

NOVEMBER

A close-up photograph of a torn, yellow and black price tag. The tag is rectangular with a black background and yellow text. The number '10' is large and bold, and the word 'CENTS' is written below it in a smaller, bold font. The tag is heavily worn, with significant tearing and fraying along the edges, particularly on the left side. The background is a light-colored, textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of paper.

12

10 CENTS

12

NOVEMBER

SPORTS

ACES

A vintage comic book cover for 'Sports Aces'. The title 'SPORTS' is in large, bold, red letters with a black outline, and 'ACES' is in smaller, bold, red letters with a black outline. The word 'NOVEMBER' is in small, black, sans-serif capital letters. The price '10 CENTS' is in yellow, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a black background. The number '12' is in large, bold, red letters with a black outline. The background is a light, textured yellow. There is a small illustration of a person's arm and hand holding a card, and a small 'ACE' logo in the bottom right corner.

ACES



THE FOURTH STRIKE



JOHN WILSON

GRIDIRO GRAVEYA

Gripping Football

By **DUANE YAR**

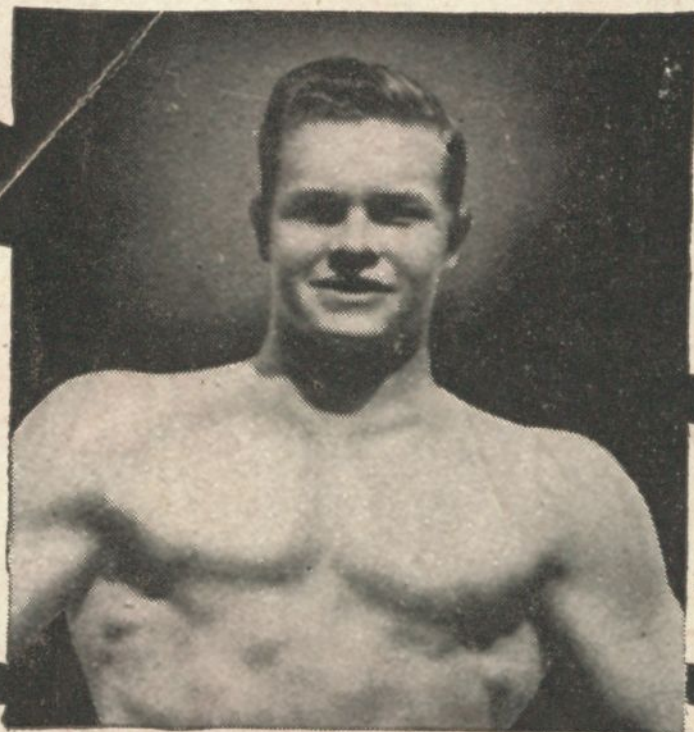
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a a postcard

HE Mailed This Coupon

J. G. O'BRIEN

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Cup Winner
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snapshot of one of
Charles Atlas' Cali-
fornian pupils.



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J. G. O'Brien
Please print or write plainly

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J. G. O'Brien.

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12 SPORTS ACES

Vol. 5

November, 1941

No. 3

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | THE FOURTH STRIKE (Novelet) John Wilson
Fate's last blow heads Punch Holm for the long trek into oblivion. | 6 |
| 2 | PUG CUB W. H. Temple
A slugger gets led to slaughter. | 28 |
| 3 | SPIKES ON THE PROD Giles A. Lutz
This harrier's flying feet carry him into his own man-made hazard. | 37 |
| 4 | DON'T GET HURT Ned Cady
Great athletes know how to avoid lumps and bumps. | 45 |
| 5 | GRIDIRON GRAVEYARD (Novelet) Duane Yarnell
Rick Hillman tries to start life again—from a pigskin cemetery. | 48 |
| 6 | BASE HITS BY REQUEST M. M. Tinney
You can't mix base hits with bad blood. | 63 |
| 7 | BLOCKING SPOT BLUES Theodore J. Roemer
To line up the touchdowns, Keg Dittman has to take himself out of the scoring position. | 74 |
| 8 | MIRACLE MOUNDSMAN Mac Davis
A new kind of hurling cunning is needed to change jeers into cheers. | 85 |
| 9 | NOT GRAPPLING FOR GLORY Charles Coombs
This mat bantam is driven by a hate-ridden revenge. | 87 |
| 10 | PIGSKIN CHOPPING BLOCK Jay Thorburn
A furniture mover takes to heaving cleated linemen. | 96 |
| 11 | THRILL-AND-SPILL MEN Theodore Stratton
Keep your eyes on the new grid stars. | 99 |
| 12 | STOOGES TO A SKY-CLIMBER Richard Brister
Pole-vaulting Chick Levering goes into a heart-breaking tailspin. | 103 |

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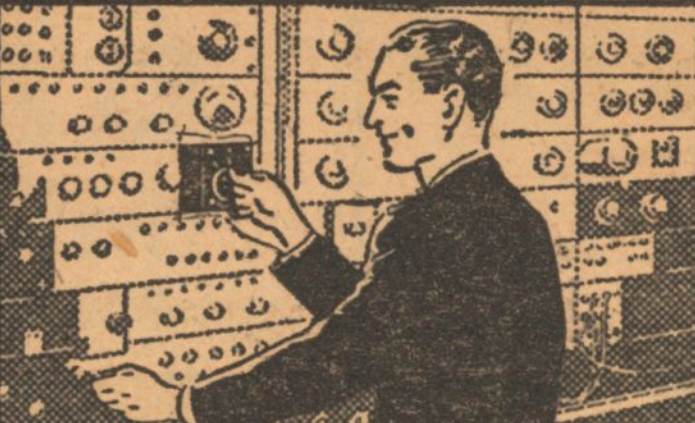
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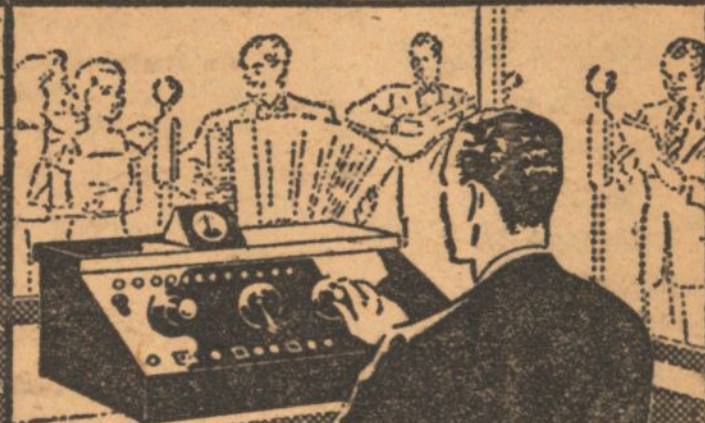
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The Fourth Strike



He slid in hard under the throw.

By John Wilson

CHAPTER I

THE blow was not unexpected. It had been coming a long time. Punch Holm didn't know why he should feel a thousand little hammers pounding around his heart. This was the

moment to confront the situation boldly. And yet Punch Holm, diamond veteran that he was, felt hurt and let-down.

He strode into the office of "Judge" Connery, owner of the big league Packers, and tried to appear nonchalant. He looked at Connery and saw the small,

Fate slammed over four strikes on Punch Holm. And the last one headed him for the long trek into oblivion.

*Great Baseball
Novelet*



hard eyes glowing triumphantly out of the large fleshy face. Punch Holm stood in front of the huge desk and waited for the blast. It came.

"This is it, Holm," Connery said flatly. "You're through as manager of the Packers. The club is down in the sixth spot and that's explanation enough. I

warned you, Holm, what was comin' and you wouldn't listen. Now you're washed up. What the Packers need is a manager who will adhere to the club policies more closely."

Punch Holm's eyes narrowed a little. Sure, he was washed up—and proud to be, under the circumstances. It wasn't

Connery who had hired him as player-manager for the Packers two seasons back. It had been old Barney Raeburn. But Connery had been gunning for his scalp ever since he had turned down a "proposition" to cross old Barney.

In his first season at the helm of the Packers, Punch had lifted the club from the depths into second place. Then only a week before the current season started, they had laid old Barney in clover.

Connery, a younger man with plenty of outside influence and a long arm, had gradually bored his way into the Packer organization. Now he became the new owner of the club. It was bitter irony that the man old Barney Raeburn had fought so stubbornly should gain the whip-hand by being the highest bidder for Barney's stock.

Punch Holm looked straight into Connery's eyes. He said shortly:

"I ain't beefin', Connery. I had my crack at the job and it didn't pan out. You can't manage a team from the front office and from the diamond, too. Mebbe I'm glad to get out from under. I'm still a ballplayer and I can play for somebody else. If you got the little pink ticket ready, I'll be leavin'. There's a smell here and it's right behind your desk and I don't like it."

Connery shifted his huge bulk in the chair and his eyes were like burnt holes in white paper. Then a slow, tantalizing grin flicked over his lips.

"Not so fast, Holm," he said tightly. "You'll play shortstop for the Packers and like it. You've slipped plenty but I have no idea of releasing you."

"Slipped?" Punch said incredibly. "I hit .346 last season. They picked me on the All-Star team and I couldn't have been too awful. Unless somebody's kiddin' me, I'm doin' all right with the averages this season. I'd hardly call that slipping."

"Figures don't always tell the whole story," Connery said quickly. "Tuffy Greer is the best pivot man in the loop, and still the double plays have been scarce. I say you're slowin' up, Holm, and the team has suffered. Further than that, I'm not gonna argue the point." Connery

swung abruptly forward in his chair, pressed a button and into the speaking tube on his desk, said: "Tell Tuffy Greer to come in."

CONNERY gave Punch a wry, side-long glance. "I want to caution you against making any wild statements to the press. You're still a member of the Packers and will regret any statement you can't back up."

The lines tightened around Punch Holm's mouth. He could give the press a story that would open their eyes. He could tell them how Tuffy Greer, the Packer second sacker, had conspired with Connery to undermine his job. If the Packers hadn't been scoring double plays in the clutch, it was because Tuffy Greer had the knack of expertly messing them up.

Punch could tell them too, how Greer had roused the team against him, split their ranks with dissension. It had all been a very nice frameup, the way these two bandits had put the screws to him.

There were other angles. But it would all sound like sour grapes, because Tuffy Greer was to become the next skipper of the Packers. The public would give little credence to anything that Punch might say.

"You needn't worry about me shootin' off my mouth to the papers," Punch said quietly. "That's not my way of doin' things, Connery."

The door opened and Tuffy Greer came in. Tuffy was wide and squat and wore clothes that had a voice all of their own. He was wearing his party suit and was coming in to get his cake.

"Tuffy is takin' over the team," Connery said curtly. "I expect you to give him your full co-operation, Holm."

Punch looked at Tuffy. The second baseman's eyes were pools of mockery. This was Tuffy Greer's big moment and he was making the most of it.

"I'm willing to let bygones be bygones," Punch said. "I'll be in there plugging—like I always was, Tuffy."

He put out his hand but Tuffy Greer happened to be looking elsewhere. He was looking at Connery making an exit from the room. The door closed behind Connery

and a brittle laugh rolled off Tuffy's lips. "Save that pretty speech," he rasped. "I been waitin' for this chance a long time. This job was all sewed up for me once before. But the old man shelled out a fancy price and hired ya. Okay, I'm in the driver's seat now and that's all that counts. Get ready to pay the piper, Holm, and plenty."

Punch laughed a little. "I'm a ball-player, Tuffy. I don't go 'round looking for trouble. But if it comes . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders significantly and started toward the door. He went down into the lobby, swarming now with reporters. They huddled around Punch, flung a rapid-fire string of queries at him.

"Sorry, boys," Punch parried. "But you'll hafta get your story from Connery"—he smiled wryly. "Yeah, he's up there with Tuffy Greer now."

They knew what he meant and there was a scramble for the elevators. But a couple of old-timers lingered a moment, watched Punch stroll out into the night.

"Old Barney picked the kid to succeed him," one of them commented. "I got a hunch that the real story is out there, where old Barney must be turning over in his grave."

YOU'D never guess Punch Holm had been a manager of a big league outfit. He was a youthful veteran—not much over the twenty-five-year mark. He was a nice looking fellow, lithe and lean and tall with deep intent eyes and a sure, calm confidence. They'd called Punch Holm the "boy wonder" when he had entered the majors, and not without reason. A kid of eighteen, he had made good from the very beginning.

The slight breeze that was in the night air felt good against Punch's burning cheeks. As he walked, his eyes scanned the faces of the passersby. He did it almost unconsciously as though he was trying to pick out a familiar face.

Occasionally, his glance would lengthen into a stare and his eyes would glitter with a peculiar hardness. But always the hardness would go out of his eyes as quickly as it had come into them. And

Punch would shake his head, disappointed.

Some day, some place, he would find that person whose face was indelibly burned like a scar in his memory. It had become an obsession with Punch. He would find him and the link that had once been so abruptly broken in his life would be mended. Everything was secondary to that, even baseball.

When Punch Holm went into the locker room the next day, the noise, the chatter suddenly subsided. The players looked at him with fixed stares that were hostile and cold but nobody spoke. It wasn't till Punch had started shucking into his monkey suit that Biggie Bevan, the Packer prime sacker, broke the silence.

"Yesterday you was the boss," he said huskily. "Today you're a bum. It must be quite a come-down to hafta associate with us common ballplayers. You don't get any sympathy from us, fella."

Punch got to his feet. He looked at Bevan but what he said was intended for all of them.

"You wouldn't play ball for me," he said calmly. "Mebbe you will for Tuffy. You got him in there and how you did it is your own business. The bunch of you were pals of Tuffy, and you hated my guts. Okay, so you helped kick me downstairs. But it gripes you because you still gotta stand havin' me around."

"Easy on the lip," Bevan sneered. "Yuh ain't the big shot now and there's nothin' that can stop me from laying a fist in your beezers."

The words were hardly out of Biggie Bevan's mouth when he let fly a looping right-hander. The blow grazed Punch's jaw and he drove in and tied the ponderous first sacker in a knot.

"Nice goin'," Punch said sweetly. "You swing your hands like you had a bat in 'em. You never could hit the side of a barn door, Bevan."

From another section of the room, a booming voice slammed against Punch's eardrums. Tuffy Greer's spikes clattered on the concrete.

"Startin' trouble already, huh, Holm?"

Greer ripped out. "It's gonna cost ya fifty and this is only the beginning."

Of a sudden, a harsh gale of laughter rattled the walls. It dawned on Punch then that he had been tricked into a brawl with Bevan. It had been planned so that Tuffy Greer could drum up an "incident" and plaster a fine on him.

It wasn't easy to go out there and play ball for a pack that hated his guts. Down deep it hurt Punch. There was dust in his eyes and a peculiar tear in his heart. But he was grinning when he trotted out to the shortfield. He darted deep to the fringe of the grass to snare the lead-off batter's grass-cutter and whip the ball into Biggie Bevan's mitt.

The first Bison player had been retired and Punch had showed the Packers that he was in there scrapping. Scrapping for what? So that Tuffy Greer's début as manager would be a success. So that Connerly could tell the press that Tuffy's leadership had finally turned the Packers into a winning ball club. Fighting when it hurt to fight because he knew no other way to play. Winning to lose. A diamond clown who had a job to do and was letting the chips fall where they may. Punch was a sucker and he knew it. But keep plugging, sucker. There will be no reward.

WITH one away, the Bisons jammed the hassocks in the third inning. The hitter slammed a scorcher over second. It would go for a "hit" in the scorebooks. So don't be a fool and try to stop it, sucker. Make a phony try for the ball and nobody will know the difference. That was Tuffy Greer's old technique. Now is the time to give him a taste of his own medicine.

But you can't break the instinct of a real ballplayer that easily. Punch Holm half dived at the skidding white pellet, lashing his gloved hand across his chest. Off balance he snared the ball, flipped it to Tuffy Greer. The relay to first was true and deadly, completing the double conversion.

It was a marvelous play by a great shortfielder at his best. Almost bitterly, Punch reflected that Tuffy had gotten the

ball away like nobody's business. He hadn't played that way when Punch held the reins. The difference was that Tuffy Greer had taken off the wraps. He could play a nice brand of ball when he was playing for himself.

Batting in the third slot, Punch watched the ball ride in there, letter-high and sizzling. He lashed the hickory around and there was a resounding crack. The ball sailed deep and into the upper tier of stands. He was giving them a run for their money, stealing the headlines that would naturally go to Tuffy Greer.

Punch blasted a double on his next trip to the platter. He did it with three aboard and cleaned the sacks. He went five for four that day and started three sparkling double plays afield. The guy was truly great and the Packers drubbed the Bisons, 7-0.

During the next week, Punch Holm continued to play a good, consistent brand of ball.

Glancing at the bulletin board in the clubhouse one day, Punch noticed that an off-day in the schedule had been filled. The Packers had carded an exhibition game with the Class "A" loop Barons, one of their farm clubs. Punch was standing there when Tuffy Greer trundled over, a look of amusement in his eyes.

"We been hearin' things about the kid playin' shortfield for the Barons," Tuffy said lowly. "His name is Danny Crane and he's burning up the league. Mebbe ya heard of him, Holm. The scout tells me the kid knows you from way back. He ain't no fan of yours."

Somehow, Tuffy Greer's words had the effect of ice-cold water being dashed in Punch's face. Yes, he and Danny Crane had met before. Punch culled from memory a lanky, blond kid, built like a greyhound and twinkling-fast, scooping up grounders in a vacant lot that he batted at him.

There had been a third person, too. A girl—Danny's sister—the lone girl in the neighborhood to boast owning a baseball glove. A regular hoyden but pretty as pretty could be. She had insisted that Punch hit grounders at her, too. And Punch at times had purposely socked the

ball out of her range so that she had to chase it.

It had been a nice picture. But fate had turned it topsy-turvy. Inwardly, Punch flinched at the thought of that exhibition game with the Barons. For a moment he considered begging off the assignment.

However, on second thought, Punch realized that he could expect no quarter from Tuffy Greer. Facing Danny Crane was certain to light up the dark, hidden corners of Punch's mind. But in that darkness there was no guilt. Only pain and remorse and bitter hurt. Perhaps Danny would understand. And the girl—well, she always had understood in the past.

"Yes, I know Danny," Punch said slowly. "We're both from the same town. The kid musta come along fast."

Tuffy Greer's lips twisted in a smirk. "If he's as good as they say he is—you'll keep toeing the mark, Holm. The guy will make good infield insurance. Just in case ya get any funny ideas."

CHAPTER II

THIS was the day, the place where fate was to strike Punch Holm a second time. The ball field, home grounds of the Barons, was jammed to its bulging confines. And Punch Holm walked unaware into an ironic trap which was to affect his whole diamond career.

Punch crouched in the on-deck circle and gazed at the blond kid playing short-stop for the Barons. It seemed hard to believe that this was the same Danny Crane that Punch had once known. The kid's lanky frame had filled out. His shoulders were heavier and he looked husky and solid.

There was one man on the basepaths when Punch stepped to the plate. He glanced down short and the blond kid was surveying him with a boring gaze. The kid moved in on the grass and his jaw was set at a grim, determined angle.

A strike whizzed past Punch. He swung on the next ball, rocketing it between short and third. It looked like a base smash till the blond kid took to his legs. He swooped down, snagged the pill with

a nice finesse. Without breaking his stride, he winged the ball from his shoelaces to the midway station. The second baseman's heave to first killed off Punch and it was a double play. It gave the home fans plenty to holler about.

The side retired, Punch crossed the blond kid's path on the way to his position.

"Nice play, Danny," Punch commented. "You always could go and get 'em."

Danny Crane looked at Punch and his eyes were like a couple of chunks of ice.

"Yeah, it was a nice play," he said grimly. "And there's plenty more where that one came from. I'm a pretty good shortstopper, Holm. You helped make one outa me. Now I'm gonna take your job away and enjoy doin' it."

"I was hopin' you'd understand, kid," Punch said softly. "I thought mebbe—"

"Understand!" Danny cut in bitterly. "All I understand is that my old man is home in a wheel chair, paralyzed. You put him there, Holm. You slugged him for some lousy dough."

