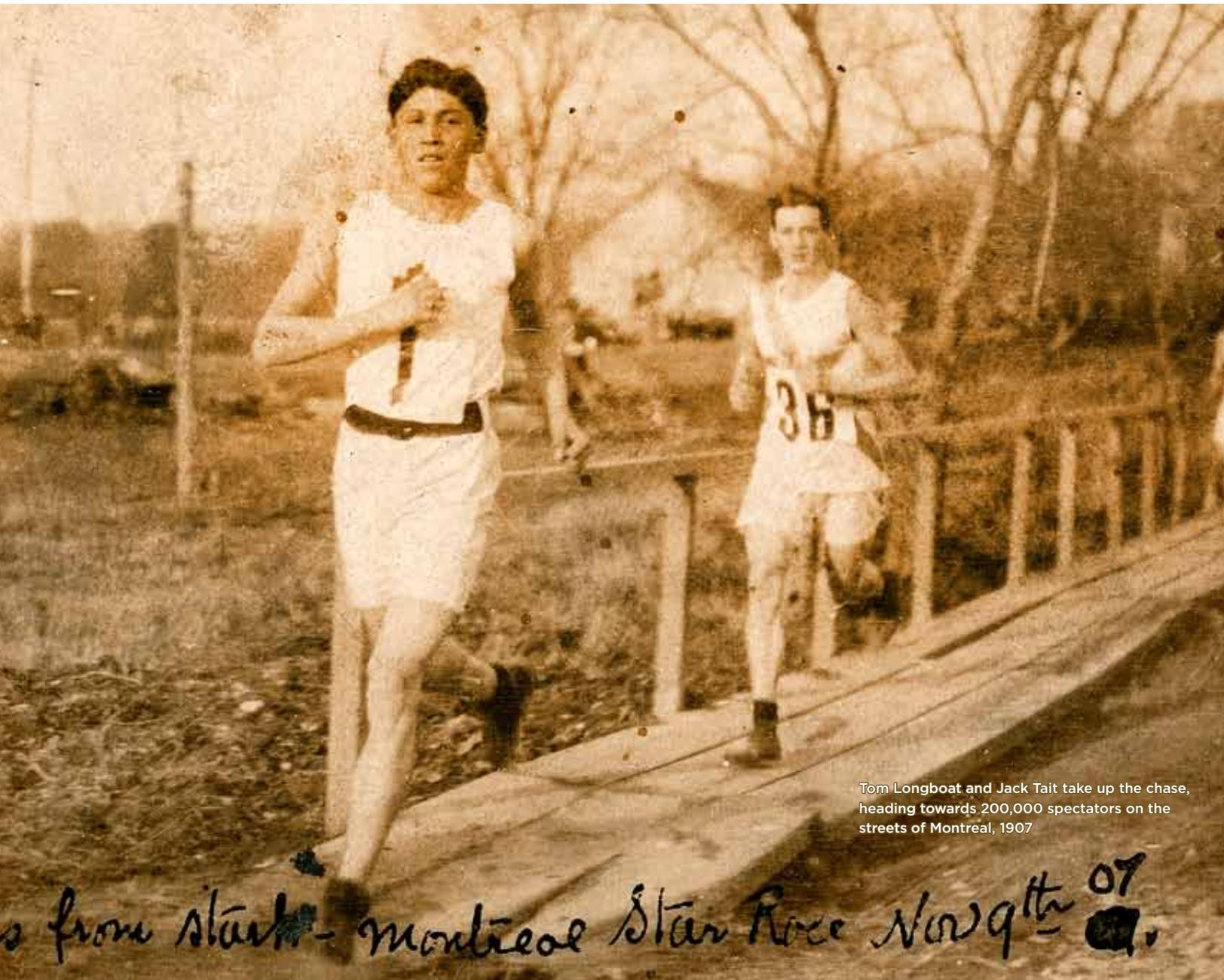


Boys Wonder

The story of a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and *his* heroes.



Tom Longboat and Jack Tait take up the chase, heading towards 200,000 spectators on the streets of Montreal, 1907

The runners who inspired a nation, and a young boy who grew up to change his country, and the world.

by W.S. Williams
(Last Lap Entertainment Group)



Jack Tait and gang at Dovercourt & Queen, 1904.

“Les... I think it's all about the timing. When to show up and take someone on. When to lay back a bit, then open it up. And you've gotta kick at the end like no tomorrow. That's how you win these things, kid... or go down trying. I hope you don't mind, I asked someone to come over and say hello.”

Tom...

Jack Tait, age 18, to Lester Pearson, age 9, after Pearson sees his childhood hero win the race of a lifetime.

