EXERCISE P1/P2-1  ♦ The comma and unnecessary commas: Guided practice

Edit the following essay by adding commas where they are needed and removing unnecessary commas. The numbers in the margin refer to relevant rules in sections P1 and P2 of A Writer's Reference, Seventh Edition. The first revision has been done for you; answers to this exercise appear in the back of this book.

If a boy wanted to join the football team at Carlisle Indian School, he had to go through a difficult test. Any boy who wanted to be on the team had to stand at one of the goal lines; all the first-string players stood around the field. When the ball was punted to the new boy, he had to catch it and try to get all the way to the other end zone with it. The team members tried to stop him before he could get very far. Only a few players had ever gotten as far as the fifty-yard line so “Pop” Warner, coach at the Carlisle Indian School considered it a good test.

One day a quiet Native American boy surprised Pop. The boy caught the ball, started running, wheeled away from the first players who tried to stop him, shook off the others and ran the ball all the way to the opposite goal line. Convinced that the player's success was an accident, the coach ordered him to run the play again. Brusquely, the coach spoke to the players, and reminded them that this workout was supposed to be tackling practice. Jim, the nineteen-year-old, six-footer, simply said “Nobody tackles Jim.” Then he ran the ball to the goal line a second time.

Well, almost no one tackled Jim Thorpe successfully for many years. Life itself got him down and made him fumble more often than his football opponents did, but, he was usually able to recover and go on. The first blow was the death of his twin brother while the two boys were still in grade school. This tragedy was followed by others; by the time Jim was twenty-five, his mother and his father had also died. They left him a Native American heritage: His father was half Irish and half Native American and his mother was the granddaughter of a famous, Native American warrior named Chief Black Hawk.
Fortunately or unfortunately, along with his Native American heritage came great pride and stoicism. That pride kept him silent when the greatest blow of all came: He was forced to return the Olympic medals he had won in 1912 because he was declared to be not an amateur. He dealt stoically with his personal tragedies. When infantile paralysis struck his son Jim Thorpe disappeared for a few days to deal with the tragedy alone. His stoicism also saw him through a demotion to the minor leagues and sad years of unemployment and poverty before his death.

Even death's tackle may not have been totally successful: After Jim Thorpe's death his Olympic medals were returned, and a town was named after him.
EXERCISE P1/P2-2  The comma
To read about this topic, see sections P1 and P2 in A Writer’s Reference, Seventh Edition.

A Insert commas where they are needed with coordinating conjunctions in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, mark it “OK.” Example:

Coach Warner was impressed with the new player’s skill, and he looked for a chance to try him in an actual game.

1. Jim passed Coach Warner’s test but he did not get to play right away.
2. Then in one game a player was injured and Coach Warner sent Jim in.
3. At first, no one but Jim and the coach believed that Jim could play well enough.
4. He lost five yards the first time he got the ball but the next time he ran sixty-five yards for a touchdown.
5. His sports career began with that game and included major honors in track, lacrosse, baseball, and football.

B Insert commas where they are needed after an introductory element, in a series, and with coordinate adjectives. If a sentence is correct, mark it “OK.” Example:

After trying to tackle Thorpe only once, Jim’s most famous opponent never played football again.

6. In a game against Army, Thorpe had the ball.
7. One Army player tried to tackle Jim, failed, injured his knee in the process and had to be helped from the field.
8. That strong confident player said in later years, “Thorpe gained ground; he always gained ground.”
9. Although the injured player was never able to play football again he became famous in other ways.
EXERCISE P1/P2-4 ♦ The comma

To read about this topic, see sections P1 and P2 in *A Writer’s Reference*, Seventh Edition.

Edit the following paragraphs to correct the use of commas. The first revision has been done for you. You should add ten more commas.

When the Amateur Athletic Union ruled that 1912 Olympic winner Jim Thorpe had not been an amateur at the time he won his medals, several consequences followed. Once the ruling was formally stated, Jim Thorpe’s name was erased from the Olympic records. In addition he had to return his medals. Friends wanted him to fight the AAU ruling but he was too proud to do so.