Punch winced. It had been foolish to hope that Danny might have seen things differently. After all, the police had found the dough on him. And the evidence had all pointed to Punch's guilt. You couldn't expect Danny Crane to think otherwise where his own flesh and blood was concerned. The kid would always go on hating him, being bitter unless—

Punch shook his head a little and stooped methodically to pick up a practice grounder. He almost pegged the ball over Biggie Bevan's head. Joey Tandler, a rookie moundsman, experienced no trouble in setting the Barons down in order.

In the second frame, the first batter touched him for a two-bagger. That brought Danny Crane to the plate. Punch spat in his glove and crouched forward, his eyes fixed on the blond kid.

Danny looked loose as ashes up there. He belted the second pitch, whipping into the ball with a sweet, flowing motion. The pellet went on a line into left field. It was a long single but Danny rounded first base and went thundering toward second.

The outfielder pegged the ball into Punch's glove. His spikes flashing dan-

gerously, the blond kid crashed into Punch, knocking him loose from the ball and sending him plunging and twisting to the ground. Daggers of searing pain bolted up Punch's leg and settled like a ball of fire in his knee.

Punch got to his feet slowly. He stared at Danny and the kid's eyes were hard and shining with conquest.

"That was a busher's trick," Punch said calmly. "I wouldn't try it again, Danny."

Then Tuffy Greer trudged over to the bag. He had a wide grin on his face. He cocked an eye at Punch.

"The kid knocked ya for a loop, Holm," he muttered. "He made ya look like an old man. He showed you stuff and you're beefin'."

Punch's hands balled into fists but he made no retort. He moved back to his position, hobbling a little. The next batter shot a hopper to his left and Punch was slow getting started. It went through into left field.

When Punch batted, he found the knee painful when he pivoted around. Punch went hitless besides having a brace of errors chalked up against him. It was Danny Crane who enjoyed the fruits of the afternoon. Danny played like a big leaguer and Punch looked like a busher.

IN THE clubhouse the knee was swollen and a stiffness had begun to set in. Punch put the heat lamp on the knee. Tuffy Greer sauntered over, his eyes shining darkly.

"The kid gave ya the works," Tuffy bit out. "He's a regular gashouser—my kind of ballplayer. I'm seein' that he gets a contract."

"Danny will make a great ballplayer if he's handled properly," Punch remarked quietly. "A lot depends on you."

"Ya don't hafta worry about me handlin' him," Greer said sneeringly. "I'll make him the best in the business. Better than you ever were, Holm."

Tuffy's eyes stared for a moment at the swollen knee. He shrugged his shoulders derisively, turned his back on Punch.

"Better not miss any games, Holm,"

he flung over his shoulder. "I might forget to put ya back in again."

The heat treatment reduced the swelling considerably and the knee felt pretty good when Punch put on his street clothes. Hell, it was only a bruise and in a couple of days it would be okay. Knocks and bruises were part of the game.

Punch went through the players' exit. He started to swing up the avenue when behind him a girl's voice said:

"Punch—Punch Holm."

Punch's throat felt dry and there was a sudden lump there because he recognized the girl's voice. He turned and looked into blue, shining eyes, wide-set and probing. The girl's slim, lovely figure seemed to quiver a little. For a moment, Punch stared at Ann Crane, a stunned look in his face.

"Ann, I didn't think you'd come," he said brokenly. "I thought you'd feel the same way about me as Danny."

"I had to come, Punch," she said softly. "I never believed any of those awful things they said."

She paused visibly. Punch signalled a cruising cab.

"We'll take a little spin, Ann," he said. "I guess there's a lot of things we've got to talk about."

They got into the cab. Ann looked at Punch, her eyes upon him inquiringly. "I always thought you'd write, Punch. That somehow you could explain—"

"I couldn't bring myself to write, Ann," he said soberly. "Not after I'd been to reform school. They said I blackjacked your father. That I was working with the crew that robbed him of the payroll. When I came out, I got a job playin' ball. That's all I knew how to do."

The girl shook her blond head.

"But you weren't guilty, Punch," she said stanchly. "I never believed that you were."

"When they picked me up," Punch said slowly, "I gave them a phony name and I had dough in my pocket. I couldn't—I wouldn't for my own reasons explain how it got there. I guess you couldn't blame them for sending me away."

Punch sank back into the seat, stared momentarily out onto the road. His mind

shuttled back across the span of years. It was on Thursday nights that Ann's dad used to make up the week's payroll for the lumber company. On this particular Thursday Punch, strolling past the company office, had noticed three men emerge from the street shadows and make an entrance.

Suspicious, he had trailed them into the office. The lights had been snapped out and a brawl was already in session. In the shuffle, a necklace of light from a flashlight had been focused on Ann's dad. In that brief moment, Punch had glimpsed the face of one of the stickup men. He had never forgotten that face because a moment later that man had slugged Ann's dad, dropping him unconscious and bleeding to the floor.

The siren of a police car blaring, Punch had found himself alone. Suddenly he had realized that he himself had a large sum of money in his own pocket. Who could say that he had not abetted in the holdup? There were bound to be a lot of questions asked. And for a good reason Punch would not want to answer some of them. It was better that he was not on the scene.

PUNCH had fled out into the darkness. But the authorities had picked him up later. He had tried to give them a phony name. They found five hundred dollars on him and that had been all that was needed to convict him.

"Your cut of the melon, eh, kid?" one of them had said accusingly. "They did pretty good by you."

Punch's face was gray and there was a tired droop to his eyes when he turned toward Ann.

"I don't care how much proof they had," she was saying. "You didn't steal that money. You didn't slug dad. It was unfair and cruel to say that you did. Tell me you didn't, Punch, and I'll believe you."

"No, I didn't," Punch said firmly. "The dough I had on me was a bonus for signing a baseball contract."

Ann Crane stared wide-eyed. "But why didn't you tell them that, Punch? They wouldn't have sent you away."

"Mother never wanted me to be a ball-player," Punch said solemnly. "She thought it was too much of a gamble. It's a short life and even shorter if you don't make the grade. I decided to be one anyway but I didn't want her to know about it. The five hundred would give her the medical care she needed. That's why I gave the cops a phony name. I didn't think they'd do anything to me. It doesn't matter now. She died while I was in the school. She always thought it was a regular school—a college. It was better that way."

Ann was biting hard on her lip.

"I knew I was right," she exclaimed. "I knew it. But Danny, he's young and impulsive. He's a good kid, though, Punch. He spends his salary trying to help dad to walk again. A chance with the Packers means so much to him—to all of us. If he makes the grade it will mean more money. And maybe dad will be able to have that operation then. But I wish it wasn't with the Packers that he was getting his chance."

"Then there is a chance that your dad will walk again?"

She nodded. "A slim one. The blow caused a cerebral hemorrhage. But the brain tissue was not destroyed. That's why there still is a chance."

"I've got something socked away," Punch said. "I wish you'd let me—"

"It's better the other way, Punch," she broke in. Then: "You'd better tell the driver to stop here. Home is just around the corner."

Punch signaled the driver to stop. They faced each other, their eyes locking. It was funny, after all these years—though they had been only youngsters then—that they still felt the same way about each other. Then Punch took her in his arms briefly, kissed her. There was something in Ann's eyes as she turned away, put her hand on the door handle.

But the door suddenly swung open and Danny stood there, his eyes stony and slitted. He took one step into the cab and his fist shot out, landing sharply against Punch's jaw.

"That's only a warning, Holm," he said hoarsely. "The next time I'll beat the

daylights outa you. And I can do it, too." Then the door banged shut in Punch's face.

The Packers pulled up stakes and started an invasion of the Western half of the circuit. They had already lifted themselves one notch in the standings since Tuffy Greer had taken command. With their eyes set on the first division they took on the Lions for a three-game series.

In the first inning the Packers opened fire on the Lion hurler. The lead-off batter doubled and Punch brought him home with a single. That lone counter stood up for five innings. Punch showed no sign of the knee injury. He accepted three chances and each time threw the runner out. None of them were difficult plays, the balls being batted almost directly at him.

With two away in the sixth and runners in scoring position, the batter spanked a sizzler through the middle. Punch whirled to his left, twisted and swooped to make the pick-up. The right knee buckled under him and a dozen tiny bombshells exploded simultaneously in the knee. The ball skimmed past his glove and the Lions scored two runs.

The Lions were set down without any more damage and Punch dragged his feet to the water cooler.

"So that's the great Punch Holm," Danny Crane said with mock sarcasm. "He bats in one run and donates two. It must be fine to grow fat on your rep."

PUNCH'S mouth tightened in a grim, straight line. He looked at the line of faces in the dugout, at their hostile stares, and knew what they were thinking. They didn't trust him, not a single one of them. Their stares as much as told him that he had purposely bobbed one in the clutch.

There were runners on first and second when Punch leveled his stick at the rival moundsman. Punch lashed out at a low curve on the outside corner. He swung and the needles lanced through his knee and there was a hitch in his swing. The ball rolled meagerly to the mound. Then bingo! the pitcher started a double play.

Punch looked bad going to left in the eighth frame. The ball slipped off the heel of his glove and it led to another run for the Lions. Tuffy Greer was purple with anger when he stomped into the dugout.

"Get acquainted with the scenery around short," he snapped at Danny. "I got a hunch you're gonna be seein' a lot of it."

Danny Crane grinned. "I'll do better than wave at 'em when they come down my way. I'm no flour-flusher."

It happened the next afternoon when the Packers dropped their second straight to the Lions. Punch had two boots charged against him. His play was ragged and slow on almost every ball that was hit to either side of him.

The climax came in the eighth inning when Tuffy Greer flipped Punch a double-play ball. Punch stabbed the bag with his right foot, wheeled to make the throw to first. The knee half buckled under him. His throw was into the dirt and the Lions scored what turned out to be the winning run.

"I been waitin' for ya to pull some smart stuff," Tuffy Greer snorted in the clubhouse. "Ya can't work that old army stuff on me, Holm. Startin' tomorrow ya ride the bench." Greer's lips twisted in a smirk. "Get two hundred smackers up, Holm. That's what your little act is gonna cost ya."

It was robbery, a lousy deal. But there was a sort of consolation in it for Punch. He thought how much sticking with the Packers meant to Danny and it didn't matter that the kid was getting a whack at his job. There was room on the club for both of them. A guy can't play ball with a bum knee, anyway. A rest was the cure Punch needed.

He sat on the bench and watched Danny make the most of his opportunity. Danny was hitting the ball hard and played a flashy game in the field.

After a week of doctoring the knee, Punch began to get worried. There was still some swelling on it and baking it under the lamps didn't seem to help much. At times, the knee felt as good as ever.

But in the pre-game stunts when Punch put it to the test, grave doubts began to assail him. He could never be certain when the knee wasn't going to buckle under him. It began to undermine his confidence, make him a little panicky.

He had the club physician examine the knee. When it was all over Punch was told to forget about playing ball for a while. A week passed and when Punch hadn't received any further report he dropped around to the doc again.

"I filed a complete report with Connery several days ago," the doctor said. "In the meantime, I've been told not to discuss your injury with you."

"What kind of a runaround is this?" Punch demanded. "Since when can't a guy find out what's wrong with him?"

The doctor nodded sympathetically. "I don't know who can be more concerned than you. I can't see anything wrong by telling you that it's a serious injury, Punch. It may seriously affect your future."

Punch swallowed hard. "Is it that bad, doc?"

The doctor nodded and didn't say anything more. Punch went out and saw another doctor and he knew the whole truth a couple days later. When he came out of the office, his face was pale and his hand moved shakily across his forehead.

Everything the club physician had said was confirmed, and then some. In plain language, Punch had something akin to a trick-knee. It might respond to treatment. Then again, it could be permanently stiff. There was no assurance that the knee wouldn't continue to buckle under him when he made a quick pivot or twisted suddenly. Hanging over Punch would always be the possibility that each game was his last.

Punch smiled thinly at the thought of being a has-been when he should have been pounding into his ripest years. It all seemed like a bad dream. He had moved too swiftly to the top, cut the corners and been a front-runner. And those guys seldom win races.

It was doubly ironic because Danny Crane had unknowingly accomplished what he had set out to do. Punch Holm's

diamond career hung by a thread because the kid had smashed into him, wrecked his knee in a meaningless exhibition game. And Punch would never tell him the damage he had done that day. Well, the job playing shortstop for the Packers belonged to Danny now.

Punch walked back to the hotel, vaguely conscious of the cry of the newsboys. But he did hear finally and his head jerked up and the jumbled syllables poured into his ears like hot lead. He grabbed a newspaper and there it was in bold, black type, incredible but true.

"Packers Sell Punch Holm to Pelicans. Get One Hundred Thousand and Three Players for Ex-Manager. Connery Announces That Danny Crane Will Be Packers' Regular Shortstop. Says Holm Refused to Co-operate With Tuffy Greer."

CHAPTER III

PUNCH stood there, dazed and befuddled, his eyes bugging. Connery had sold him though fully aware of the bum knee. No ball club would shell out a dime for him under those circumstances. But Connery had unloaded him to the Pelicans before anybody caught wise to the seriousness of his injury. It was like selling a horse with a broken leg.

A cold knot of anger grew and tightened within Punch. He strode swiftly into the hotel lobby and up to the desk clerk.

"Tell Connery that Punch Holm is comin' up there," he said.

"I'm sorry but Mr. Connery has left word that he is not seeing anyone tonight," the clerk said. "But he did leave an envelope for you."

The clerk handed Punch an envelope and he ripped it open. In it was a train ducat, the salary owed him, and instructions to report to the Pelicans. Punch whirled angrily, brushed through the crowded lobby. He rode the elevator to the fifth floor and went to Connery's room and banged on the door. He banged till the club owner finally opened the door. Connery jammed his foot in Punch's path, tried to stop him from entering.

"Don't try any funny stuff," Punch

said fiercely, shoving Connery aside. "I'm not in a mood to be kidded."

"Get outa here, Holm," Connery said belligerently. "You have your orders to report to the Pelicans. There's nothing more to be said."

"Oh, yes there is," Punch said evenly. "I hope you've cashed that hundred-grand check, Connery. I hope you got it put away in a nice safe place. Because you might have to give it back."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talkin' about, Holm. Your sale to the Pelicans was perfectly legal. There were no clauses in the contract." A grin etched across his lips. "No clauses," he repeated significantly.

Punch's cheeks flamed at the implication. The Pelicans had made the deal thinking that he was in sound physical condition. There were no strings, no clauses in the contract that would allow them to cancel the deal should they discover otherwise. Connery had done a fine job of slicking the Pelicans.

"You had the doc's report about my knee," Punch said tersely. "Those X-rays don't lie. You suckered Rocky Clymer good."

"Go ahead and shoot your mouth off, Holm. Tell everybody that you got a flukey knee and you're finished." Connery laughed. "Of course, I'll admit nothing. It's a closed proposition and Rocky Clymer can holler his brains out. Suckers don't deserve breaks!"

Punch Holm's eyes were blazing and the cords along his jaw stood out like little ridges. He stepped toward Connery, saw his face go ghost-white, and Punch laughed.

"Here's something to remember me by, Connery. Love and kisses. . . ."

He drew back his right hand and let it burst alongside Connery's mouth. The blow toppled the club owner, sent him groveling to his knees. Punch slammed the door behind him.

That same night Punch Holm boarded a train. In his heart there was a peculiar pang. It took guts to walk in the beam of a past reputation and still pretend to be the same guy. He was being sold down

the river to a perennial second-division outfit. That didn't greatly matter.

But what did matter was Rocky Clymer. The veteran Pelican pilot had on numerous occasions called Punch one of the all-time great shortstoppers. It was no secret to baseball insiders that Rocky had been angling for Punch a long time. However, Rocky Clymer had been hamstrung by the club's policy of putting key players on the auction block to keep the team out of hock.

ALL that had changed now. Rocky Clymer was finally getting his chance to build a ball club instead of having to tear one down. And Punch thought of these things and a cold sweat chilled him down to the spine. Maybe the knee would stand up. Maybe it wasn't too much to hope for a miracle.

They met him at the train shed, the photographers and baseball writers and a lot of fans. It was wonderful the way they put the welcome mat out for him. And Punch stood there, a little dazed by it all, and tried to grin and forget about the lump that was in his throat.

A short, grizzled, red-faced man pushed his way through the crowd and thrust a horny hand in front of Punch. He had a square, rugged jaw and steel-gray eyes and a tongue that could be caustic and bitter. He was patient, but a driver, a fighter. One floundering ball club after another had not robbed Rocky Clymer of these qualities. He said:

"You're the stuff this ball club needs, Punch. Now we can start goin' places."

"I'll give 'em all the steam I got," Punch murmured.

"That's good enough for me."

The cameras clicked some more and Punch thought about that trick knee and winced. He felt like a heel standing there kidding them along and letting them hope for something that could never be.

"Let's get outa here, Rocky," he said. "It's a nice show, but they'll be wantin' me to make a speech pretty soon."

Rocky chuckled. He hustled Punch into a waiting cab. On the way to the ball park, Rocky said:

"I got a hustling bunch of guys and

they're ready for big things. All we need is a key man, a spark plug to get us goin'. And you're that guy, Punch."

There was a look in Rocky Clymer's eyes that belied his confidence. It was only there a second but it spoke volumes. It was easy for Punch to guess that Rocky didn't have forever to get into the pennant scramble.

"Mebbe it's none of my business," Punch said slowly, "but could it be that you're puttin' all your eggs in one basket, Rocky? Mebbe you haven't got all the time you need to develop this team."

Rocky's eyes clouded for a moment.

"What the hell," he said, shrugging, "I've been buying and trading and building long enough. They gimme this season to get some results. But I ain't worried. With you playin' shortfield we'll be right up there this season. And next year you can give this team back to the Indians."

Punch didn't say any more.

At the ball park, they gave Punch a new uniform with a big number 8 on it. He went out there with the rest of them to play the top-notch Bears. Before the game started, Rocky sauntered over to Punch.

"Pick yourself a spot and see how the wheels turn," he said. "I don't wanna rush ya into things. Tomorrow you start."

Punch sat through eight innings and saw a ball game. The Bears had their ace, Boots Roth, on the hill, but he wasn't having any picnic out there. The plucky Pelicans were all hustle and spirit and Rocky kept driving them all the way. It was a 1-1 game going into the ninth. Then the Bears bunched three hits and scored the tie-breaking run.

It appeared that the run would stand up. Boots Roth wiped out the first two batters on infield grounders in the Pelicans' half of the ninth. The third batter waited Boots Roth out and finally walked. A scratch single followed and the winning run was on the bags. Rocky Clymer came in off the coaching lines, his jaw clamped hard and his eyes fiery. He looked at Punch.

"Get up there and swing, Holm," he

snapped. That was Rocky's way on the diamond. He acted quick, decisively.

Punch went up there amid the staccato stamping of feet and the imploring voices of the fans. He waved his big stick at Boots Roth and the hurler didn't like it a bit, having Punch up there in the clutch. He toyed with the resin bag, scuffed his spikes in the dirt and finally snapped off a hook, low and on the outside.

There wasn't any doubt in Punch's mind that he wasn't going to get anything too good to cut at. The ball flashed down the alley, exploded in a blaze of white on the outside. That was exactly what Punch wanted it to do.

He shifted his feet slightly, slid his hands up a little on the hickory and belted the apple on a screaming line drive into right field. It smacked against the wall and the Pelicans had won a ball game, 3-2.

They jostled him good naturedly in the clubhouse. Rocky Clymer came in and he had a wide grin on his kisser.

"Atta way to poke 'em, Punch," he piped. "That hundred grand is startin' to pay daddy interest."

There was a ripple of laughter, but there was one man who did not crack a grin. And that was Punch. The acid test would come when he played regularly and had to pivot and twist and make jerky stops. Then he'd know definitely whether the knee would stand up or not.

FOR the next ten games, Punch played like his old self. He was hitting the ball solidly and often and making a lot of impossible stops. But all the time it was like living within the shadows of the guillotine.