In July 1907 the athletic world's 'Boy Wonder' and future Olympian, 18 year-old Jack Tait, beats Tom Longboat – his older friend and some-time rival – in one of the famed West End Y powerhouse five-milers on Dovercourt Road.

Longboat is now thought to be unbeatable by anyone, anywhere, after breaking the marathon record three months earlier at Boston... by five minutes! But Tait is a natural miler and consummate amateur sportsman, with a sense of timing to wither his opponents. With one last kick and the crowd going berserk, he crosses the finish line 15 yards in front of Longboat, one of the few times 'the son of the forest', Cogwagee, is ever beaten. They hug each other and laugh, like they both won after fighting each other so hard.

Near the finish line, watching this powerful display of speed and sportsmanship with his mouth hanging wide-open, is nine year-old Lester Pearson. The boy is frozen in place, watching his Sporting Gods shine on one of the great and glorious mornings of his youth.

Over 40 years later, Pearson, by now the world's most famous Canadian, sits down for a first-ever interview about his childhood. He describes Jack Tait in detail as his greatest idol, and Longboat as the fresh, exploding superstar of a new

century. When a much older, care-worn Tait hears of this, he can barely believe his ears. Longboat, by now, has been dead for two years and largely forgotten by the public for many, many more.

Boys Wonder starts here. The story of two men who share such similar character and personality — brought together in youth, and again after decades by one simple interview — and the true tale of a legendary 'gentle-man' who hovers around them still. Longboat... who's experience few could ever share, let alone understand. Yet Tait and Pearson do: one at the height of his great teammate's fame, and the other years later, in incalculable ways.

They meet as next-door neighbours in 1904 on the Dovercourt Road, an older on-the-run prodigy and an unremarkable, stationary 7 year-old. Jack and 'Les' grow up fast, smart and funny, under the sunshine and shadow of Tom's rocket-like fame and struggle with deep, double-edged racism. Boys do indeed wonder, and these two stay connected somehow in unfathomable ways, and with Tom, for sixty years. Jack goes from international track star and amateur role model, to reporter-humourist and soldier-war correspondent, before receding from view in 1921

as a private, passionate family man. Lester then takes what he learns from Jack, Tom and his studies, and starts his career as an academic-diplomat, then on to his most challenging role as a political leader.

He co-founds the United Nations, presides over NATO and later wins a Nobel Peace Prize for averting nuclear war over the Middle East. It is Tom and Jack's turn, now, to read about young Les in the papers. Then in 1963 'Mike' Pearson becomes the effective, 'sporting' Prime Minister who guides and first-defines a modern, progressive nation in the world.

Lester carries deep lessons and a set of hard-won values away from the 'neighbourhood', and the public exploits of his heroes. These are life-long lessons of hard work, humility, compassion, and the profound need to confront bullies where and when they appear, regardless of the personal cost.

He never forgets his indelible hero next door, and the acts of courage Jack is compelled to make during his career, and in a tough town. His integrity and humour, become Lester's. And they never forget Tom, and the true meaning of 'status' for every human being.



Lester Pearson (lower right) and family on the Dovercourt Road, 1907



Balmy Beach Harriers, just after the 1911 British Empire Games. Jack Tait is front row, centre.



Men's Marathon at the 1908 Olympics in London, England. Jack Tait and Tom Longboat are on the ground running.



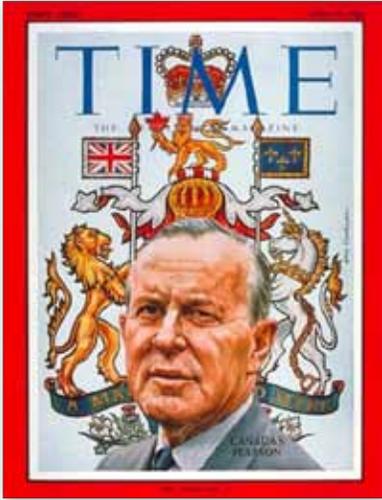
World-famous war photo taken in France, 1917. Tait is on right.

Boys Wonder centers on Jack, Tom and Lester through the wild, pulsating 1904-14 season — when runners were like rock stars, and how you won mattered more than what you won. Young Lester peeks around the corner of his house for glimpses of the Boy Wonder daily...

