 1 priority is always keeping the students safe," Coe said.

Wake County is large and travel conditions in Wake Forest might be different from those in Fuquay-Varina and conditions at Green Hope can be different from those at East Wake.

Bobby Hill, the Durham Hillside athletics director, said one of the most beneficial aspects of the conference were meetings grouped by classification. The 4A ADs met together as did the 3A, 2A and 1A in separate meetings.

The groups discussed questions from the N.C. High School Athletic Association. Responses were recorded and will be provided to the NCHSAA staff.

"I think the association is going to get some great feedback," Hill said. "We had time to really discuss ideas and it was a relaxed atmosphere."

One point of discussion was the exceptions the NCHSAA made to its weekly game limits this winter because of weather-related postponements.

"The NCHSAA showed great flexibility and moved quickly," Hill said. "But now the question is, that having done it once, will it be done more often? Is holding competition

on a Sunday really an option in the future? Would it be good to loosen the weekly limits or leave them like they are? Is the playoff structure now what we want? There are different opinions."

Hill said it was important for the ADs to give feedback to the NCHSAA.

"We have a different perspective than coaches," Hill said. "The coaches in this sport or that sport may want something, but we're looking at the overall program."

The AD conference also was geared toward education. Seven classes were offered that can lead toward certification as an athletic administrator. North Carolina is among the national leaders in coaching certification and athletics administration.

Panther Creek's L.J. Hepp took a risk management course and said a presentation on social media was informative.

"We think of the negative aspects of social media, but we learned ways to use social media in a positive manner," he said.

**Reserve keeper:** Holly Springs senior Bailey Ulm, the backup girls' soccer keeper, played a key role in the Hawks' 1-1 tie Wednesday night at Panther Creek. Ulm had not played keeper since the fourth grade until this season.

She was pressed into an action when starter Nikkie DeBardelaben broke her fibula. The Catamounts' only goal came off a Briana Velasquez penalty kick.

"That was incredible," Holly Springs coach Brian Miller said of Ulm's performance.

Panther Creek (8-0-1, 4-0-1) entered the Student Sports national rankings this week at No. 47 but had to rally against Holly Springs (6-0-2, 2-0-1).

**Big leagues:** Former West Carteret High baseball standout Lonnie Chisenhall has earned a spot on the Cleveland Indians' opening-day roster. He was the Indian's first-round pick in 2008.

J. Mike Blake contributed to this story.

## » Online

See photos of high school sports events at [nando.com/hsphotos](http://nando.com/hsphotos); get the latest scores and stats at [nando.com/preps](http://nando.com/preps).

# Ravens' Rice indicted for assault

Associated Press

**ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.** Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice has been indicted on a charge that he assaulted his fiancée during an argument in an elevator at an Atlantic City, N.J., casino last month.

Rice had been charged with simple assault after police said he knocked out Janay Palmer on Feb. 15 at the Revel Casino. But a grand jury Thursday indicted him on a more serious count of aggravated assault, which carries a three-to-five-year sentence.

Palmer also had been charged with simple assault. But prosecutors say that complaint was administratively dismissed.

Rice's attorney, Michael Diamondstein, told The Press of Atlantic City that Rice "vehemently denies" the charge and that the couple are happy and in counseling.

## ■ AROUND THE LEAGUE

**Buffalo:** Private funeral services for owner Ralph Wilson, 95, will be held in his hometown of Detroit on Saturday.

The Bills are planning to hold a public celebration and remembrance honoring Wilson at a date that has yet to be determined.

**Cincinnati:** Defensive tackle Domata Peko agreed to a two-year contract extension that runs through the 2016 season.

**Detroit:** The Lions signed free-agent safety James Ihedigbo. He made 99 tackles and had three interceptions for the Baltimore Ravens last year.

**Indianapolis:** Owner Jim Irsay, 54, had \$29,000 in cash and bottles of prescription drugs in his vehicle when he was arrested on suspicion of intoxicated driving and other charges, according to the arrest report.

The cash was in Irsay's wallet, metal briefcase and two laundry bags. The briefcase and bags, which were on the front passenger-side floor, also contained bottles of pills of various colors, the police report states.