The first bad omen came just before the Pelicans encountered the Packers. Punch darted in behind the mound, made a one-handed pick-up of a dribbler. His weight on his right knee, he whirled and tried for a force play at third. The old stabbing pain was there and his throw pulled the third sacker off the bag. Then he knew it had all been too good to last.

The Packers came in spoiling for trouble. Both clubs had been traveling at a fast clip and one of those kick-'em-and-

drag-'em-out series loomed. The Pelicans had Red Allison on the firing line and he set the Packers down in order in the first inning.

Eddie Colvin lashed a bingle into left to start things for the Pelicans. Another clean smack promptly followed, putting two men on the bases. Fog Devlin, serving them up for the Packers, gave the next batter three healthy whiffs of air.

Hitting in the clean-up slot, Punch set himself tensely. From the second base region Tuffy Greer's clipped syllables slammed into Punch's ears.

"Bear down on the tramp, Fog. He's all bluff up there."

From first base echoed Biggie Bevan's strident voice: "Collar the bum, Fog. Hit 'im in the head."

Punch's mouth was a grim, straight line. He wondered why Danny wasn't getting his five cents' worth in. He glanced down at short and then he knew. The kid's hatred went deeper than words and ran thicker than blood.

Then the ball was winging in there, a scorching speed ball, peppered with plenty of hop and dippy-stuff. Punch stayed with it, bit venomously into it. He smashed it down the third-base line. He went into first, was waved on and legged it for the keystone sack.

It was close and he slid in amid a cloud of dust. A spiked shoe lanced him above the knee and he felt the ball being pounded into his side. A body crashed down on him and Punch lay there still for a moment. His whole right leg seemed paralyzed. He looked up and Tuffy Greer was glowering down at him.

"A little exercise for that wooden leg of yours, Holm," he rasped. "Ya better take a good look at the dirt out here because pretty soon it's gonna be nothin' but a memory."

Punch got to his feet slowly. The knee was throbbing, shooting daggers of pain up his thigh. But Punch wasn't thinking about the pain now. All he could think of was that Tuffy Greer had deliberately tried to cripple him. A knot of cold fury rose suddenly inside Punch. He sailed into Tuffy Greer, hammering him briskly with both fists.

The veteran second sacker met the attack with an almost fiendish delight. He slammed over a backhand blow, leaped in behind a looping left. But Punch was inside it and he shot a staggering left to Greer's jaw. Then he hooked with the right, knocking Greer down. Hardly had the knockdown blow landed when Punch looked up to see Danny Crane rushing toward him, his right hand cocked.

"Stay out of it, Danny," Punch warned.

But Danny had no such idea. He threw the right and Punch slid under it and let the kid have it. A blistering right-hander that dumped Danny on his pants.

The kid was getting up when a half-dozen blue-coated gents came on the field. It took two of them to hold Danny Crane in tow. The others concentrated on various scattered brawls that had flared up all over the diamond.

The fans were in an uproar when the game was finally resumed. Feeling was still running high and bitter between the teams. Punch was declared "out" at second but wasn't sent off the field. Fog Devlin whiffed the next batter to retire the side.

THE Packers came in for their licks, and in rapid-fire succession rapped out two singles. With first and second occupied, Danny lashed a whistling grounder past the mound.

Punch streaked to his right, braked, and something happened. His right foot crumpled under him as though he had slipped. The horsehide deflected off his glove and rolled into left field. A few moments later, he was slow fielding a hopper and it went through. The Packers scored four times that inning.

Punch led off the Pelicans' half of the frame with a one-base sock into center. The hit and run on, Punch dug for second with the motion of Fog Devlin's arm. The batter, attempting to hit behind Punch, tapped the horsehide to the box.

Fog Devlin snatched it up, wheeled and pegged the leather to Danny, covering second base. Punch slid into the bag, dumping Danny and busting up the double play, which was good baseball.

There was a crimson spot on the dirt. The blood was trickling down Danny's leg. Punch stared wide-eyed. It dawned on him that he had unintentionally spiked the kid. No matter how Danny had laced it into him in the past, Punch knew he'd never stoop so low as to deliberately crease the kid's shins with his spikes.

Tuffy Greer and some of the other Packer players quickly converged around Danny. The team trainer came on the field and put a patch on the wound and Danny stayed in the game. Tuffy Greer chatted some more with Danny, and Punch saw the kid's eyes harden, sweep over him suspiciously.

"I'm sorry as hell about that, kid," Punch said, shaking his head regretfully. "I wouldn't have had that happen for—"

"Yeah, I can imagine," Danny cut in tersely. "We'll find out how sorry you really are."

It was a cryptic statement. It wasn't till the Pelicans had clumped into the clubhouse on the short end of a 6-3 score that Punch discovered its meaning. He was shedding his monkey suit when the door opened and Tuffy Greer came in with Danny. Right behind them was Rocky Clymer, and there was a lot of eyebrow lifting among the Pelican players. Rocky strode over to Punch, and his face was grave and serious.

"You better go in my office, Holm," he said quietly.

There was something in the wind and Punch wasn't too sure he liked the smell of it. A moment after he had gone into the office, Rocky, Greer and Danny Crane followed him in. Rocky had a pair of spikes in his hand and was examining them closely.

"Yeah," Rocky said, looking up. "They've been sharpened. Not much—just enough to do the damage." Then he turned toward Punch, his jaw jutted. "They're your spikes, Holm. Ya got anything to say for yourself."

Punch stared at the trio in shocked amazement. The drift was clear enough. They were accusing him of having filed his spikes to do a job on Danny.

"This is a nice gag and it's very funny," Punch said at length. "Now you boys bet-

ter go home and think up some new ones."

"I'm afraid it can't be dismissed that easily," Rocky said grimly. "It's a very serious charge."

"First he tried to job me with his spikes," Greer put in. "But I was too smart for him. So he picked on the kid. I could tell by the way his spikes tore into Danny's shin that there was something funny. I wanted to make sure before I said anything."

Danny Crane's lips had a sardonic expression on them. His voice had a cold, brittle ring.

"Holm knows a lotta cute tricks. He learned them on the way to the reform school."

The blood was pounding at Punch's temples. His throat was tight and dry. He couldn't explain how his spikes had come to be filed. Whoever had tampered with them had made him the goat of one sweet frameup.

"Have your fun," Punch said resignedly. "This one is on me. I'm the fall guy. So don't forget to kick me while I'm on my back. You've done about everything else."

He turned his back on them, walked out of the room.

Rocky watched the door close behind Punch. Then he looked directly at Tuffy Greer.

"I paid a hundred grand to have that guy on my club," he said softly. "I guess for that kind of dough I'm entitled to handle this thing my own way. I think it will be to your satisfaction, Greer."

The party was over. Rocky Clymer slouched wearily into a chair. He sat there for several minutes, staring unseeingly at the floor. Connery and Greer—a couple of diamond wolves. They had rooked him into shelling out heavy sugar for a one-legged ballplayer. Rocky had been around a long time; he knew the symptoms of a trick knee.

HE had known almost from the beginning that something was amiss with Punch Holm. He had seen Punch's face go gray with anguish, seen the knee buckle under him and the guy pretend

that he had slipped. A guy with that kind of guts—and they expected him to believe that Punch had deliberately spiked Danny Crane.

A faint grin flickered on the veteran's lips. Yes, he knew the answer to this "spiking" episode. But the time was not ripe for him to speak out. Perhaps it would never be.

Punch Holm did not play in the remainder of the series with the Packers. Nor did he see action during the next two weeks. Rocky Clymer was strangely quiet. He gave no hint what was behind his stony silence.

Somehow, Punch could not help but wonder what Ann Crane thought about the turn of events. Shortly afterward, he found out when he received a letter from her. Its terse comments read:

"Danny wrote me about the terrible thing you tried to do to him. You know that the only way for dad to get the money for his operation depends on Danny. Yet you might easily have wrecked his career for the sake of some cheap revenge. The Punch Holm I believed and had faith in was another person. Not the one who has grown bitter and cold and ruthless. There isn't anything that can make up for what you've done. I never want to see you again. . . ."

That was the final crushing blow. The fates had pummeled and battered him and this was the final payoff. The blow that stabbed and deadened the spark that keeps a man fighting.

It seemed ironic that on the same day Rocky should send Punch back in at shortstop. He made three boots and went hitless. The fans let him have it. Each day the boos and hisses and jeers grew louder. They echoed in his ears at night and he knew that he had come to the end—the dead-end. Rocky wasn't too hard on him when he handed him his pink slip.

"I could farm you out, Punch," he said. "But it's time to stop foolin' ourselves. I been seein' things and your trick knee ain't no secret to me. You're your own boss now—a free agent. That's all."

Punch looked at Rocky. He saw mirrored in the manager's eyes the disap-

pointment, the dimmed hopes of a blasted season and it hurt. He said:

"You could have made it tough for me. But you gave me a break. Mebbe it doesn't matter much, but I won't forget it."

That was all there was to it. Punch took the next train out of town. It was different this time. There were no photographers or cheering crowd on the platform. Punch was alone and glad that nobody could see the humiliation written in his face. His big league career had three strikes and this was the fourth one, the long trek into oblivion. Where to next? Punch didn't know.

CHAPTER IV

THE story broke at the end of the season. Punch read it in a weekly newspaper up in Vermont. He was sitting on a park bench and the scenery was swell and the day clear and he was feeling lousy. He turned to the sports page and a headline item hit him between the eyes. He read:

"Rocky Clymer Fired as Pelicans' Manager."

Punch didn't have to guess the rest of the story. He knew that he was to blame for Rocky's losing his job. Rocky had depended on him and he had flopped and the Pelicans had collapsed.

Punch stayed in Vermont another week and then he couldn't stand it any longer. He packed and went down to Baltimore. He was there a week and they gave it to him straight.

"An operation might fix the knee. Then again, you may never play another game. It's a big gamble. You better think it over a while."

Punch sucked in his breath.

"If I think about it any more, I'll go nuts, doc. Go ahead and operate."

The doctor nodded. "Next season you'll know whether you'll ever play ball again."

The winter months seemed long and tedious. Punch exercised the knee carefully, fed it strength and it felt fine. Better than he had dared to anticipate. But the doubts and fears still lurked in his mind when another baseball season rolled around. There was only one way to find

out if the operation was a complete success. That was to play ball and put the knee to the test.

Punch tried to make a minor league contact. Strangely, his past reputation was a drawback. Most of the minor loop outfits had big time affiliations and they wanted young, ambitious kids. The independent clubs had read in the papers about his game knee. Punch was yesterday's star and they didn't want him.

The pickings grew very lean. Somebody tipped Punch off about a fast semi-pro team called the Parkbays. Punch dropped around to their ball park and the click of ash on leather bit deep inside of him. On the third base side of the diamond he spotted a bulky, barrel-chested gent with a foghorn voice who was whacking fungoes to the fly-shaggers. Punch watched the guy perspire and holler and cuss for several minutes. Then he sauntered over to him.

"What ya want?" the guy wheezed between swipes at the ball. Without waiting for a reply, he added: "If you're an outfielder, I'll take a look at ya. Those lame-arm bums out there are lousy. Ever play in fast company before?"

Punch grinned wryly. "I'm an infielder—shortstop," he said quietly. "I've been with some pretty good ball clubs. The Pelicans . . ."

The Parkbay skipper leaned on the fungo-stick, spat tobacco juice and gave Punch a measured stare. Punch thought he noticed a flicker of recognition in his eyes.

"We got all the knock-kneed trambos we want on this club," he grunted. "Sorry, fella. We got nothin' here for ya."

It was getting to be an old story. Punch was getting tired of trying to talk half-baked managers into giving him a job. He looked at the exit and started over there.

"Wait a minute, bub," a voice said from behind. "What yuh need is a lawyer—a clubhouse lawyer. Stick around while yours truly goes to work on Nap."

Punch turned, faced a husky, wide-shouldered guy with a cocky grin on his face and a catcher's mitt under his arm. The catcher's eyes hung thoughtfully on

Punch for several long moments. Then the fellow nodded, as if confirming something to himself. He winked finally at Punch and sauntered up to Nap Mullins, the Parkbay boss.

"Ya give every bum that comes in here a look-see," Punch heard the catcher drawl. "But you turn this guy down and he looks all ballplayer to me. What's t'matter, Nap, you got a million-dollar-infield or somethin'?"

"This guy's name is Punch Holm and he's no good to us," the manager snorted. "He's got a trick knee. It was in the papers and I can read. He wouldn't last two games with us."

The catcher did not change expression at mention of Punch's name. His jaw merely jutted more determinedly and he started dogging the retreating footsteps of Nap Mullins. He kept talking a blue streak and the semi-pro mentor couldn't shake him off.

"Okay, okay, okay," Mullins shouted, throwing his hands up. "Tell 'im to draw a suit. He won't be around long enough to get it dirty, though. But anything to stop that damned tongue of yours from wagging."

Punch strolled over to the catcher, offered his hand.

"Thanks for the boy scout act, fella," he said gratefully. "Mebbe I can do something for you sometime."

"The name's Gabby—Gabby Gatherun," the backstop said. "Ya don't hafta worry about Nap givin' you a chance. He's an A-one guy. Used to play in the majors himself." A grin spread over Gabby's lips, though his eyes remained searching and thoughtful. He added:

"The only trouble with Nap is that every shortstopper he gets keeps messin' up my good pegs. And Nap gives me hell for it. Guess I won't hafta worry about that now."

"I hope not," Punch said.

IN THE days that followed, Nap Mullins' prediction that Punch wouldn't last two games with the Parkbays was soon blasted. Punch, showing no trace of the old knee injury, took over the regular shortstop berth on the team. He was

adequate, but hardly the same efficient and brilliant shortstop who had once glided over the turf with a deadly precision.

He was playing a good enough class of ball to get by with the Parkbays and that was about all. Nap Mullins kept driving him, exhorting him to cut loose, but Punch continued to be cautious. He was clammed in a groove and he knew it and he couldn't get out of it.

Gabby asked him about it one day. They both roomed at the same boarding house. Punch liked the guy and they hit it off fine. So Punch gave him the whole story. He told him how he felt like a heel because the Pelicans had fired Rocky Clymer on account of him.

At this point Gabby looked up, a little startled.

"Don't ya read the papers?" he asked incredulously. "Rocky Clymer is managin' the Hawks in the other league now. They snatched him up before the season started. He's got those boys steppin', too."

Punch felt a little foolish. He had hardly glanced at the sports sheets. There was too much in them to remind him of old hurts. But it was great news to know that Rocky had caught on with another major league outfit.

The season went its merry way and the Parkbays played their hated rivals, the Buckwicks. In the first inning the Buckwicks hopped off to a 3-0 lead. They threatened to increase the margin in the seventh.

With nobody down, the Buckwicks had runners on every corner. The next hitter was a dangerous man with the willow. He swung furiously at an in-shoot, got a piece of it and lofted it into short left field. With the crack of the bat, Punch turned and tore back after it. He was going at full speed when he glimpsed the left fielder driving in equally fast and in his direct path. The instinctive thing to do was to let the outfielder try for the catch. But Punch knew he wouldn't be able to make it.

So Punch, with unslackened speed, kept right on going. He stuck out his mitt, snagged the horsehide and swerved sharply at an angle to avoid a collision.

Then he wrenched around and pegged the leather into the plate, holding the runners to their bases. He stood stock-still a moment, hardly able to believe that there was not even a twinge of pain in his knee.

Then he realized that it was okay. The operation had turned the trick. He was grinning and the crowd was roaring and it was sweet music.

On the next play, Punch broke to his left. He braked, stabbed at the darting pellet and it stuck in the webbing of his glove. Off balance, he whirled prettily and snapped the ball into second, doubling up the base runner.

He trotted into the dugout and Nap Mullins leveled a scrutinizing stare at him. Then Gabby Gatherun rattled a couple of bats and made a little speech. He said:

"Daddy, get me one of those things if what Punch got is a trick knee. I want it for Christmas, too."

The Parkbays started to click. The lead-off man shot a single into center. Punch went up there and it felt different this time. He did business with the first pitch. He sailed it somewhere—somewhere because nobody could judge how far out of the park the ball was going to land.

In the ninth, Punch knotted the score with a double with one man aboard. It was ordinarily a two-bagger, but Punch stretched the blow into a triple with a nifty hook slide into the bag. He scored when the next batter hoisted a drive into the outfield, and that was the ball game.

Starting with that performance Punch hit his stride, his whole game lifting several notches. He kept rocking the potato hard and was a belting fool. In the field he was the old Punch Holm and that was saying plenty.

THE season gradually neared its end. Punch seemed resigned to waiting another season before getting back into organized baseball. He was playing cards with Gabby Gatherun when a call came through from Nap Mullins. The Parkbay manager wanted to see him right away.

Wondering what could be so urgent,

Punch hustled over to Mullins' office.

"I'm lettin' you go, Holm—"

"You mean you're releasing me?"

Punch gasped. "But I've been playin' my best ball. There's nothin' wrong with my knee."

Nap Mullins broke down and grinned. "Listen, dopey," he said, "you're too good for my bunch of bums. Rocky Clymer and me used to be teammates. So Rocky heard about ya and he wants ya to be his short-stop on the Hawks!"

There were lights dancing in front of Punch. It seemed unbelievable that Rocky should give him another chance. Hadn't he cost the guy his job once? Then, too, he had never been able to prove that he didn't spike Danny Crane. Punch hurried back to the boarding house to pack and break the news to Gabby.

He opened the door and what Punch saw hit him like a bomb bursting in his face. He stood there frozen in his tracks, staring wildly at the swarthy, lean-faced man talking with Gabby. The swarthy guy's own face went pallid and his gaze scanned the room as though searching for some avenue of escape. He suddenly made a lunge for the door.

Punch lurched forward, slammed the man to the floor with a body block. He seized hold of the man, started dragging him toward the door. And all the time something like a trip hammer was pounding, pounding inside him. Then he became conscious of the fact that Gabby had wedged himself between them and was shouting into his ear.

"Punch, you've gone mad. This guy's my brother. Let him alone, Punch. He's my brother—"

The words slowly penetrated Punch's brain. "Your brother, Gabby," he murmured. "He can't be, kid. This is the guy who slugged Ann's father. I knew I'd come across him some time."

Gabby gazed straight into Punch's eyes and Punch had the feeling that all along Gabby knew about him.

"Tippy's been in a lot of jams," Gabby said huskily. "But he's been goin' straight. Don't ruin it all now, Punch. Ya gotta give him a chance for me. He even told me about you—when he recognized

your picture in the papers. That's why I tried to sell you to Nap Mullins. So you know he's leveling."

The anger in Punch's eyes faded and the pain was all in his heart now. All these years he had waited to meet up with this guy. Now fate finally gave him the chance to wipe away the stigma of guilt that had caused Danny to hate him. The chance to prove his innocence. . . .

"*Mebbe I can do something for you sometime.*" The words he had once spoken to Gabby stabbed through his mind like hot irons. Gabby had helped him get the break that led to his going up to the Hawks.

Punch said: "I'm leavin' for the Hawks tonight, Gabby. I guess we're all square now."

He walked out of the room and he was a little unsteady on his feet.

Fifteen minutes later in that same room, the muffled report of a gun rent the stillness of the night. And Gabby Gatherun dropped to the floor, the blood streaming from his shoulder. . . .

Rocky Clymer had the Hawks up there fighting for the pennant. They were battling the Bengals down the stretch in a furious two-team race. Punch noticed that Rocky hadn't changed much, but there were more lines of worryment in his face. Yet he was the same bristling, rugged scrapper.

"We had a damn good man playin' short," Rocky crisped. "He busted a leg sliding home and he's finished. Go out there and fill his boots."

"They'll be filled," Punch assured him.

That day the Hawks played the Bengals. Punch belted out three hits and handled eight chances in the field faultlessly. In the eighth inning, he soaked one into the stands with a base runner on the paths. The Hawks salted the game away, 3-2.

They roared to triumph in the next two games, each time by one-run margins. The Bengals reeled under the impact of the drubbings. They dropped five out of their next seven while the Hawks tore off a seven-game winning streak. Everybody knew the Hawks were in then. It was a cake-walk into the Series.