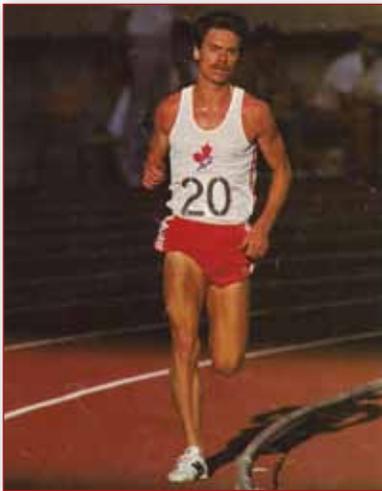
- He reads the papers constantly and talks with his parents about Jack's latest act of 'amateur' tenacity, and Tom's rapid rise to the top of the professional marathon world
- He knows all about Tom's wins 'out of nowhere' in 1906 at the famed Around The Bay race and Ward's Marathon, as 17- year-old Jack hangs tough to finish top-10 in both
- He prides himself at Jack's defiant, public endorsement of Tom's character and residency into a reluctant West End Y, tidying misperceptions as the US tries to block Cogwagee's entry in Boston
- Lester knows it is Jack training with Tom every week in the months before Boston, inside the Y, standing beside his friend as he prepares to shake the world
- He watches them like a hawk for three years, and is rewarded in July 1907 when his father takes him to see the West End Y 5-miler and meet his heroes, before moving away from his precious Dovercourt Road
- He never forgets, especially when reading the newspaper in his new hometown of Peterboro, about Tom and Jack's legendary duel in front of a crowd of 200,000 at the Montreal Marathon; and another act of public courage, made for each other
- Lester obsesses about his heroes as they leave for England, both Olympians now, to compete in the wild, woolly affair that becomes the 1908 Olympic Games in London
- He boasts to friends later, as Jack shrugs-off a head start he's bullied into before 9,000 spectators in Madison Square Garden, and then beats the "World Indoor King" by 20-yards
- Lester is witness from afar, as Tom takes on the greatest long-distance runners of the time to become World Marathon Champ, and Jack wins the mile at the first British Empire Games
- And he sees them — the last time all three will be together in one place — at the Great Indian Meet of 1909, in Peterboro: Jack wins the 3-mile Invite, Tom supports his friend as celebrity starter, and a young boy cheers from the rail in awe...

Then suddenly, after disappointments at the 1912 Olympics, this charmed and worthwhile life comes to a grinding halt. It is now 1915-18, as Lester becomes 'Mike' after pilot training and tries to meet up with Jack overseas. And two former running stars, now a gunnery sergeant and dispatch runner, don their spikes one last time in a brigade race; rallying the spirits of allied troops in France.

We follow as they adjust to the post-war world in complicated years to come. Lester works in a meat-packing factory to recover emotionally from the war, and a serious street accident in London after drinking one night with writer Robert Graves; Jack returns to find his sports-editor job given to his best friend; while Tom finds his way, bitter



Nobel Peace laureate Pearson gets his Time cover in 1963.



Jack Tait's grandson Paul Williams.

It contrasts with the warmth of their new friendship and hilarious, heartfelt personal correspondence beginning after the interview in 1952. Yet Lester will barely ever know how he helps his own hero recover from the shocking, untimely death of his 27 year-old son, Don Tait, who also dies suddenly in 1949.

towards no one and after it is learned he is not a war casualty — through the world of fading celebrity and a Native life in modern times. All three are lucky to find the loves of their lives now; strong women who lead them and their children along when spirits flag.

The 1930s leaves its mark: Tom is out of money and certain prospects, after building his mother a new home on Six Nations Reserve and other generousities; Jack becomes unemployed, breaks down briefly, and sells his track medals to feed his family; and all of this as Pearson works to stem the tide of fascism and the Depression from his London office.

Tom's early, isolated death in 1949 echoes deeply in the lives of Jack and Lester.

As 'Mike' fights to build a compassionate, progressive nation for the world to work with, Jack unwittingly becomes mentor and hero to a new generation of athletes. He enjoys a quiet, renewed fame, in a nation taking steps into the future imagined by Lester B. Pearson.

Do they finally meet face-to-face after being brought together again, by an interview? In late 1968, when Pearson retires as PM and Jack relaxes at home, long-retired and enjoying his grandkids we wonder if yes, they do; to remember lost youth, Tom Longboat, and a time in their lives that held the power to define, for all time.

I always dreamed of being one of you,

Pearson says to Tait.

Mike, you always were. But you ran faster and farther than any of us thought you would. (laughs) All we could do was read the papers, watch from a distance... and wonder how you did it.

Funny, that's exactly how I watched you and Tom when I was a kid.

The story ends, under closing credits, amid the ringing echoes of a shared legacy both men leave behind — with Tom — including among their children, grandchildren and great-children.

This story never seems to end.

No wonder... because girls wonder too.



Lynn Kanuka-Williams, Olympic medallist

Boys Wonder – a filmed entertainment property

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