**Miami:** Running back Knowshon Moreno agreed to terms on a one-year contract. The five-year veteran had his best season in 2013 when he rushed for 1,038 yards, caught 60 passes and scored 13 touchdowns playing with Peyton Manning and the Denver Broncos.

**Minnesota:** The Vikings signed free agent offensive lineman Vladimir Ducasse to a one-year deal. Ducasse spent the first four seasons of his career with the New York Jets. He was a second-round draft choice out of Massachusetts in 2010.

**New England:** Nose tackle Vince Wilfork, a 10-year veteran who missed most of last season with a torn Achilles' tendon, tweeted that he looks forward to returning to football and helping his team have a chance to win a Super Bowl. He originally had balked at the Patriots attempt to restructure his contract to lessen the salary cap hit.

**Philadelphia:** Mark Sanchez, 27, passed his physical and the former New York Jets quarterback will sign a contract with the Eagles on Friday, a source close to the situation said. PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

**Washington:** The Redskins resigned cornerback E.J. Biggers, 26, to a one-year deal. Linebacker Brian Orakpo has signed his franchise player tender.

**Draft:** Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel threw for 75 officials from 30 teams at Texas A&M. Former President George H.W. Bush and wife Barbara watched most of the workout.

## ■ GIRLS' SOCCER

POINTS				
Name	Sch	G	Goal	Ast
M.Goff	TRI	8	17	6
E.Trulove	CLE	8	12	7
M.Bolen	GCS	5	11	7
A.Dreyer	RCH	6	10	8
C.Boch	MBK	8	12	1
A.Kimball	CHL	7	10	4
T.Boyte	GCS	5	10	4
K.Bootes	HLV	8	11	2
R.Nociti	ADR	8	9	3
D.Babbitt	HLV	8	2	13
C.Griffiths	MBK	8	5	7

## ■ BOYS' LACROSSE

POINTS				
Name	Sch	G	Goal	Ast
I. Leving	ECH	8	23	28
D.Monroe	ECH	8	24	8
C.Durling	MBK	6	20	10
N.Paussa	GHO	6	21	9
C.Besser	APX	7	9	21
S.Baird	ADR	7	21	8
J.Medwar	MID	24	24	4

## ■ GIRLS' LACROSSE

POINTS				
Name	Sch	G	Goal	Ast
K.Dupere	BRO	8	35	11
M.Bromley	ADR	7	24	17
M.Castanero	APX	7	27	14
A.Blawas	WAK	6	16	24
E.Cornell	APX	8	28	9
M.Blawas	WAK	6	19	16
L.Stanley	GHO	5	19	14

## ■ BASEBALL

DOUBLES			
Name	Sch	G	No.
J. Paxson	WakeHome	9	7
T.Yoder	GHO	8	5
B.Stephens	WKC	8	4
K.Koehler	SAN	8	4
R.Gosney	WHS	9	4
R.Smith	NRC	7	4

TRIPLES			
Name	Sch	G	No.
M.Smyth	WakeHome	9	2

HOME RUNS			
Name	Sch	G	No.
T.Edge	NRC	7	5
P.Ammons	EWK	8	3
D.Burt	FUQ	8	2
E.Pittard	EWK	8	2
S.Scott	CGI	8	2

RBIS			
Names	Sch	G	No.
T.Edge	NRC	7	22
J.Paxton	WakeHome	9	11
B.McLamb	TRI	5	10
S.Pittara	GHO	8	10
A.Alexander	WKC	8	9
S.Scott	CGI	8	9

STRIKEOUTS			
Names	Sch	G	No.
G.Deal	MBK	9	35
R.Roby	SAN	8	34
D.Dulaney	SAN	8	33
E.Brabrand	WAK	7	20
M.Merryman	GHO	8	18
T.Maslowski	GHO	8	18
C.Scott	MBK	9	17
J.Maciejewski	PAN	8	16
J.Wilson	PAN	7	16