CHAPTER V

THE Hawks were pitted against the Packers in the World Series. It was exactly as Punch wanted it to be. He knew what this meant to Rocky, and deep down inside him he, too, had lived for this day.

"It's your ball game—your Series," Rocky told them in the clubhouse. "It's yours to win or lose. Do what you want with it."

It was Rocky's way of putting it squarely up to the team. Cleats scraped on concrete and they filed out, grim, determined and silent. Punch looked at Rocky and he saw his lips quiver just the slightest bit. Rocky met his stare but neither man spoke a word.

Punch went out there and it was a full house of fifty thousand strong. It was something to see, the solid mass of humanity that filled the stadium.

The Packers were taking their fielding practice and Punch watched them and thought how there was a double-cross for every base. Bevan and Greer and Danny. Over the Packers' dugout Connery sat hunched, and he was the biggest double-cross of them all. Punch thought of the score he had to settle with all of them, and of the debt he owed to Rocky.

The diamond was cleared for action. The men in blue walked out to their respective positions and a great tenseness hovered over the crowd. The plate umpire slid the iron bars over his face, fiddled with his tiny scorecard, and belled: "Play ball."

The Packer lead-off batter, Dusty Davis, crouched at the plate, set himself for the pitch. Al Jackson took one quick glance at his outfield and toed the rubber. He stretched, kicked his right foot high and brought the left arm around in a side-arm delivery. The white sphere buzzed in there, nipped the outside corner for a strike.

A fast worker, Jackson gave the batters little time to get set. He took the catcher's return toss and flashed the ball across again. This time it was hoisted into center and was in the bucket. He struck out the second batter and retired

the side on a grounder back to the mound.

Punch flung his glove on the grass back of shortstop and started to jog into the dugout. In front of him was Tuffy Greer.

"So they got semi-pros in the Series, huh?" he derided. "Well, we're gonna make it comfortable for you, Holm. Very comfortable."

"You got a good imitation for a head on your shoulders, Greer," Punch said evenly. "Try some monkey business and you might lose it."

Shep Banning led off for the Hawks. Punch wasn't surprised when he trudged back into the dugout after three pitches. Fog Devlin was doing the chucking for Tuffy Greer's bunch. And with the white-shirted centerfield background the ball looked like an aspirin shooting out of Fog's sleeve.

Fog Devlin blazed three strikes past the second batter's stick. But Hunk Andrews, after fouling a half dozen balls, won a free pass to the initial sack.

Punch, batting in the fourth slot, moved into the batter's box. Fog Devlin eyed him closely, grinned cynically.

"Hit this, ya tramp," he blurted.

The ball exploded from his hand, zoomed in there high and hard. Punch waited for it to break and swoop down around the shoulders. But the ball arrowed straight for his head without the slightest break. It glanced off his forehead and he dropped in a heap. Fifty thousand fans rose and held their collective breath.

Punch felt himself being lifted to his feet. He looked at the guy who was aiding him. It looked like Danny Crane, and Punch shook his head because only cobwebs could make him see things like that.

"It was a lousy trick—that duster ball," Danny Crane said angrily.

Punch took another look and it *was* Danny and he couldn't fathom why the kid had suddenly become so concerned about him.

"Better go with the doc to the clubhouse," Rocky put in.

Punch shook his head. "This is one ball game I'm finishin'," he said coldly. "You couldn't get me outa there with four alarms."

Rocky Clymer studied Punch's face for a moment. "Mebbe I wouldn't want to, Punch."

OUT on the mound, Fog Devlin was making extravagant gestures with his flipper. And Tuffy Greer was pointing to the centerfield bleachers, blaming the beaning on the white background.

The beaning apparently had little effect on Fog Devlin's composure. He breezed three strikes past the next hitter to retire the side.

There was a droning buzz in Punch's head and a bulging egg-size lump on his forehead when he went out for the second inning. One more bruise. It didn't matter. Didn't hurt like the hundred other aches that the Packers had piled upon him. He had come a long way for this shot at the Packers, back from the shadows of oblivion. And he couldn't let go of it now.

Once he tore to his right, then to his left to scoop up smashes and wing the runners out at first. He was a stone wall out there and they couldn't blast the ball past him. Single-handedly he set the Packers down in the second. He roamed deep back of third base to gobble up a looping fly ball for the third out.

Fog Devlin twirled three perfect innings. Not a Hawk batter was able to belt one safely. Then in the fourth, he faced Punch again. The first pitch was a sweeping curve ball that slammed in tight against Punch's shoulders and broke sharply down across the outside corner. Strike.

Another one whizzed inches from his head and suddenly cut down over the plate, shoulder-high. There was nothing gunshy about Punch in spite of the duster pitches. He didn't budge. He leaned into the ball, let his stick flow into the pitch. The ball rifled along the left-field line.

Punch rounded first base, dug for second. The ball was powered beautifully into Tuffy Greer's taloned mitt. Punch saw Greer crouched over the bag, grinning maliciously, and he knew what the Packer manager had on his mind. He plunged headlong into the base.

Greer's armlashed down with the ball.

It struck Punch on the head. Simultaneously, his spikes jerked up toward Punch's right knee. In mid-air, Punch twisted, rammed his head into the pit of Greer's stomach, walloping him to the turf.

"Try something like that again," Punch said evenly, "and you'll find yourself landing out in centerfield."

Tuffy Greer glared balefully but no words came. He was on the ground, the wind knocked out of him.

Five innings slid into horsehide history. Fog Devlin had the pellet popping and bursting and exploding in the faces of the Hawk hitters. They were popping the ball into the air and going down, swinging helplessly.

It was a brilliant exhibition to keep pace with. But Al Jackson, a workhorse and a good one, managed to stifle the dynamite in the Packer war-clubs. Occasionally he yielded a bingle, but he had the stuff to bear down in the clutch.

In the sixth frame, he had two down when Tuffy Greer dropped a two-bagger down the right-field foul line. Biggie Bevan came up and slammed a blue blazer down shortstop alley. Punch moved in on it. He went down for it and a sudden filmy haze formed in front of his eyes.

The ball caromed off the heel of his glove. He groped for it, finally picked it up—but late. Base runners on first and third and still two down.

Al Jackson got two strikes on Danny Crane. Then the kid caught hold of the next one. There was a sharp, clean crack of wood against leather. The ball was up there in the stands and Danny was jogging around the basepaths. He passed second, glanced at Punch, hesitated, then continued.

And Punch noticed that there was no look of triumph on Danny's face. And Punch couldn't understand that. Danny's behavior all during the game had been peculiar.

IT WAS very quiet in the dugout when the Hawks finally came in for their licks. Those three big runs on the scoreboard were as good as ten, the way Fog Devlin was mowing down the Hawk bat-

ters. One bobble, one mistake and the Hawks had seen their hopes turn to ashes.

Shep Banning strode to the plate, and four pitches later he came trudging back to the bench shaking his head bitterly. Then Hal Myers nudged one of Fog's buzzballs, and it fell in for a Texas Leaguer. Another strike-out. Two down and Punch grimly set himself in the batter's box.

The pitch roared down the alley, a white screaming bombshell, twisting and hopping. Punch swung and it burst against the wood. A splattering, loud crack and the ball was soaring deep, deep, and Punch put his head down and started to run. He looked at the first-base coach and his hands were palmed and he was grinning. And Punch trotted around the bases.

The score was 3-2 and the Hawks were still a run shy of knotting the count. Fog Devlin bore down on the next hitter, making him pop a dinky fly that Biggie Bevan gobbled up.

There was no scoring in the seventh and the teams battled into the eighth. The Packers went down one, two, three. Fog Devlin machine-gunned the first two Hawk hitters into submission with blinding, overpowering speed. But the number three man crossed him by dumping the ball down third base and beating it out.

Hunk Andrews, who had three whiffs to his name, finally connected, whacking a shot into centerfield. There were two men on the hassocks and it was Punch's turn up there. He stared out on the mound and wasn't sure whether Fog Devlin was smirking or not.

That recurrent blur began to thicken in front of him again. The Packers' hurler's beanball had done its damage. Punch's hands were clammy on the bat. He swiped viciously at a downer and heard the dull plop of the horsehide in the backstop's glove. Again he swung from the heels, blindly, desperately, and the ball was only a white speck in the gray that blocked his sight.

On the mound, Fog Devlin reared back and blasted the ball down the slot. It was the same kind of pitch that had glanced

off Punch's head in the first inning. He had two strikes, and there was no guessing whether Fog Devlin was trying to sneak one past him—or bean him.

Punch held his ground. The ball suddenly zinged down and across his shoulders. Punch slid his hands up on the wood and smote the ball on a blazing line into right field. The base runners dug for home. Punch went into second base and the Hawks were out in front. A moment later, he scored on a smash to the fence. Score: Hawks 5, Packers 3.

Al Jackson stood up on the bench. He said:

"Leave the rest to pappy, guys. I'm shootin' the juice to the bums this inning."

The hurler was as good as his word in the ninth. He struck out the side.

They were in the clubhouse and the noise and din was terrific. The Hawks were pushing and pounding and hollering. They were acting like a lot of school kids and you couldn't blame them. They were piled around Punch and they wouldn't let the guy alone. Rocky Clymer watched them for a while.

"Lay off him, guys," he said, grinning. "We need him for the rest of the Series." Then he motioned to Punch to follow him into his office.

"You gave me my chance to come back, Rocky," Punch said soberly. "Even after I let you down once and you found those sharpened spikes in my locker."

Rocky shook his grizzled head a little. "That was a lousy frame-up," he murmured. "Greer forced the clubhouse kid into doing his dirty work. He threatened to make it tough enough for the kid that he'd lose his job. Greer has a knack of framing guys. Only this time it backfired. I wrung the truth out of the kid. I remembered seein' him foolin' around your locker before the game. Greer is gonna get more than one surprise when the Series is over. He's gonna learn things from the commissioner."

Punch stared at Rocky, amazed. "Nice guy," he ripped out. "He chisels me outa my job. Then damn near gets me thrown out of baseball for good."

"It's gonna cost him," Rocky said tersely. "It's gonna cost Connery, too. The commissioner has all the dope on Connery. The stuff I gave him is just another drop in the bucket. Connery is a front for some very smart business. He doesn't have the best interests of the game at heart. The commissioner is very sensitive about that. Yeah, I got a feelin' that Connery and Greer ain't gonna be with us much longer."

Outside the room the newspapermen were pounding on the door. So Punch and Rocky went out there. But Punch didn't stop there. Pushing toward him in the crowded locker room was Gabby Gatherun, his arm in a sling. Punch went over to him.

"You pick on somebody bigger than yourself, Gabby?" he said lightly. "Mebbe you tried to push over a truck."

"A little token of brotherly love," Gabby said, a catch in his voice. "Tippy tried to hit me for dough after you left. He was in another of his jams. I didn't need three guesses to know that he'd been

bluffin' me along. He had a gun and we had a little brawl. The cops got the gun now."

Gabby's eyes brightened. Then: "There's a gal outside that I brought along. Mebbe she wants an autograph. I dunno. Ya better go see."

Punch went outside. He looked into Ann Crane's face and knew that Gabby had told her all there was to tell. Now he understood why Danny had acted so concerned when Fog's pitch had floored him. Gabby had taken care of everything.

Then Gabby was saying: "Punch is always late gettin' the news. You'll hafta write it on the sidewalk for the guy to understand."

"But it's not too late," Ann said quietly.

Punch said: "After we wallop the Hawks in the Series we'll all get together. We'll make it a family affair. Gabby can drop around later."

It took the Hawks six games to clinch the Series. And there was a family affair. Danny was best man at the wedding.

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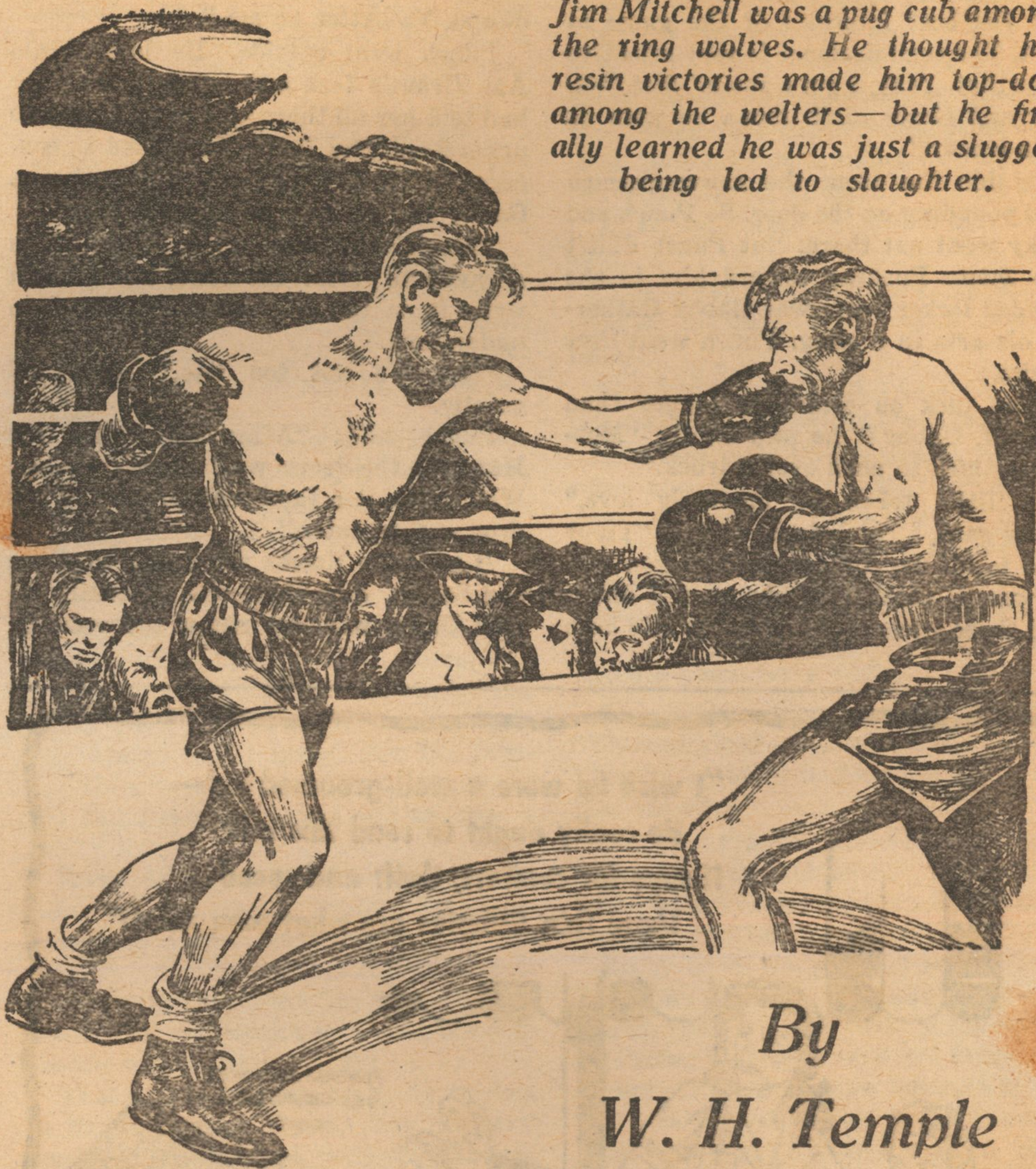
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Pug Cub

Jim Mitchell was a pug cub among the ring wolves. He thought his resin victories made him top-dog among the welters—but he finally learned he was just a slugger being led to slaughter.



By

W. H. Temple

THE first round was a minute and a half old when Jim Mitchell knew he was going to get the beating of his life. A cold sickness dragged at his insides as the champion methodically went to work on him.

There was no yellow in the black-haired, lantern-jawed Irish kid. His blue eyes glinted and he wound up his right

and lashed it forward at the champ. But he couldn't hit him. Jim Mitchell wondered about that. In the tank towns across the country that punch had sent them all to the floor. But this was New York and this was the welterweight champion he was fighting. It was not the same and he figured he was letting down his manager, Doc Hyatt.

He thought that Doc was going to feel very badly about this. Doc Hyatt had taken Jim Mitchell out of one of those tank towns and told him he was going to be the next champion. He had trained him and managed him through twenty fights. After every battle the publicity was a little louder.

He swung the right again, snapping it through the air, and it slid along the champ's chin. The champ moved inside and his fists made a tattoo on Mitchell's ribs. An uppercut clipped Mitchell on the jaw and he went backwards for a minute with the champ hitting him again. The champ was mechanical, deadpanned, and an artist the way he boxed. His fists cut like a set of knives.

The bell ended the round and Jim Mitchell walked slowly back to his corner. He sat down and looked anxiously at Doc Hyatt.

He said, "I didn't do so good, Doc. I'm sorry but maybe I will tag him one of these rounds."

Doc Hyatt looked like a small town philosopher and druggist. He was fat with small eyes set deep in the flesh and he wore a perpetual friendly grin. He was the kind of person that con men marked at once as a sucker. But they did not do so more than once and there were those who knew the Doc better.

"You are doing fine, Jimmy," Doc Hyatt said. "Just keep it up. Take a look at the house, kid. They couldn't get another spectator in the joint."

Jim Mitchell felt a little irritated as the warning bell sounded. Doc Hyatt had not seemed quite the same. Jim went out at the bell and the champ flowed across toward him, his left stabbing out.

It hit Jim Mitchell twice over the left eye. The kid tried to duck under it and get inside, but the champ cracked him in the mouth. The punch caught Mitchell off balance and spun him around to face his own corner. He looked at his manager and there was a grin on Hyatt's face, a satisfied smile.

JIM MITCHELL could not understand that. Hyatt had been a father to him, and what was there funny in his fighter

getting kicked around. Jim moved in again toward the champion. There was nothing to do except to take those punches and find an opening for his right. Head down, he walked into the rain of blows. His right landed high on the head and the champion counter-punched with the blow. The kid's head rocked back and then he stood flatfooted and swung both hands for the head. They landed on the champ's elbows and shoulders as he bobbed and weaved.

The bell ended the round and Jim Mitchell slumped down on his stool. Doc Hyatt leaned over him and Mitchell said, "I got to hit that guy and quick. I can't see so good with my right eye and he caught the left one last round. He'll have 'em both closed up if I don't tag him soon."

Hyatt said, "He's a fast starter but he won't last long. This is fifteen rounds, remember. You got plenty of time."

Jim Mitchell knew that was not the truth. The champion was in the pink. He was a greater fighter and he was always in condition. Jim Mitchell had seen him fight one time.

The bell rang again and Mitchell went out there to face those gloves that came at him from all angles. The champ drove his left to the stomach and his right to the jaw and Mitchell fell into a clinch.

He hung on tight, trying to shake the fog out of his brain. The champ said, "You had no business in here, kid. I don't like to murder anyone, but that's my job."

He broke away from the clinch and tagged Jim Mitchell on the chin with a right hand. His left hit the right eye again and Jim Mitchell staggered backward, then fell into another clinch as the champ came in.

Mitchell shook his head hard. He had to knock the champ out. He was going to be murdered and the only way to stop it was to land that right. He knew that there was plenty of power in it.

He was not a boxer. He was a hitter and he had nothing but a wallop and an iron jaw.

He held the right doubled up close to his chest as he came out of the break. He set himself and watched the champ

through slitted eyes. His sight was a little foggy but he focused on the champ's jaw, remembering his ability to roll with the blows.

The champ moved in. He was very sure of himself. He was up against a raw youth with little experience and less ability. He came in and for a moment his defense was open. He was going to try for a knockout. He set himself, and then fired the blow.

Jim Mitchell moved forward. His right hand straightened out from his chest and he pivoted with the punch, turning his body with it and snapping the glove home. The punch traveled about fourteen inches.

The champ's reflexes were like lightning. He pulled his head back. He could not get out of the way of that punch. It landed on his jaw and he went backwards three steps and shot between the ropes. His head was hanging down outside the canvas and his feet waved in the air.