During the next sixteen years that Jim played football was quite different from what it is today. Players then had no league, no formal schedule, no helmet requirements and often no salaries. Then representatives of eight concerned teams met to form a league. The organization they formed which was called the American Professional Football Association later became the National Football League; Jim Thorpe was its first president.

Jim’s playing declined with the years until on November 30, 1929 an Associated Press story described him as “a mere shadow of his former self.” No longer able to play sports Thorpe had to dig ditches during the Depression years. When the 1932 Olympics were held in Los Angeles California he could not afford to buy a ticket.
EXERCISE P1/P2-5  ♦ Unnecessary commas
To read about this topic, see sections P1 and P2 in *A Writer's Reference*, Seventh Edition.

Each of the following sentences contains one unnecessary comma. Delete the comma that is not needed.
Example:

> Along with other bad news about Thorpe, newspaper stories reported that he drank too much and that drinking caused his second marriage to go wrong.

1. After Jim Thorpe’s death, his friends worked to have his medals restored, and to get his name back on the list of Olympic winners.

2. Knowing that they would not be happy, until the AAU and the Olympic committees changed their minds, his friends made repeated appeals.

3. The AAU acted first, reversing its position some years later, (in 1973) by saying that Thorpe’s titles should be restored.

4. The American Olympic Committee agreed two years later, but, it was not until 1982 that the International Olympic Committee voted to restore Jim’s titles.

5. New, Olympic medals were presented to Thorpe’s children in a 1983 ceremony in Los Angeles, California.

6. However, the International Olympic Committee, did not erase the names of the second-place finishers.

7. Even though Thorpe had beaten the other “winners,” his friends had to accept the fact, that Jim would be listed only as a co-champion.

8. In the hearts of Jim’s supporters remains the honest, firm conviction, that Jim should be listed as the sole winner of each of the races he won.

9. They thought that the International Olympic Committee’s reversing its position, restoring the titles, and awarding Thorpe’s medals to his children, were not enough.

10. It is not likely that there will be any further action, such as, erasing the other winners’ names.
EXERCISE P1/P2-7 ♦ The comma and unnecessary commas: Guided review

Edit the following paragraphs by adding commas where they are needed and removing commas where they are not needed. The numbers in the margin refer to relevant rules in sections P1 and P2 of A Writer’s Reference, Seventh Edition. The first revision has been done for you.

Quarrels about one of America’s greatest athletes, Jim Thorpe, continue. Even though the decision about his Olympic standing has been made, other quarrels about him remain. After Jim Thorpe died his wife had to choose a burial place. Everyone assumed he would be buried in his home state of Oklahoma, but, his wife made other arrangements. Some people from Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, made her an offer. They said, that they wanted Jim buried in their town. Having his body there would make more tourists want to come to their small, Pennsylvania town. They talked of a burial place, a Jim Thorpe Museum and a hospital in his memory. They also offered to change the name of the town from Mauch Chunk to Jim Thorpe.

Mrs. Thorpe, who wanted a memorial for Jim, agreed to these proposals, and gave Jim’s body to the town. It is probable that at the core of her decision was the desire for Jim Thorpe to be remembered. After some negotiation, the agreement was concluded and the town is now on the map as “Jim Thorpe.”

Jim’s wife, not his children, made the agreement. His children, seven sons and daughters, wanted his body buried in Oklahoma. They wanted the body to be given a traditional Native American burial. They wanted the town to give back their father’s body. Jack Thorpe, one of the sons, said to a Sports Illustrated writer in 1982 “Dad’s spirit is still roaming.” In Jim Thorpe’s family pride is still part of the Thorpe heritage. The family has not given up the struggle. Other people have also asked the townspeople to change their minds.

Jim Thorpe lived a tough, honest, gifted, and controversial, life. Even if his records are someday broken, he will remain a legend of the American sports world.