## ■ SOFTBALL

DOUBLES			
Name	Sch	G	No.
J.Gontram	HRT	9	7
A.Long	FUQ	7	5
D.Williams	MBK	9	5
K.Cook	NRC	6	5
L.Hodge	APX	7	4
L.Williams	APX	9	4

TRIPLES			
Name	Sch	G	No.
S.Shepard	NRC	6	3
A.Morris	LVL	5	2
L.Panella	LVL	9	2
L.Zieve	LVL	5	2

HOME RUNS			
Name	Sch	G	No.
T.Bartholomew	SDA	5	3
B.Davis	COR	5	2
L.Hodge	APX	7	2
L.Bowling	FUQ	7	2
O.Baratta	ADR	9	2

RBIS			
Names	Sch	G	No.
J.Gontram	HRT	9	20
L.Hodge	APX	7	13
E.Burris	MBK	9	11
L.Williams	FUQ	7	11
M.Brown	HRT	9	11
O.Baratta	APEX	7	11
S.Cavallaro	ADR	9	11
T.Bartholomew	CGI	8	11
S.DA	SDA	5	11

STRIKEOUTS			
Names	Sch	G	No.
H.Shomo	MBK	9	49
T.Bartholomew	SDA	5	44
L.Hodge	APX	7	41
A.Morris	LVK	5	33
L.Williams	HRT	9	33
D.Wallace	MID	9	31

# 76ers tie league recored for consecutive losses

Associated Press

**HOUSTON** The Philadelphia 76ers tied the NBA record with their 26th straight loss Thursday night, as James Harden's triple-double led the Houston Rockets to a 120-98 victory.

Harden had 26 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists in three quarters for his second career triple-double as Houston picked up its fifth straight victory.

The 76ers (15-57) stuck around early before a big second-quarter run allowed the Rockets to pull away and roll to the win.

Philadelphia matched the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers for the

NBA's worst skid and can set the record at home against Detroit on Saturday.

James Anderson led the Sixers with 30 points and made six 3-pointers.

## ■ AROUND THE LEAGUE

**Trail Blazers 100, Hawks 85:** LaMarcus Aldridge had 25 points and 16 rebounds in his return from a back injury, and Portland beat host Atlanta to end a three-game losing streak.

Damian Lillard added 21 points for the Trail Blazers, who had lost seven of 10 and were in danger of falling out of the fifth spot in the Western Conference playoff standings.

The Hawks have lost five

straight. They lead the Knicks by only 1 ½ games in the race for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Jeff Teague, who was scoreless in Wednesday night's loss at Minnesota, led the Hawks with 22 points. Lou Williams had 16 points, including 13 in the final period when Atlanta closed the deficit to six points.

Atlanta's Kyle Korver missed his fifth straight game because of back spasms and center Pero Antic sat out after he twisted his right ankle in Wednesday night's loss at Minnesota.

After a couple misses, Aldridge quickly found his shot in his return after missing seven games with a lower back contusion.

**Bucks 108, Lakers 105:** Brandon Knight scored 30 points, Ramon Sessions added 22 and host Milwaukee beat Los Angeles to break an eight-game losing streak.

The Bucks swept the season series with the Lakers for the first time since 2006-07. Knight scored a career-high 37 points in Milwaukee's 94-79 victory on Dec. 31 in the other meeting.

Khris Middleton added 14 points for the Milwaukee, which won for only the 14th time this season.

Jordan Hill had 28 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers, while Nick Young added 17 points.

**Clippers 109, Mavericks 103:** Chris Paul scored 31 points, Blake Griffin added 18 points and 13 rebounds, and Los Angeles rallied from a

10-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat host Dallas.

The Clippers swept the contentious three-game series with second-half rallies in each game.

On Thursday, the teams combined for six technical fouls charged to players on the floor, three on each team.

Vince Carter scored 23 points off the bench for the Mavericks, going 4 for 5 on 3-pointers. Dirk Nowitzki had 21 points but only two in the fourth quarter.

Los Angeles maintained its one-game lead over Houston for second place in the Western Conference.

The loss dropped Dallas a half-game behind Phoenix and into ninth place in the tight race for the final playoff berths in the West.