There was bedlam in the Garden. The fans had come to see the vaunted punch of this new fighter and they had been disappointed. Now they came to life with a mighty roar.

Jim Mitchell went to a neutral corner and he felt much better. He looked across at Doc Hyatt, expecting to see a smile of approval on his manager's face.

And then he went icy cold. Doc Hyatt had lost his perpetual smile. His fat face was drained of its normal ruddy color. He was staring at the champion and there was panic in his eyes. His cheeks were like dirty gray paper.

The referee was counting. The champion got himself back in the ring. At nine he got to his feet and Jim Mitchell turned and went across to get him.

But he could not hit the champion again. He chased him and the welter-weight king backpedaled and bobbed and weaved until the bell rang.

Jim Mitchell walked to his corner and sat down. He was thinking very hard. He turned to Doc Hyatt. "Something's wrong, Doc. What is it?"

Doc Hyatt was smiling again. His color was coming back. He said, "Why,

nothing's wrong, my boy. That was a fine punch you landed."

THE bell sent them out again. The champ had come back fast. He was cautious now, and he had given up trying for a knockout. He stayed away from Jim Mitchell's right hand. He was an artist. He sliced up Jim Mitchell like an expert butcher carving a side of beef.

The challenger stayed with him. He had a punch but he could not find a target and he was in there showing a lot of heart and nothing else. He grinned through the dripping blood that covered him, and plodded forward. He forgot the rounds. Twice he knew he was on the canvas and then finally the referee was in front of him.

"G'wan, beat it," Jim Mitchell said and the referee shook his head.

He knew that the fight was over. The referee had stopped it. Jim Mitchell got out of the ring and went through the crowd. They gave him a hand as a courageous fighter who had taken his lumps without quitting. He got in the dressing room and it was very silent. He looked around for his manager but Doc Hyatt was not there.

Jim Mitchell let the hot water soak his system and the bitter truth came home to him. He began to put the facts together. The anxiousness of Hyatt to get him a lot of publicity. The desire to match him with the champion. And the worry when Jim Mitchell had put the champion outside the ropes.

Hyatt must have bet on the champ. He had taken a green kid and shoved him in there, knowing he would get a beating. Doc had made a pocketful of dough out of the fight. And the fighter was now beaten. There was no more money to be squeezed out of him and Hyatt had walked out.

Jim Mitchell dressed slowly. He had liked Hyatt. He was a friendly kid who liked most people. Instinctively he had trusted his manager. He had heard of managers who milked their fighters but Doc Hyatt had not seemed that kind. That hurt more than the beating Jim had taken. It made his heart dry up a little.

The dressing room door opened and a man came in. He was tall and very thin, and he had glittering eyes. He had a tight-lipped mouth. He walked in and said, "I'm Shad Brawley. I'm your new manager. I bought your contract from Hyatt."

Jim Mitchell stared at him, hating him. He said, "You look a little like a buzzard, Brawley. Hyatt picked me pretty clean. I don't know that there are any scraps left for you."

Brawley sat down and lighted a cigarette. He said, "You got a punch. That's all. Maybe you can get somewhere, maybe you're just a bum. We'll see."

Jim Mitchell smiled but there was no humor in it. He said, "You're wrong as hell, Brawley. Because I'm through fighting. I can be played for a sucker once but not twice in the same racket. You know what you can do with that contract."

Shad Brawley's expression remained unchanged. He said, "You got to eat, don't you? How much dough do you have?"

Jim Mitchell thought that over, remembering the purses that Hyatt kept with vague talk about press agent and publicity expenses. Jim thought that fighting was his trade. It was not as he had pictured it. A fighter was the pawn of the man who managed him and he was sewed up legally. Even if there was a loophole in Brawley's contract he would have to hire legal advice to find it and that would cost more money than he had.

He said, "You get a third, I get the rest. There are no outside expenses."

Brawley said, "You got to pay to train."

"The bills will come to me," Jim Mitchell said. "I'll pay 'em and you and I will split the take after the bills are paid."

Shad Brawley got up off the table. "Come around to Stillman's some afternoon as soon as you're healed up."

He walked out the door and after a while Jim Mitchell followed him. He fought against the bitterness that was in his heart. From now on he had to be cold and hard-boiled, like the men who associated with him. He had been a

friendly pup in a pack of wolves and now he had to show his teeth. He hated his new manager but there was nothing he could do about it if he wished to continue fighting.

He stayed away from Stillman's for a week, and then the urge was on him again to feel the gloves on his hands. He went there and found Brawley in the smoky interior.

He climbed in the ring against a smaller and faster man. They went three rounds and with pillows on his mitts Jim Mitchell took a beating.

Brawley watched him with his hard cold eyes. He made caustic comments about Jim Mitchell's boxing. Doc Hyatt had been encouraging, Shad Brawley ran his fighter down. He worked with him hour after hour trying to develop a left hand and to teach him footwork. It was part of the build-up. Jim Mitchell felt and did as he pleased.

THEY went on a tour of the New England states for small purses and Jim Mitchell knocked out six men in six fights. They were none of them very good men.

"You got to learn to box," Shad Brawley said. "You can hit, but that isn't enough. You have to be able to soften a man up for your knockout blow, and have to know how to stay away from a better boxer. You have to learn to untangle your feet. You are about the lousiest boxer I ever saw. But you're fast enough. Maybe you're just too dumb to learn."

"Why do you care whether I can box or not?" Jim Mitchell demanded. "What difference does it make to you?"

Shad Brawley let cigar smoke trickle through his thin nostrils. He said, "Well, for one thing, I might be able to make a little more dough out of you. I might be able to get you in the ring with Dutcher. He's on the way up. He might take you on the way. He'll beat your ears off if you don't learn to box. He's hard to hit."

"Get the fight," Jim Mitchell said. "If he hits me you won't feel it. The only thing that could hurt you would be a sock in your bank account."

Shad Brawley got the fight. It was a

month away and they went into training quarters. Brawley hired fast, skillful sparring partners and Jim Mitchell began to see that there was some sense in learning defensive tactics. But it was too late to learn them. They might have done him some good before he met Doc Hyatt but not now.

And then finally he was climbing up into the ring, weighing one forty-five and in good condition. He looked across the ring at Dutcher, who was short and swarthy.

They were introduced and Jim Mitchell thought that if he could beat Dutcher he would be climbing again. He no longer felt a thrill in it, but it was better to go up than down.

The bell rang and Shad Brawley whisked the stool away. Jim Mitchell walked flatfooted out toward the center of the ring. Dutcher came toward him with a sidewise motion like a crab. He fought from a crouch, his arms wrapped around his head.

Mitchell stabbed a left and then swung the right. It landed on the top of Dutcher's head. It was like hitting a stone wall. Dutcher raked him with hooks from that awkward stance of his, then backed away.

Jim Mitchell, a stand-up fighter, poked out his left hand and then fired the right. He kept landing on Dutcher's head. It wasn't doing him any good.

After the third round of it Shad Brawley said, "You got to get under it. Straighten him up with your left. Stop using your right for a round or two until you get him out of that crouch. You'll break your hand on that hard head of his."

Jim Mitchell went out again. Three times he hit Dutcher with his left. It didn't straighten him up and Jim thought, "The hell with it." He was going to hit Dutcher with the right until he beat his brains out.

He carried his right hand high and then he let go. The blow rocketed off the top of Dutcher's head. A hook buried itself in Jim Mitchell's stomach. He grunted a little and chucked the right again, landing back of Dutcher's ear.

At the end of the sixth round Shad

Brawley said, "You're not getting anywhere, Mitchell." He worked skillfully over a bad cut over the left eye. "You got to straighten him up."

The bell rang. Jim Mitchell moved out and Dutcher came toward him. Jim threw the right from his heels. It slammed Dutcher back across the ring and into the ropes, but Mitchell was a little slow in moving after him. There was a sharp, shooting pain in his right hand.

Dutcher bounced off the hemp and came back swinging. He got in close and raked both hands to the body, then shifted to drive punches to the head. Jim Mitchell hit him with the bad right and then bit his lip hard against the pain. Methodically Dutcher worked on the bad eye.

After the eighth round the referee stared hard at Jim Mitchell as he sat in his corner. Jim growled, "I'm all right."

"If that cut gets worse I'll have to stop the fight," the referee said.

They went out for the ninth. Dutcher came in and hooked to the body. He danced out of range and punched as he moved away. He hit the cut over Jim Mitchell's eye and as he hit, his glove turned. Blood spurted down the side of Jim Mitchell's face and the referee moved in. He pushed Jim Mitchell to one side and raised Dutcher's hand in victory.

JIM MITCHELL staggered wearily into his dressing room. He was all alone and he thought that now it had happened again. Doc Hyatt had walked out the first time and now Shad Brawley was departing after having picked the bones clean.

He went into the shower and when he came out he stared in surprise. Shad Brawley was perched on the rubbing table.

Jim Mitchell said, "There won't be any more big dough for me. Not after this fight. What are you hanging around for?"

Shad Brawley said, "I'm still your manager. Maybe I won't be much longer. I never did like to handle a fighter after he starts walking on his heels. I got a weak stomach. Maybe I should step out now. I'm trying to make up my mind."

He looked at Jim Mitchell and then his

glance shifted to his fighter's hand. He saw that above the knuckles there was a lump the size of a walnut. He stared at it for a long moment, then said:

"Come on. We're going to get some X-rays of that hand."

They went to the hospital and pictures were taken of Jim Mitchell's right fist. A couple of days later Shad Brawley walked into Jim Mitchell's hotel room.

He said, "You got a busted flipper. It's going to be a long time before you can hit a man with that hand. You can't box for billy-be-damn. You want to quit?"

"Supposing I don't?"

"In a month or two we pick up some fights," Shad Brawley said. "Maybe you can box your way to a decision. Maybe you'll get stretched on the canvas. But it might mean a little dough. I can teach you some things about boxing. I can give you a left hand if you'll do what I tell you."

Jim Mitchell shrugged his shoulders. He said, "The dough is what I'm after."

"You haven't got much ambition any more, have you?" Brawley said.

Jim Mitchell stared at him. "Doc Hyatt got himself a new fighter," he said. "A guy named Carter. He's going against the champ next week and he'll probably take him. Some day I'd like to beat Carter. It would be kind of a nice revenge on Hyatt. But I'm just a bum. I had a punch and that was all. Now I haven't got the punch. I'm fighting for the dough, for money enough to live on."

A week later Jim Mitchell began working out in the gym. He didn't use his right hand. Shad Brawley hung over the ropes and told him what to do. He kept Jim at it hour after hour, stabbing the left out and shifting his feet, sliding them forward and then moving back without getting tangled. It was sort of fun, Jim Mitchell found, learning the tricks of the trade.

Six weeks later he had a fight. He out-pointed a man in six rounds. He had a couple more and he won them on points, not using his right. The swelling was gone, but Shad Brawley told him he couldn't take a chance any more.

Brawley came to their hotel a day after that last fight with some news. He said, "Remember Dutcher? You're fighting him again. The new welter champ, Carter, knocked him out three weeks ago. He's finished as a top-flight challenger but he's still a good man. You're going to fight him. Maybe you can beat him on your boxing. If you can't we're calling it quits. There's no point in going on if you can't beat Dutcher. But you got to beat him with a left hand."

The fight was a month away. Jim Mitchell was trained fine the night he went down the aisle and climbed into the ring to see the man who had beaten him badly in their first battle. Dutcher had a sneer on his face and he was very confident.

They went out at the opening bell and Dutcher sidled in, watching Jim Mitchell's right. He wasn't prepared for a left.

It came out like a needle. It caught him in the eye. It stabbed him three times and Dutcher was a little bewildered. He moved in savagely. He fired those raking hooks and Jim Mitchell backed up. The punches landed on his arms and shoulders. He twisted away and as he moved he struck with his left again.

Shad Brawley was grinning for the first time since he took over Jim Mitchell. He said between rounds, "The crowd isn't going to like you tonight, Mitchell. They like a hitter. You're going to backpedal the whole ten rounds and just keep that left in Dutcher's face. He's going to force the fight but you're going to mark him up."

They began to boo in the third round. Dutcher rushed his man. He stood in the center of the ring and growled at Jim Mitchell to come in and fight.

Mitchell's right hand itched. He wanted to fire it at Dutcher. But Shad Brawley had told him what he must do and he was beginning to acquire a respect for his manager. He did not like him, but Brawley knew his business.

Jim Mitchell danced away. He went to work on Dutcher's right eye, and in the fourth round he closed it up like a shutter over a window. Dutcher's face

was like a meatball. He was not badly hurt, but there was not a mark on Jim Mitchell.

THE customers booed from then on. It was very tame. Dutcher kept moving in and Mitchell kept him at long range. He won all ten rounds and an easy decision, and the fans howled disapproval at the referee's decision.

Back in the dressing room Shad Brawley said, "You still want to fight Carter? You can have a shot at the title now if you want it."

"Why not?" Mitchell said. "But I don't think I can left hand Carter to death. Dutcher isn't very bright, but the champ knows the game."

The fight was scheduled. It was three months away and Shad Brawley day after day worked on his fighter's boxing. Jim Mitchell was like a man with one arm tied to his body.

He almost began to like his manager. He fought against it, afraid that he would be let down again. He was waiting for the stab in the back.

They had given Jim Mitchell a lot of publicity, but Carter was the favorite at nine to five.

"You got a chance to beat him," Brawley said. "You got to do just what I say and maybe you'll win the title."

Jim Mitchell said, "You're the boss, Brawley. If you think I got a chance, then I know I have. You haven't given me a wrong steer yet. You want to play some two-handed rummy?"

They sat at the table together in the little farmhouse in the hills where they were in training. Jim Mitchell studied Shad Brawley. He said, "Maybe I'm wrong, Shad. Maybe you're O.K. I don't trust anybody any more, but I'm beginning to like you."

Shad Brawley said, "You're not bad yourself, Jim. So far we have been a pretty good team."

Jim Mitchell went to bed a little later. He stretched out and thought that he shouldn't allow himself to like his manager. If he didn't like him he wouldn't mind a double-cross. And he was still afraid that Shad Brawley was going to

knife him. Because he was pretty sure that he could not beat Carter. The champ was a hard hitter and a skillful boxer. He was not a dummy like Dutcher.

"If I get any chance at all to beat Carter," Jim Mitchell told himself, "it's a one in a hundred shot."

The training period ended finally and they went down to New York. The next afternoon they were in the offices of the boxing commission. Carter and Doc Hyatt were there waiting for them and Doc Hyatt was the same as always, still looking like a small town druggist. Carter was hard-looking, dead-panned and grim.

Jim Mitchell ignored his former manager and Carter. Doc Hyatt turned his bright little eyes on him and then grinned at Shad Brawley. He said, "I hear you've been visiting the bookies, Brawley. Getting a little down on the fight?"

Shad Brawley said brusquely, "Get on the scales, Mitchell."

Jim Mitchell went through the motions of weighing in and being examined by the commission doctors. Then he and Brawley left the offices and went back to their hotel.

In their room Jim Mitchell stood with his back to the door. He said, "I've been waiting for it, Brawley. I figured it was coming. I wish you were big enough to hit. How much dough you got on the fight?"

Shad Brawley said, "Five grand."

Jim Mitchell nodded, his face white. He said, "I guess you had to give pretty good odds, didn't you? You couldn't build me up where they'd be even."

"I didn't give odds," Brawley said, "I got 'em. I'm betting on you at two to one. I stand to win ten grand if you beat Carter."

Jim Mitchell sagged against the door. He stared incredulously. He said finally, "You're betting on me. You're a damn liar, Brawley. Your dough's on the champ."

In a tired and weary voice Brawley said, "Why don't you call the bookmaker? It's too hot to argue."

Jim Mitchell went to the telephone. He knew the man who handled the big fight bets and he knew he wouldn't lie to him. A moment later he hung up the phone. He

.....
said, "I'll be damned, Brawley, you did bet on me. What's wrong with you? The champ is going to be tough."

"I'm betting that you're tougher. But you got to do just what I say."

Jim Mitchell took a long breath. He held out his hand. He said huskily, "Shad, will you shake hands?"

Brawley grinned at him. He said, "I've been waiting for this day to come, Jim. I liked your looks the night I saw the champ give you a going-over. But when I went in the dressing room I knew I couldn't talk you into liking me. I was never sure that you would get over the idea that all fight managers are crooked and heartless. We're a team now, Jim."

Jim Mitchell nodded. "Win or lose," he said. "But I don't know how I'm going to beat this guy, Shad. I'm not scared, but I don't think I'm good enough."

"Leave that to me," said Shad Brawley.

Jim Mitchell had a big dinner and then he rested until it was time to go to the Stadium. He was not worried. It was going to be a tough fight, but if Shad Brawley said he had a chance, then he had one.

IN THE dressing room he listened to the thunder of the mob and then he went down the black aisles and up into the ring. He sat down in his corner and Shad Brawley said, "Remember now. You are going to box with this guy. You're going to be very fast from the opening bell."

Jim Mitchell looked across at Doc Hyatt and then he was standing up with his back against the ropes. He went out with the bell, meeting Carter in the center of the ring.

He wanted that first punch. His left shot out and caught Carter on the cheek. Carter counterpunched and Jim Mitchell slid away. He stabbed the left out once again and felt it bite home over Carter's right eye.

The champion could hold his own boxing with anyone. They stayed at long range for the rest of that round. Three times Jim Mitchell crossed his right to the head. They were stabbing punches

without much power but with a lot of sting. Jim came back at the bell and it was anyone's round.

"You're doing fine," Shad Brawley said. "Keep it up."

They went at it again. The champion came in fast, hitting with both hands. His punches were short, jolting blows. They weren't knockout punches, but they had plenty of weight. Jim Mitchell felt that he wasn't getting very far with that left and with the right cross. He was cutting up the champion but he hadn't slowed him up any. And Carter was getting underneath his blows and driving his fists to the body.

After the fourth round, Jim Mitchell said, "You got five grand ridin' on the breeze, Shad. The guy is a smarter boxer. He's won every round but the first. He hits too hard."

Shad Brawley said, "Don't you worry 'til you see me worryin'. You can take his punches without going down. Keep taking them and keep carving him up."

Jim Mitchell shrugged his shoulders. He kept backing away. Carter's punches were hurting him, but he was staying on his feet. He kept taking them and whistling the left hand and crossing the right to the body. He thought he knew Shad Brawley's strategy. Brawley was figuring that Carter would slow up about the eighth round and Jim Mitchell could go on to outpoint him to a decision.

Jim Mitchell knew it wouldn't work out that way. This guy was too tough and too strong. He wasn't any Dutcher, he was the champ. There was the taste of blood on Jim Mitchell's lips and his stomach was red and puffy.

He stayed in there slinging that left and getting some satisfaction out of crossing his right to the body. They were making the champion grunt.

At the end of the eighth round Jim Mitchell said, "I've slowed the guy up a little, Shad. I took that lightning speed out of his legs. But he's a mile ahead and he's slowed me up, too. I can't box this guy to any decision. He's fast enough to stay away the rest of the night and take the decision."

Shad Brawley said, "You go out there this round and knock him out, Jim. Hit him on the chin with your right hand. Hit him with everything you got."

Jim Mitchell frowned. "Suppose I bust it again and the punch doesn't knock him out?"

"Are you tellin' me or am I tellin' you?" said Shad Brawley.

Jim Mitchell nodded and stood up. He walked flatfooted out to the center of the ring. Carter came in to him, not quite so fast, and Jim Mitchell cocked his right hand and held it close to his chest. He feinted with his left, saw Carter start a punch. At the same instant Jim Mitchell fired his right hand on a direct line for the angle of the champion's jaw.

The blow jarred Jim Mitchell down to his heels. His hand felt fine. It did not hurt at all. A glassy look came into Carter's eyes and he fell flat on his face. He shook his head at five and got up at nine. He began running backwards around the ring.

Jim Mitchell was staring in amazement at his right fist. Brawley yelled, "Get him," and he snapped out of it. He caught Carter in a neutral corner and tagged him again. Carter slumped against the ropes, bounced out and Jim was waiting for him. The blow traveled about a foot.

Carter spun around and fell flat to the

floor. He twitched once and then lay still as the referee counted him out.

In the dressing room, Jim Mitchell, the new welterweight champion, said, "I don't get it, Shad. How come?"

"When I saw you first," Shad Brawley said, "you were a kid with a punch and nothing else. Hyatt told you that you didn't need anything else. He was only building you up for a big match. I knew you couldn't get anywhere unless you learned to box. But you distrusted everyone. You wouldn't pay any attention to me. Then you hurt your hand in the Dutcher fight. It was my opportunity to make you learn to box."

Jim Mitchell nodded. "But after all," he said, "that busted hand healed pretty quick."

Shad Brawley grinned. "It wasn't busted," he said. "You never saw the pictures. It was only a bad bruise. Maybe I shouldn't have lied to you, Jim. Maybe it was kind of crooked on my part. But I had to make you box."

Jim Mitchell said, "It only made me the champion, that's all. Without it I'd still be a bum. That wasn't being crooked, Shad. That was smart strategy." Jim Mitchell smiled. "You're the thinker, I'm the fighter," he said. "It's a combination that ought to hang on to this title a long time."

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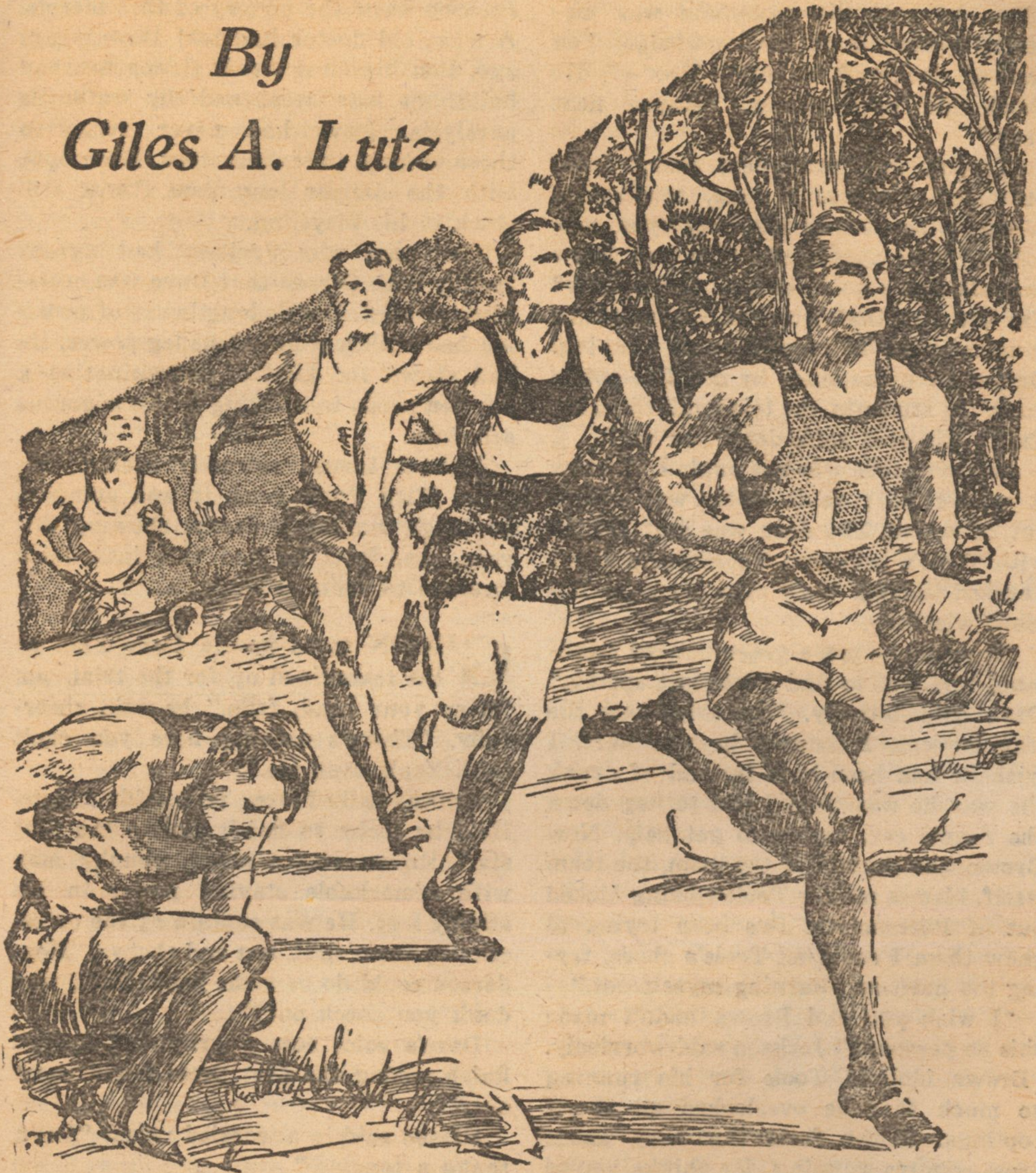
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Spikes on the Prod

By
Giles A. Lutz



The harriers were all set to go. The starting gun barked. The runners raced away down the course. And Dave Falk, who had his private reason for winning this trial run, found that his spike-shod feet were carrying him into his own man-made hazard.

COACH LEE JACKSON said impatiently: "I'm sorry, Falk. I can't give you another chance. If we go well at the Midwestern meet, we'll get a crack at the Intercollegiates. I can't hold the entire team back waiting for you."

Jackson's hair and eyes were old, but he had a quick, nervous manner that did-

n't go with his years. His voice took on a harsher tone, as if Dave Falk were responsible for all his troubles.

"I guess I listened to Gibson too much. He's a damned good cross-country man. When he said his roommate was material, I banked on his knowledge. You showed the stuff at first. Now—" He shook his head slowly. "Maybe next year."

"I can't wait until next year," Dave protested. He was a long, tow-headed fellow, with usually laughing eyes, now sobered and shadowed. "Do you know the talk that's going around the campus? I'm the guy that wrecked Portsmouth's greatest year in cross-country running. Only Gibson has stuck by me. I've got to make the students, the team quit thinking that." His eyes said, don't you see?

Jackson's tone was not unkind. "I know it wasn't your fault Toole was kicked out of school. The dean was just fed up with Toole's behavior. Toole was a sweet harrier, though. We'll miss him," he finished wistfully.

"It would be me, a green, scared freshman, who had to find Toole last spring," Dave said bitterly. "Sprawled out the way he was, I thought he was hurt. I wish he had been hurt instead of drunk the way he was. And I had to flag down the dean's car, trying to get help. Now Brown, the captain of the team, the team itself, blames me for Toole's being kicked out of Portsmouth. I've been trying to show them I could fill Toole's shoes, trying too hard and burning myself out."

"I wish you and Brown hadn't made this so personal," Jackson said worriedly. "Brown idolized Toole for his running so much that he overlooked all shortcomings. Brown feels that way about cross-country running. He thinks you've been quitting. When you prove differently, he'll be for you against anything and everybody."

"There's nothing Brown can do to change my mind about him," Dave snapped. "Am I through?" Belligerency was in every line of his body.

Jackson sighed wearily. "It's between you and Henderson. We'll make today's workout a trial run. Beat him and you'll

go to Chicago with us for the Midwestern."

Jackson's eyes were puzzled as he watched Dave walk out to the curb, pick up a bicycle and pedal down the street. Jackson knew the history of that bicycle. A wise, old doctor had told Dave, years ago, that bicycling would strengthen and build up legs weakened by infantile paralysis. Dave had never forgotten those wobbly, uncertain steps. Even now, with the danger long past, Dave still stuck to his bicycling.

That was why Jackson had agreed readily with Gibson that Dave was cross-country stuff. Dave's long hours of pedaling had built a tremendous leg power. He had shown the kind of determination a harrier needs in sticking to his rigorous schedule.

Jackson turned morosely back to his desk. With Toole gone, it was going to be tough making a decent showing this year. And now he had this inter-team wrangle to contend with. . . .

GIBSON stood beside Dave Falk as the team lined up for the trial run. "Keep your head, fella," he said cheerfully. "There's nothing here you can't beat. Yeah, even me."

Brown walked over and said: "Nuts. He'll be lucky to finish among the first six." Brown was a short, chunky man with remarkable staying power in his stubby legs. He was captain of the cross-country team, first, last and always. "Henderson could do us some good. Falk, why don't you check out?"

Dave's voice rose angrily. "If I don't finish among the first three I will check out."

Gibson said in a worried voice: "Dave, that's a tough—"

"I can handle it," Dave snapped. "For a change I'm going to do a little pushing around."

Gibson kept silent. Dave was old enough to know his way around. If he kept his head, he might finish in the first three. But Gibson had caught Brown's glance at Rober and Owen. Those two, like Brown, disliked Dave. Gibson hadn't missed their nod, or their

hard, bright eyes. Dave was in for a rough trip over the course this afternoon.

A sudden gleam lighted Brown's eyes. "If you stay in sight of me you'll be lucky. You said your piece, big mouth. Don't scream when you have to turn in your suit."

Gibson didn't like Brown's words. But angry as Dave was, advice would be wasted. Gibson could stay close to Dave and see that no visible dirt happened.

The bark of Coach Jackson's gun sent the men on their way. Brown went to the front immediately, his smooth-striding legs tossing the distance behind him. Dave threaded his way through the other runners and followed closely at Brown's heels.

Brown turned his head and said in surprise: "You still here?"

Dave scowled. "I'm gonna run you down to your ankles."

Brown laughed tauntingly and leaped forward. He hit the crest of the slope, almost sprinting. The rest of the team was far outdistanced as Brown and Dave disappeared from sight. Dave thought he heard Gibson yell, but he couldn't be sure at this distance.

The field, at the bottom of the hill, was rough and rocky. Brown never slackened pace. His flying feet picked their course between the larger boulders unerringly. Despite Dave's efforts, Brown slowly drew away.

"I thought you could keep up," he called back.

Fury flooded Dave again, and he poured on the coal. He ran recklessly, his spikes making scratchy sounds as he raced across the rocky field. He passed the mile flag and Brown was still in front, going strong. For a moment, grave doubt swept over Dave. This pace was too strong. He thrust the idea aside and doggedly kept on. If Brown could hold it, Dave could.

Dave's breathing clogged and pain hit deeper into his chest. He slowed a little, and Brown called back!

"Quitting already? Just what I've been telling coach."

They raced into a narrow, rutty, dirt

road, and still Brown held his torrid pace. The two-mile flag slipped behind Dave, and a steel band pressed closer about his chest. He caught the taunting grin Brown tossed him, and it lent new power to his legs.

Three miles went by. Dave ran in a fog and fire raged in his lungs. He was as strong as Brown. Dave had to believe that. He wondered dully where the rest of the team was. The way he was going, he had a sweet chance of finishing second, maybe of even passing Brown. The thought was electric power flowing into his legs. He put his head down and pumped harder.

The course led up a steep, wooded hill. Brown called back: "Good-bye now, sweetheart."

DAVE thought Brown's voice sounded thick and garbled, then decided it was his own fatigue playing tricks on his hearing. It was agony lifting his feet. When he breathed, a hot, searing gust passed into his lungs. Not much further to go, Dave thought grimly. There can't be much more.

The hilly path slammed Dave's feet. His feet came off the ground slowly, and the path shook before his eyes. His mouth was burning and dry, and his tongue seemed to be swollen out of all proportion.

He had to catch Brown, then he could sit down. The thought was a prop for a few more steps. Dave's stride wobbled and broke. He caught himself, tried another step, then plunged forward. He was very sick then, and the hot taste of blood was in his mouth. He tried to rise, but his muscles were flaccid, flaccid as slow-moving water.

He crawled over to a rock, hoisted himself on it with terrible effort, then sat there trying to clear his congested lungs. If only he could get cool air. His chest threatened to burst with the effort of breathing, and Dave was sick again.

His head cleared, and he thought he heard the sound of spiked feet. Rober and Owen passed, looking at him curiously. Dave dully watched them go, no thought registering in his mind. Another

runner passed, then another, until it seemed like a parade of scantily-dressed men.

"Well, wise guy, you played right into their hands."

The voice came to Dave from a long way off. The pounding slowly subsided in Dave's lungs and head. He looked up and Gibson stood before him. With sudden, sickening realization, Dave knew where he was, what he was supposed to be doing. He had said he would finish among the first three, and a great many runners had already passed him.

He pulled himself to his feet and plunged on up the hill. The first few steps went all right, and Dave tried to find more speed. The pain returned then and he couldn't keep on. He slowed to a shambling walk, breathing carefully, for the air was still a sword tearing through his mouth and nostrils.

Gibson caught up with him and said gruffly: "Easy from now on in. You can't tear yourself apart."

Far, far ahead, Dave spotted a lone figure, finishing the course at a slow trot. He looked at Gibson and Gibson nodded.

"Brown. You lost your head and he ran you into the ground." Reluctant admiration crept into his voice. "The guy's a fighter, though."

Gibson and Dave crossed the finish line, walking slowly. Dave's face was hard and drawn, his eyes blazing. Brown stood there, openly laughing.

"Last," Brown jeered. He held out his hand. "I'll take your suit."

"You sucked me along nicely." Cold fury knotted the muscles of Dave's jaw. "You'll take this." He swung with careful precision and landed beautifully on the point of Brown's chin.

Surprise glazed Brown's eyes. He swayed back and forth, then gently slipped to the ground.

The team started for Dave with angry cries. Gibson, his eyes flaming, stopped them. "Take care of Brown," he called to Coach Jackson. "Dave, come with me." He led the belligerent Dave away from the hostile group.

"You know what this means, Dave?" Gibson asked grimly.

Dave's teeth were clenched. "He didn't care where he finished as long as he—"

"I know, I know," Gibson said wearily. "You fell for one of the oldest gags in history. But you've spoken your piece and now you'll have to live up to it."

Dave watched the team walk away. With a sick dullness, he realized there would be no more chances. Henderson had showed a remarkably strong race today. Henderson would run in Dave's place in the Midwestern and in the Intercollegiates.

Dave went down to the station and saw the team leave for the big Midwestern meet. The team didn't see Dave. He stood on the outskirts of the crowd, and the hurt and longing were plain in his eyes. He would be going with them if it hadn't been for Brown.

THE result of the meet was flashed back to the campus. Portsmouth had finished third. Dave's disappointment died quickly. Third wasn't too bad against the class of competition Portsmouth faced at Chicago. And it insured the team of a trip to the Intercollegiate Meet.

Dave was in the crowd, waiting for the team's return. He tried to keep out of sight, but Gibson spotted him. He crossed the station lobby and took hold of Dave's arm.

"We needed you at Chicago, kid. If you'd run the race that's in those long legs, we might have won."

Pleasure colored Dave's face. "Tell me about it," he said eagerly.

"Toole finished first," Gibson said soberly. "Sure, he can run at Ruskin this year. They don't have the eligibility rules we have. Toole's winning hasn't helped you in Brown's eyes. All the way back, Brown kept moaning what Portsmouth would have done if Toole were still running for us." Gibson's voice took on a little edge. "I'm getting tired of hearing about Toole. Let's get something to eat, kid, and forget about cross-country running."

The final week before the Intercol-

legiate was sheer agony to Dave. He wanted to run more than he wanted anything else in the world. He took long bicycle trips into the country, trying to get the terrible, longing ache from his legs. When the longing to run hit too hard, Dave pedaled faster, trying to outrun it."

The desire was with him again and he tore along the country road, paying no attention to where he was going. There was a curve ahead, and Dave leaned into it, pedaling furiously. The curve straightened out, and Dave was riding into a group of men before he realized it.

He heard warning, frightened cries, tried to miss the figure before him, then hit the man, hard. Dave was thrown off the seat. He had a confused impression of the man falling, of other men rushing to the scene; then everything went black.

Dave sat up and shook his head dizzily. Gingerly he climbed to his feet. He was all right. He remembered the impact and thought in alarm: *The man I hit? Is he all right?*

Gibson was stretched out on the ground. The team was gathered about him. Brown sprang up at Dave's approach, his face contorted with fury.

"You deliberately ran him down. You knew the course crossed this road. You waited around that curve, then tore into him. You'd knock out your own roommate trying to open up a place on the team. You won't get by with it, you hear?" He thrust his face savagely at Dave.

Dave brushed by Brown. He ignored the accusing faces of the team members. "Gibby," he said in a choked voice. "Is it bad?"

Gibson smiled wanly. "I thought it was a truck, kid. I think you got my knee. C'mon, cut it. I know it wasn't your fault. These mugs will come to in a minute and cut the heavy act. Hey, you guys, how about helping me in?"

Gibson could walk, but it was a crippling, torturing process. The team wouldn't let Dave help, and he followed silently.

Jackson saw the little group approaching and ran out to meet them. Brown answered the questions in Jackson's face.

"That damn Falk trying to get back on the team. He can't win a place, so he tries this."

"Hold it," Gibson protested weakly. "It was an accident."

"I wouldn't hit Gibby," Dave cried. "Gibby and I—"

Jackson turned despairing eyes on Dave. "You've sure had a hand in shaping, or unshaping, this team." He turned his back on Dave, and said shakily: "Let's get Gibson in."

DAVE stood there, a forlorn, helpless figure, and watched the team disappear into the locker room. He was out of everything as definitely as though a door had been slammed in his face. From now on, the less the cross-country team saw of Dave, the better it would be for everyone concerned.

The nerves in Dave's stomach were too tightly knotted for him to eat supper. He sat in his room trying not to look at Gibson, trying to keep frightening despair from rolling in.

Gibson said lightly: "Will you quit mourning? I left my books in our locker. Run down and get them for me."

All the way to their locker, Dave kept turning things to say over in his mind. Gibson knew it had been an accident, yet Dave had to find something to say to him. He picked up the books and retraced his steps, his mind still seeking the right words.

The door to their room was open. Dave started to walk in when he heard Jackson say vehemently.

"You're crazy, Gibson. Falk has done enough. He cost us Toole and now you're out. If we make too bad a showing Saturday my job won't even be safe."

Dave didn't go in. He pressed against the wall and listened.

"Dave owes me a race," Gibson said slowly. "He'll be running for me Saturday. I've got another year of competition. If Dave runs Saturday and doesn't win, I won't be out again, coach. I mean that," he finished quietly.

Dave backed silently from the door and walked slowly down the hall. He knew how well Gibson loved to run. Gibson must believe in Dave a great deal to make such a promise.

Gibson was right. Dave did owe him a race. Fire came back to Dave's eyes. He didn't know what he could say to Jackson, but in some way he would convince the coach.

Dave waited outside until Jackson came down the stairs. He followed Jackson clear across the campus before he spoke. He didn't want the coach to know he had overheard Gibson's words.

"Coach"—there was no hesitancy in Dave's voice—"I can run a good race for you, Saturday. You need another man. Gibson's knee won't be able to stand it. You gotta let me run, coach."

Jackson frowned heavily. "Brown and the team wouldn't stand for it. I wouldn't know how—"

"You're the coach, aren't you?" Dave asked bitingly. "I don't give a damn what the team thinks. I can run you a race Saturday."

Jackson said in a hopeless voice: "It probably won't work out, but all right." His tone said that it wasn't because he believed in Dave. Jackson just didn't have another man.

Dave returned to his room and said: "Gibby. I'm running Saturday."

Hearty surprise was in Gibson's voice. "That's swell, kid. Give 'em hell for me."

DURING the long trip East, the team let Dave strictly alone. It suited Dave. He didn't feel like talking to anyone. Brown kept making remarks that Dave could overhear.

Dave thought fiercely, to hell with him. I've got to keep thinking about Gibson.

Dave hadn't realized the Intercollegiate Meet was so big. He was only a number among the large field. Six racking miles lay ahead. He stood with the other runners waiting for the release of the gun. Nerves crawled and bunched in his stomach, and he had to think hard of Gibson to keep his trembling from showing.

Toole was halfway down the long line of runners. Toole, in the green and white of Ruskin College, was big, redheaded and arrogant. Papers forecast Toole as the man to beat. LaSalle, of Bevington, was a flyer, and so was Henschman, of Central. It was a select field all right. Dave didn't blame Brown for sneering at him. Anyone thinking and saying he could beat this bunch had a big job to do.

The gun sent the field away. For a while Dave was hemmed in. Toole went to the front immediately, as Dave knew he would do. That was Toole's style. Kill them off in front. And Toole could do it. The man had remarkable stamina plus great speed. Keep him in sight, Dave thought, and you're going to be pretty close at the finish.

Dave sprinted a little, threading his way through the runners. When the field swung into the first turn, Toole and Dave were in front.

All during the first mile Dave kept at Toole's heels. Toole kept flashing grins over his shoulder. He seemed to be amused that Dave thought he could run with him.

Dave heard pounding spikes and turned his head. A chubby, dark-complexioned man in a red jersey, was drawing up. Dave turned it on a little. No one was going to pass him today. The man fell back and Dave slackened his pace. Toole seemed unworried by Dave's narrowing the margin.

Toole and Dave pounded across a grassy field and swung into a patch of woods. Branches whipped gently from Toole's passing, brushing Dave's face. Dry leaves, underfoot, crackled and snapped, seeming to say, run for Gibson. Run, run, run.

Dave passed a flag with the numeral 3 and he blinked in surprise. Half of the race was behind him already, and he wasn't feeling too badly. Toole's pace must be just about right. Fast enough to keep them in front, and not too fast to take everything out of them.

Toole swung into a soft, dusty road and Dave followed eagerly. This was easier running than the rocky field they

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had just crossed. He sprinted a little and drew very close to Toole.

Toole flashed him a glance, and the humor didn't seem to be in it. Dave thought grimly, he's surprised at my sticking this close. The thought was warm and lent power to his legs. Dave ran easily and happily. Today he wouldn't be burned out before the finish. He would take that arrogant grin off Toole's face for good.

The four-mile flag was at the bottom of a long slope, leading upward. Toole swung into the climb easily, even stretching his stride a little.

Dave followed him grimly. By the time he reached the top he was panting, and spots were swimming before his eyes. Sweat coursed down his face, stinging his eyes and running into his mouth, the taste of it hot and salty.

He looked back down the long slope and the main body of the runners was just beginning the climb. A Portsmouth man, in the familiar purple and white, came charging out of the pack. Dave thought it was Henderson or Brown. He couldn't be sure at this distance.

THE path grew very rocky and Dave picked his way gingerly. His spikes made sharp, clacking sounds as they came in contact with the rocky ground. Got to be careful, he thought. One of these rocks could turn underfoot and throw you. Just then his spikes slipped and he went down, banging his knee.

For seconds he was so scared he couldn't think. He couldn't knock himself out now. He had a race to run for Gibson. Carefully he got back on his feet and tested the knee. It seemed to be all right. Toole had probably picked up a few yards during that fall. Dave looked ahead and Toole wasn't in sight.

Panic seized Dave and he ran very hard. He couldn't let Toole get too big a margin on him. The path bent sharply and Dave raced into the turn. As he came out of the curve, he was startled to see Toole standing there, an ugly grin on his face.

Toole's hand flashed out. Dave leaped to one side. He was late, very late.

Toole's shove pushed him off the path into the rocky ditch beside it. Dave slammed into the rocky side, half broke his fall, then tumbled and slid to the bottom.

He lay there bruised and shaken. Luckily, the ditch wasn't deep. He could have broken a leg, or worse. And the guy who had pushed him was the one Brown idolized!

Anger helped Dave scramble up and out of the ditch. He felt something warm and sticky on his shoulder and left arm, and saw blood slowly oozing out. The rocky slide had scraped skin.

Dave ran grimly on, intent on picking up Toole again. Toole must be very afraid of Dave to pull a stunt like that. If Toole's margin wasn't too great, Dave would catch him and run him right off his feet.

He passed a flag and knew dimly that only a mile was left. Far down the descent he could see Toole. Dave threw form, caution and reserve to the winds. He put his head down and just ran. The downward slope lent more speed to his flying feet. If he should fall at this speed he probably wouldn't be able to get up.

The slope flattened out into a meadow. Halfway across it, Dave caught Toole.

"You louse," he managed.

He didn't have breath for more words. He didn't have breath enough to keep running. His legs seemed disjointed, moving without his directing them. Fatigue swept over him in waves, and it was difficult not to give way to his great desire to lie down and rest.

Dave thought of Gibson and of what Toole had just done. Side by side, Toole and Dave ran together. Toole lurched and brushed Dave. Dave knew Toole was just as weary as he.

Dave found a little reserve and drew out. "You coming?" he rasped.

Toole tried, but the effort was too much for him. His stride broke, and he plunged forward on his face.

Dave felt only a numb gladness. He had raced Toole off his feet. He had accomplished that much, even if he didn't do anything else.

The last quarter-mile was across a golf

links. Far ahead, Dave could see the crowd clustered about the finish. Their cheering came to him dimly as if he were under a great fog.

He heard pounding feet behind him and felt a great surge of disappointment. Toole had gotten back on his feet and was coming again.

DAVE called on fading muscles and found little response. A runner was at Dave's shoulder. Dave couldn't see him plainly. His lungs were a solid mass of fire and his breathing was an agonized thing.

Lift your feet and put them down. Lift your feet— Dave made it a chant running through his mind. The cheering sounded louder. The finish line should be close. Dave reeled and stumbled, taking one wobbly stride after another.

The man at his shoulder made harsh rasping sounds through his open mouth, but he wasn't passing Dave. One more step, Dave thought, and that's the last. Something flimsy struck his chest and Dave plunged forward into blackness.

He came back slowly, fighting off the haze.

"Dave." Gibson leaned over him, watching anxiously. "Dave, can you hear me?"

Dave nodded mute assent. Coach Jackson stood there, too, concern on his face.

"How did I do?" Dave husked through dry lips.

"Just first," Jackson said gently. "You ran your race for Gibson."

"How did you know about that?" Dave asked curiously.

Coach Jackson's grin was broad. "We heard you outside the door the other night. You heard just what we wanted you to hear."

Dave sighed a little. "I wanted to beat Toole badly."

Jackson said: "He hasn't finished yet. Isn't that bad enough?"

"Then who was it—"

"Me." Brown stood over Dave, his face oddly puzzled. "I ran my heart out, trying to break you and you never did. That takes courage, kid." His face blackened at a remembrance. "We've got some unfinished business with Toole. I was at the top of that hill and saw him shove you. And that's the guy I believed in."

Dave laughed. All his heartbreak and longing were gone in the sound. He could see in Brown's face that he belonged now.

"Forget it," he said. "We finished one-two, didn't we?"

"And Henderson just crossed," Jackson said exultantly. "We're in, Dave. We're in."

"There's one thing I'm sorry about," Brown said solemnly.

"What?" Dave asked in alarm. He didn't see anything to be sorry about. He thought this day was perfect.

"I'm not going to be here next year. With you and Gibson and Henderson, Portsmouth is going to have the greatest team in history."

Dave grinned contentedly. "For green hands we showed them a fair one today."



Don't Get Hurt

By Ned Cady

Author of "Champs or Chumps?" etc.

Great athletes don't get hurt as often as mediocre ones. It's all in knowing how. Here's how.



IT IS no fun to get hurt, even in a winning game. And getting hurt is only a bad habit. There really is no point to it.

Accidents will happen, I admit. Hundreds of people are put into hospitals every year, just by slipping in bathtubs. But even that is mostly the result of bad habits. And I do not mean that bathing is a bad habit, either. The bad habit in this case is to grip the sides of the tub instead of the front of it when getting in or out.

Big-shot coaches know that injuries result from habits. They use this knowledge when judging prospects.

Three weeks ago I stood with a scout from the Yankees. He was watching a young pitcher in a semi-pro game. The lad had put over eleven strikeouts in five innings.

"What do you think?" I asked.

"Wrong pitching habits." He shook his head. "The young fellow would pitch his arm out before he got out of the minors. His motion is too kinky. He pitches with his arm and not his body."

I know that this happens in every form of big-time sport. Athlete after athlete piles up a fine record, then gets bids only from the talent-hungry small-time outfits. The reason is that he has habits which will lead to getting hurt.

Yet good habits are as easy to form as bad ones. Easier, in most cases, for they bring fewer penalties.

Take that most dangerous post on the

baseball field, the catcher's job. Why do men like Harry Danning and "Old Sehnoz" and dozens of others go on year after year while the infielders are lucky to last three seasons in the majors?

The reason is, a good catcher forms the right habits or he never could become good.

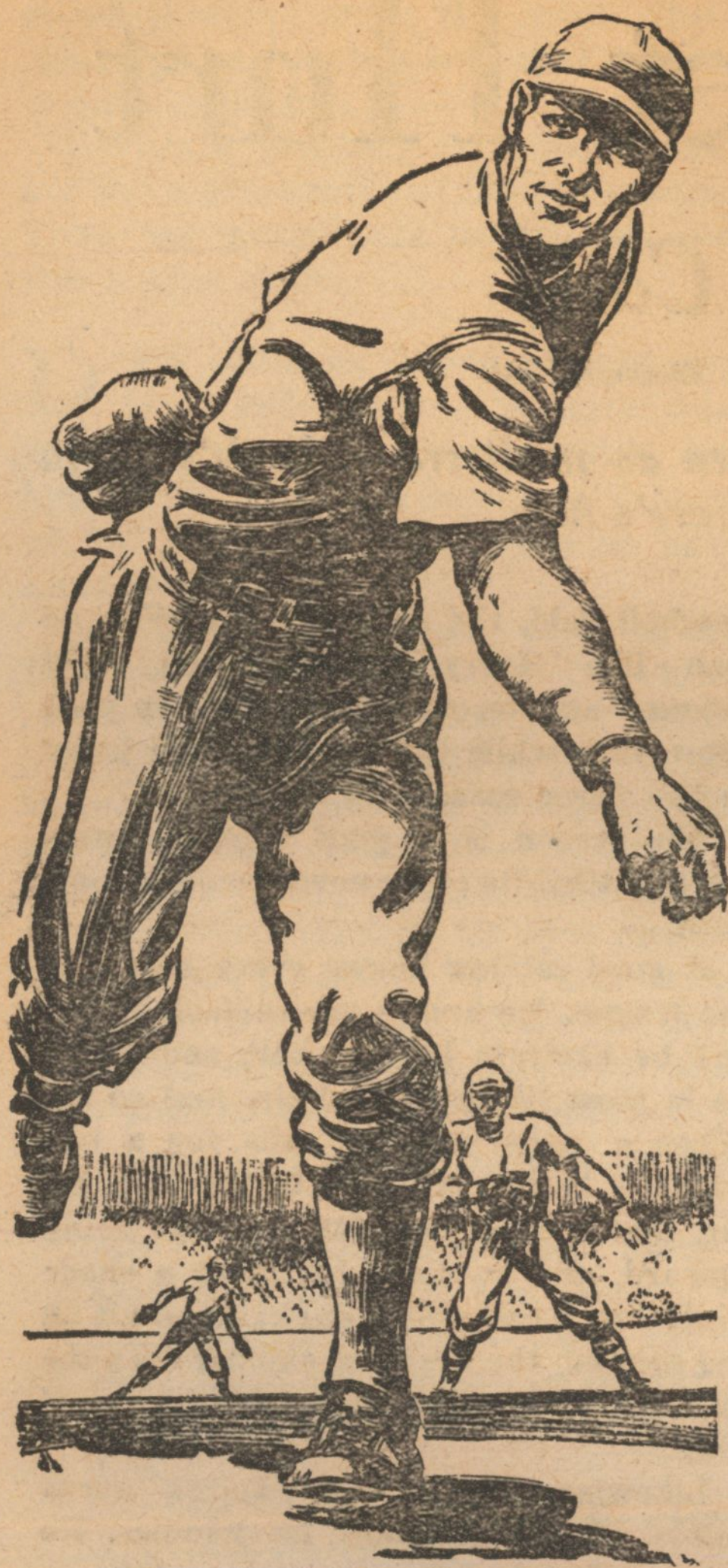
A good catcher knows every batter in the league. He knows where each batter will be likely to hit any ball, and which he is most likely to foul tip, and so on. When a smart catcher calls for a ball which a batter is likely to hit into the air, that catcher lays for foul tips going upward, and he holds his glove a shade high. For a ball which ought to be hit on the ground, the first-line catcher does the opposite. Therefore fouls seldom "get" him.

Likewise, the catcher knows every foible of the pitchers he handles. He knows what bad throws and mistakes a pitcher is likely to make. The catcher holds his body and his glove in such positions as to guard against those mistakes. This helps the hurler to pitch better, and it wins games. But it also is a habit which keeps the catcher from getting hurt.

Long-lived infielders know their stuff, too.

Few modern fans know that the magnates had to bring in the "rabbit ball" because one of the greatest first basemen of all time did not want to get hurt.

The first sacker's name was Hal Chase. He grew up in the days when first basemen wanted 'em tossed high where they were easy to catch.



But in those same days a fellow named Ty Cobb had set the nasty habit of spiking first basemen on the way down. This custom led to first basemen making errors on close plays, and hiked up Ty's scoring average no end. Other fast runners were following suit. And our friend Hal Chase did not like to get spiked—he claimed that it made his ankles itch.

So Hal called for low-thrown balls to first base. This had been thought the surest way to pile up errors. But Hal leaned way out into the infield and picked them off the grass tops. He seemed to stretch halfway to the pitcher's box. And after the catch, he stepped off the bag

and into the infield where it was almost impossible for a fast-running batter to spike him.

Low-thrown balls get over faster than high ones, and the stretch gave Hal the split-second advantage of a shorter throw from the infield. This cut off so many base hits that they had to put more life into the ball so it would be hit to the outfield more often.

All good first basemen use this trick now. It is a habit which avoids getting hurt. And like all good habits, it wins games.

GOOD footwork habits help in all sorts of sports. Bill Tilden, the great tennis star, learned years ago that in a five-set match the feet take an awful beating. Then he studied form until he worked out a way of saving his tootsies.

Watch Bill in a professional match. He goes across the court for a backhand shot. Watch his feet. Right, left, right, and pause in perfect balance. Right, left, right again, and he is in position.

When he stops each time, his right foot is toed up a little and his heel is on the ground. The muscles of both of his legs and hips take the shock of stopping. He can change direction quickly, for he is in perfect balance, like a cat. He pounds his feet down as little as possible to stop. Therefore he is a great star after more than twenty years of top-flight play.

Red Grange, the "Galloping Ghost," was another great athlete who knew how to make his footwork keep him from getting hurt.

Through more than ten years of college and professional football, Red averaged more than four yards gained from scrimmage on every run. This high speed ought to have made him a mark for every hard tackler. But Red almost never was out with injuries.

The reason was that Red ran with his hips loose but his ankles braced. His ankles were not stiff, mind you, but they were not snapping with his stride like those of a sprinter. And as a result, Red's whole body took the shock of the tackle instead of his legs getting it all. Great

backfield stars who do not learn this trick seldom last two seasons.

Lou Little, now the coach at Columbia, was a tackle who knew how not to get hurt. And through his years at Penn and in the professional ranks, Lou was one of the greatest linemen ever to don cleats.

Lou charged with his body in a straight line from the hips. A blocking back had first to get past Lou's hands—which few of them did, for Lou's straight-lined body gave him excellent leverage with which to use his hands. After avoiding the hands, the blocker had to get by Lou's elbows, and those sharp and hard joints were close to Lou's body so they could not be knocked askew.

After the elbows, the blocker found Lou Little's shoulders in his way. And all of this time, Lou had been using his legs to help him, and Lou knew all about the famous half-step timing technique. No wonder Lou Little was All-American and All-Professional at his position.

I mention these old-timers because they discovered the methods which keep young fellows from getting hurt today. Knute Rockne was one of them. As an end at Notre Dame, Knute learned how to be fast without getting hurt. And he has taught this stratagem to others. When did you ever hear of a Notre Dame star being out with injuries? When has any Notre Dame team been counted out of the running because it had the "injury jinx"?

Using your eyes the right way will help you not to get hurt. The habit of blinking during fast action probably leads to as many injuries as anything else. And unless the muscles of the eyes have been injured, blinking is only a habit.

Arthur Donovan, the greatest referee in boxing and a former top-flight boxer in his own right, says that keeping the eyes open in the ring is a habit easy to develop. And it is a very useful habit. It will save accidents in everything from football to car driving.

THE boxers who become great champions without getting hurt almost all take special steps to develop their eye

habits. Benny Leonard, who, though the greatest of the lightweights has not a mark on him, started as a heavy puncher but stuck to light hitting and skillful boxing until he had almost perfect defense. Then he started hitting again. At the top of his form, Benny could see punches and pick them off before they got started. He could hit while being safe from hitting, all because he taught himself to see in the ring.

Gene Tunney started his career as a slugger and an "Irish Strong Boy." But after he had learned a few things, he developed the habit of beginning every training period with having others throw punches at him while he blocked and picked them off. All through his training he kept his eyes ahead of his muscles. And now Gene is teaching Uncle Sam's men how to be good athletes and develop themselves in the right way.

There are ways of getting hurt and of not getting hurt in every sport. Ace Parker, perhaps the greatest star to play in a professional football backfield, has not learned how to slide on a baseball diamond in such a way as to soften his stop by slipping around the bag. Ace goes through season after season on the grid-iron, lasting through games in which the toughest of teams gang him, but he breaks his ankles when he tries fast baseball.

Dizzy Dean is trying to learn how to pitch without hurting his arm after he has tossed away most of his marvelous ability. Bucky Walters never had anything but "don't get hurt" habits, and he probably will be an ace until he starts tripping over a long white beard while going after bunts.

The right habits can be learned from good coaches, and by watching how old-timers do their stuff. The wrong habits come from refusing to learn. A swelled head can break an ankle.

Getting hurt is no fun for you, your coach or the spectators. Learn how to play safely, and everybody will get more out of the game, and your sport will be the most excellent training for your life.

Gridiron Graveyard

Gripping Football Novelet

By Duane Yarnell



RICK HILLMAN looked across the desk at the dapper little owner of the Gotham Bisons. He was having a hard time keeping his fingers off

Maxie Luscombe's throat.

Rick was a big guy, tall and well tanned and miraculously in one piece after five seasons of tailbacking for the perennial champion Bisons. Rick had drawn ten grand a year for the five-year span. Until he'd seen that new face in the dressing room, he had looked forward to dragging down that same chunk of cash for at least another season.

For just an instant he thought of what it would mean in case he *didn't* pick up that cash. It made him shudder. It set his ears to clanging. The clang was like the sound of jail doors being shut.

Rick stood there, glaring at Maxie Luscombe, his eyes a bleak gray. "The new guy on the squad," Rick said. "His name's Slocum, isn't it?"

Maxie gnawed the end off a four-bit stogie. He reminded Rick of a beaver sharpening off a tree. Maxie said, "You guessed that right, Rick."

"He's a tailback," Rick said. "Same as me . . ."

Maxie shrugged. "He ain't a tackle," he admitted.

Rick's hot palms were flat on the desk and he leaned forward, his eyes earnest. "I want it on the line, Maxie. I've got to know. Did you hire that guy to replace me—or just to relieve me?"

"To replace you," Maxie said. "You slowed down plenty, Rick."

Rick began to sweat. He loved football

and if he did get sold to some other outfit, he could be happy as far as he alone was concerned. The devil of it was, Rick wasn't the only one involved.

There were all those people who had been sucked into that phony oil deal because they had trusted Rick's judgment. They had to be paid and it would take another nine thousand bucks for Rick to square off. The money had to be raised in a hurry. If Rick didn't pay off before the papers got the lowdown, his name would be mud and he'd be washed up with the public forever.

Rick had to stick with the Bisons because Maxie Luscombe was the only owner who could pay the kind of money Rick had always earned. Rick had to have one more season! One more big pay check from Maxie Luscombe.

Now, desperately, Rick said, "I don't crawl on my belly very well, Maxie. I've not had much practice . . ."

Maxie shrugged. "Talkin' won't help, Rick. I've made up my mind."

Rick's breath came fast. "In five years," he said, "I've set plenty of records, Maxie. You know that."

Maxie frowned. "You got paid plenty, didn't you? That's the hell with you footballers. You ain't ever grateful."

Rick Hillman was beginning to get sore. He was beginning to remember things, too. He jerked up a pant leg and there was a bump along his shin. Not a bad bump, not a deformity. But it was a bump, just the same, a silent marker where a bone had been broken.

Rick was talking softly, but his voice had a funny ring and Maxie, listening, moved backward in his chair. "Remember that day," Rick murmured. "We were behind and I was out with a bad leg.



Rick Hillman's flashing cleats were beginning to slow up. And the Bisons knew it! So Rick was traded to the lowly Ghosts, graveyard of the ex-gridiron greats—to start life again from a pig-skin cemetery.

Remember how it was, Maxie? You said, 'Go in there, Rick. Win this one for me. If you break that leg again, I'll buy you a gold one.' "

MAXIE was beginning to look uncomfortable. Rick jabbed at the scar along his chin, at other scars. "Remember how I got 'em, Maxie? Remember how you used to say, 'Win this one for me, Rick. Sock 'em hard and when you're washed up, there'll be a job for you on the coaching staff.' I'm asking about that job, Maxie. Do I get it?"

Maxie got up. He was smaller than Rick and Rick's eyes had a dangerous glint. But Maxie could face a buzz saw if his mood was right. His mood was right, now.

"Times change," Maxie said. "I figure you're too young to coach and too old to play the kind of football I want played. But I ain't got a guilty conscience. I paid you plenty."

Rick Hillman went quietly mad. He reached over, picked Maxie Luscombe up by the belt and collar. He hoisted him over his head. Maxie was too little to hit, so Rick compromised by bouncing him off the wall. There was a gravy spot on Maxie Luscombe's tie and Rick proceeded to wipe it off. With Maxie.

Maxie fought back. He opened Rick's forehead with an ink bottle and he got Rick in the groin with a pen holder. He tripped Rick with a typewriter stand and when Rick fell, Maxie's typewriter bounced off Rick's shoulder. Maxie was a cute little guy in more than one way.

Rick got up and wiped blood from his cut forehead. The physical action had sapped much of his anger. He began to think of that job he needed again and his stomach got tight. He licked a split lip, scowled.

"Shoving you around don't solve anything, Maxie. I hate your guts and maybe you hate mine. But that don't keep us from swingin' a deal."

"The only thing I want to swing with you is a rope from your neck," Maxie remarked sociably.

Rick disregarded him. "You say I'm washed up. I'll admit I've slowed down a

little. But I'm still as fast as any tailback in the league. I'm willing to prove it, Maxie!"

An odd gleam came into Maxie's eyes. He accepted the challenge—quickly. But Rick was too excited to notice. He moved toward the dressing room as Maxie barked swift orders.

"You take the tailback on the seconds. I'll put Slocum with the first team. If you make a monkey out of him, you stay on the payroll."

Rick said, "I'll make a whole damn zoo out of him!"

Rick Hillman went out onto the field a few minutes later. He went out and he took his place with the scrubs for the first time in his life. He lined up against the same guys he had been sparking for the past five seasons.

The scrubs got the ball on the kickoff. The quarter pitched a lateral to Rick and the man who was a veteran at twenty-six ambled up the sideline for thirty yards before they nailed him.

Rick felt better. He bounced to his feet. The scrub quarter looked at Rick because he knew that this was Rick's party. Rick said, "Seventy-six. Block or duck."

Rick eased into the tailback. It was single wing, unbalanced to the left. Rick hit tackle on a delayed buck. He found a small hole and he widened it. Solid legs churned hard beneath him. Rick was driving. He went for two yards and then a red shadow came out of nowhere to pin his knees together in a back-jolting tackle. Rick went down on his pants. When he rolled over he saw the grinning, cocky face of young Slocum.

"How'd you stick around five years?" Slocum demanded.

Rick said, "I had to wait to see what you looked like. I want to see how your diapers fit."

Rick went back and he heard Slocum's confident chuckle ringing in his ears. It was the chuckle of youth and Rick found himself remembering his own youth that had been literally thrown away on Maxie Luscombe.

Rick wasn't a heavy guy for pro ball. From the beginning, he'd known that he'd burn out years sooner if he didn't use a

change of pace. He'd told Maxie Luscombe, but Maxie had shrugged Rick away.

"Go ahead, Rick," Maxie had said. "Give me everything you've got. Don't save yourself. And if you burn out before your time, I'll take care of you."

Rick had believed Maxie. He'd given Maxie ten years of service in five years of playing. He'd played fire-wagon ball without a letup. Rain or shine, sick or injured—knowing all the time that Maxie was saving a coaching job for him when he began to slow down.

But Rick had been a sucker. He'd let Maxie lie to him and now the chips were down and if Rick stuck around, he'd have to earn his place by fighting for it.

Rick winced. He saw the cocky way Slocum was dancing around in the varsity secondary. He felt the tightness in the backs of his own legs. There was no use hiding it. Rick was still a good tailback. But the years of hammering had taken a toll. He was *good*—but once, he had been *great*.

RICK hit the same tackle slot. He hit it with head down and with straight-arm banging. He went for three yards and then the red jersey slapped him kicking again. Before he rolled over, he knew who had tackled him. Slocum was beginning to get on Rick's nerves.

Slocum grinned, tauntingly. "You're through!" he said.

Rick had never been bothered by a rookie before. But he was bothered now. Slocum was too cocky. Slocum was emotionally drunk from reading his own press notices and every time he burped he spewed about twenty words of self praise.

The tough part for Rick was that Slocum really *was* good! He was every bit as good as Rick had ever been—and he was five years fresher. Rick knew he was going to have a time, showing up Slocum. But he had to get the job done. If ever a guy needed a job, it was Rick, right now!

Rick threw everything. He hammered the line until his head was swaying and

the grass looked reddish green through the blood haze.

Rick went down under Jeff Mundane's tackle. The big first-string guard muttered, "Don't be a sap, Rick. Maxie's sendin' you through the laundry. You poked him in the mouth and it made him sore. He's tippin' three of his guys fifty bucks apiece to give you a working over."

Rick's brain was a whirl. He said, grimly, "I—I gotta keep trying! I gotta show Maxie that I can dish it out . . ."

Rick kept trying. He kept throwing everything he had, kept shaking his head and rolling back for more. He knew, now, that the football deck was stacked against him. He had been ordered smeared by his own mates. They were doing a luscious job of smearing. Rick was one solid ache and he was beginning to throb.

He fought back. He fought back until he was rocking on his heels. He didn't remember exactly how it ended. He was running, swaying, and a sob was coming out of his throat. Somebody hit him and his teeth rattled. After that, it was a blur until he opened his eyes.

Maxie was standing over him. Maxie was saying, "Get that bum outa here. Get his wrist bandaged and then get rid of him!"

Rick's stomach was in clamps. He listened to Maxie finish. "Don't waste adhesive tape, doc. I just made a phone call and I got him peddled. From now on the Ghosts pay Rick's salary."

Rick's mouth fell open. He said, slowly, "The Ghosts? You sold me to the Midville Ghosts?"

Maxie's eyes were hard, his mouth vindictive.

"Yeah. That's my little goin'-away present. So long, chum."

Rick was weak. But somehow he managed to find the strength to swing. His fist landed lightly on Maxie's jaw. But it was Rick who went down, not Maxie. He went down in a dead faint and before his eyes paraded the hapless string of footballers known as the Midville Ghosts.

Midville was the graveyard of gridiron hopes. It was the final resting place for the ex-gridiron greats. It was the last place in the world where a pro player

wanted to wind up. But Rick was on his way. Maxie Luscombe had sold him to the Ghosts and there was nothing Rick could do about it!

II

BOZO BLOZZIS had been as great a fullback as Nagurski. But somewhere along the line Bozo Blozzis had picked up a trick knee and was now earning bean and bacon money with the Ghosts.

Bozo looked over at Rick just before the Ghosts went out for their first game of the season. Bozo Blozzis grinned crookedly. "What's eatin' you, Hillman?" he demanded.

Rick scowled. All around him he could hear the light chatter of guys who no longer cared. Guys who were talking about dames they'd met and golf courses they'd played. Of poker games they'd busted and of poker games that had busted them.

Rick Hillman thought of the six other clubs in the league that Maxie might have sold him to. He thought of the nine thousand bucks he would be needing soon and his belly tied itself into a bowline knot.

"Maybe you don't like it here," Bozo said.

Rick snorted. "Maybe I don't," he admitted.

"Maybe you think you're too good," Blozzis said.

Rick considered that one. As a matter of fact, that was exactly what he did think. Sure, he'd slowed down. His legs were not as strong and he didn't start quite so fast. There was a tailback in the business who might be a better man. But against any other tailback except young Slocum, Rick was willing to take his chances. He had been sold down the river by Maxie Luscombe and he had been shoved into the tightest crack it had been his pleasure of meeting.

"Look, brother," Blozzis suggested. "When a guy gets left with the Ghosts, it means he's washed up. There ain't no point in you gettin' high-hatty. We're just one big happy-family and there ain't no guy gonna put on the dog around us."

Rick blinked and his eyes were desper-

ate. This was the club he'd half hoped might be rejuvenated into a winner. Rick had talked with the owner, Potsy Conklin, and the easy-going Potsy had laughed at Rick's plea for ten grand a season.

"We got a loser," Potsy had cracked. "The only guys I get are the guys who can't make the grade with the better teams. We don't draw in this park and we can't pay fancy salaries. You get three grand a season and I probably won't be able to pay all of that. I traded two promising rookies for you and besides that, I put but some cash. I don't want you to give me any trouble."

Rick had wondered why Maxie had been willing to get rid of him to a club that was notorious for the great amount of money it did not have to spend. He knew, now. Maxie had got a couple of players in addition. And at the same time Maxie had got even with Rick by putting Rick in a lineup where victories were few and far between. Maxie knew how Rick loved football. He knew how playing with a loser would sap Rick's morale. A nice guy, Maxie.

Thinking of him made Rick go cold with hatred. He slapped his fists together hard. Some day, if it took ten years, he was going to take an outfit of footballers and smash Maxie's Bisons right out of a pennant picture!

Through Rick's thoughts crashed Bozo Blozzis' voice again. "Wake up, sweetheart. We got a little chore to do."

Rick went out with the Ghosts. They were wearing gray uniforms and it was a gray day. The only thing necessary to complete the gray ensemble in Rick's mind was the apathetic sight of those half filled stands.

The opposition was the Maroon outfit, another cellar dweller. But the Maroons had one thing. They had spirit. They were a poor outfit, financially, but when it came to wanting to win, they had what it took.

From his spot deep on the goal line, Rick tried to boom up some fire. He yelled, "Let's take these buzzards!"

The Ghosts turned to stare at Rick Hillman. It was the first chatter they'd

heard on their field since the beginning of the practice season. Regardless of the shortcomings of the Ghosts, there was one thing that stuck out more prominently than all the rest put together.

The Ghosts were whipped before they stepped onto the field. When you were a Ghost, you were with an outfit that didn't give a damn! The feeling of apathy held every old Ghost player and it soon took hold of the newer ones. Rick Hillman, being an observant guy, could see all this.

IN A WAY, Rick couldn't blame players for being upset when they became Ghosts. With the Ghosts, there was no chance of high salaries and little chance of winning. Midville happened to be right in the middle of the league setup and since it was a handy overnight stop on a good railroad, transportation costs were held down and the other teams tolerated the Ghosts. By careful managing, Potsy Conklin had managed to eke out a living on a shoestring investment.

Rick Hillman had been sold into this setup. It was enough to all but sink his spirit. But it didn't quite sink it because Rick still had a job to do. He had money to get and he had Maxie Luscombe to pay back. Football was the only game Rick knew and everything he earned or accomplished must spring directly from the game. He was stuck in Midville and about all he could do was make the best of the situation and fight back his damndest!

The Maroon kicker got a nice high one into the teeth of the strong wind. By the time the ball dropped into Rick's arms, the Maroons had had an opportunity to sift down through the hapless Ghost blockers.

Rick was surrounded when he reached the ten. He picked the guy who looked greenest and drove toward him. The kid shifted over with Rick. Rick threw a nice feint at him and the kid dived and then Rick was shifting back into the groove and for a moment, was out in the clear.

He crossed the twenty, then cut to the sideline. He was turning on the heat, now. He was driving for Potsy Conklin

the same way he had always fought for Maxie Luscombe. He thought of Maxie and he felt a brief burst of anger that gave him new strength.

A Maroon jersey came down across Rick's vision. Rick was like a machine gunner in the belly of a fighter plane. He waited until the maroon jersey was centered in his sights. He jerked the trigger of his stiff-arm and there was another opponent spinning out of action.

Bozo Blozzis came to life as Rick crossed the forty. Bozo threw a nice body block. It took two Maroons out of the fracas and there was Rick out in a broken field, still the slickest veteran in the pro league, making monkeys out of the Maroons.

It was funny, the feeling inside Rick. He didn't stop to think that he was playing with the Ghosts, that for every touchdown there would probably be two by the opposition. The only thing on Rick's mind, at the moment, was the glory of playing a great game. He had a pigskin under his arm—and, brother, pull in your ears, here comes a cyclone!

Rick had himself a time. He reversed his field on the fifty. He outraced two kids who were supposed to be fast. He dumped one of them into the other when he pulled a neat crossover. He tangled the safety man in his own rompers with a nice bit of Fancy Dan and when he went over for the score, the scattered fans rubbed their eyes in disbelief and waited, half expectantly, for the referee to call the touchdown back on some technicality.

Bozo Blozzis ambled up, grinning a little.

He said, slowly, "Maybe I was wrong in there, brother. Maybe you *are* better than the rest of our happy family."

Rick grinned. But his grin faded as he thought beyond the rosy hue of his immediate accomplishment. Suddenly, as he listened to those startled fans shouting his name, he wondered how it would be in six months. He thought of that oil deal that had him hogtied and he was sick at his stomach.

Rick hadn't intended to get in on anything phony. It was while he was play-

ing with Maxie, while his name meant plenty to advertisers and any day he wanted, he could get three-four hundred for endorsing some kind of product. Rick was a thrifty guy and he knew the money wouldn't always be there for the taking, so when there was a product he really liked, he usually signed his name to the endorsement papers.

Rick thought he was endorsing a motor oil. He got five hundred cash for signing. It was a month later that he learned there had been some fancy manipulating of papers. What he'd really signed was a paper asking permission to sell oil stock.

By the time Rick caught up with the two smoothies, they had sold thirty thousand dollars worth of worthless oil stock. They had used Rick's name and because Rick had signed the original paper, there wasn't a hell of a lot he could do about it.

IT HAD happened before, a trick like that. Guys with crowd followings had been used as blinds to lure the hard-earned money of working men and women. When Rick saw the setup, he began buying back stock. He didn't have to, particularly. A couple of attorneys had told him that the whole thing was legal—that oil promoters didn't have to *guarantee* that there'd be oil where they were drilling.

Rick didn't care about the legal aspects. All that bothered him was the thought of a lot of fans losing money because he'd been sucker enough to sign a paper without reading it too carefully. He knew that the stock shares covered all profits on wells drilled during a two-year period and he knew when the two years were up, if no oil had come in, there would be a certain amount of stink in the papers.

So Rick wasn't waiting. He'd already sunk his own savings in an effort to repay. He had six months to raise the other nine thousand. Six months to buy back the last remaining share of stock so he could be a free man again. As a Bison, as a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year wage earner with Maxie Luscombe, Rick could have solved his problem. But Maxie had

dumped him. Now, with the two years nearing an end, Rick Hillman was stumped for an answer . . .

Rick kicked goal. It was a nice, lofty boot and it split the uprights. The big 7 went up on the weatherbeaten side of the Ghost scoreboard. It was a fresh, new-looking 7. It had rarely been exposed to the weather.

Rick said, "Now, we're going! Let's get us a ball game."

The Ghosts looked at Rick again, but this time their expressions were not so funny. This time, their eyes told him, a few of them believed they might actually win a game.

Stinky Hale was the quarter, but it was Rick who drove them. When Stinky wanted to take it easy, when Stinky wanted to kick and let the Maroons hammer, it was Rick who yelled, "When we've got the ball, they can't score. And *we* might! If you don't know what to do with the ball, give it to me!"

Rick drove them hard. He drove them on offense and he backed them on defense. He aroused what little dormant spirit there was left within them and during the first half battle he made an important discovery.

The Ghosts, despite the fact that most of them were vets who were on their last legs or rooks who had failed to make the grade, had a certain amount of ability. Quite a certain amount, to be more exact. And although they were dispirited at being sunk with the Ghosts, they were footballers at heart and most of them, once aroused, thought enough of the game to pour plenty into it.

There were a few guys who didn't like it, however. There was Ed Spangle, the blocking back. "What the hell?" Ed complained. "This is only a ball game. I should get my head hammered off for the dough I get . . ."

Rick let the crack pass. He let others pass, too. He didn't say anything when Tank Orson began to gripe about the sweat he had worked up. He didn't say anything when Lefty Carse began to yap about getting killed every week for a hundred bucks or so a killing. But Rick Hill-

man remembered, and when he got inside the dressing room for the half-time rest, he got a few things off his chest.

III

POTSY CONKLIN, the coach and owner, did not come in with the team. Rick climbed upon a table and lifted his voice above the hard, wheezy breathing.

"We got a seven to nothing lead out there," Rick said. "I think we oughta double it before the end of the game . . ."

Tank Orson, a big, overgrown-looking kid with a baby face and a tank car body, scowled at Rick. "What the hell's eatin' you?" Tank demanded. "You're alla time actin' like we're tryin' to win the pennant or something."

Rick Hillman planted his feet wide apart. "Well?" he demanded. "Aren't we?"

That caught Tank Orson off guard and Tank had the big-overgrown-boy-complex of never wishing to be caught off guard. Tank grew bellicose. "Who're you to come here and try to take over the whole damn team?" Tank challenged.

Rick said, "My ancestors go back to Patrick Henry and, brothers, the Hillmans still like to talk. Get comfortable, because you're gonna hear yourselves a speech." Rick's manner was light, but there were ominous overtones. Rick Hillman was sore.

"You guys have pitied yourselves so long that you think a team in a Ghost uniform can't win! Bozo, you got sold down the river because of that trick knee. You used to be a hell of a fine kicker and now you can't kick much any more. But you can still pass, can't you? You used to toss 'em for the Lions. Why don't you toss 'em now?"

Bozo flushed. "Stinky never calls my signal. . . ."

Rick glared. "You can pass and you can run. That's two things you can do without hurting that leg much. You're not a triple threat any longer, but if you'd do a hell of a lot of the two things you can do well, then we might be able to find a guy who can kick!"

Bozo blinked and some of the other

Ghosts looked interested. Rick swung on Tank Orson. Tank was munching a double chocolate Goodie Bar. Rick said:

"Tank, you came up from Texas as a promising tackle. The Bears dumped you for just one reason. You couldn't get down to playing weight. Now, I know why. You've got a gnawing in the gut of yours and you've got to feed it or maybe lose a little weight." Rick reached over, knocked the candy bar from Tank Orson's fingers.

Tank Orson came up like a mad bull. "I had enough of your damn interference," he raged.

He swung a roundhouse that was about as lethal as a Virginia baked ham. The punch didn't land. Rick was under it. He drove three hard, fast blows into Tank's middle.

But the middle was well padded with Goodie Bars and Tank moved close. He brought his big arms down and they slipped around Rick's body. He dug his fat chin into Rick's chest and began to squeeze Rick backward in a giant bear hug.

Rick felt his lungs begin to burst. He felt the way those tortured lungs were laced by ribs that pressed harder and harder against them. He felt the room begin to grow red and hazy. His back was against the green metal of a locker and there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

Through the haze, Rick saw the faces of the men. There was Lefty Carse, frankly pleased with it all. Ed Spangle and Rip Winkle were enjoying it, too.

But it was Bozo Blozzis' face that worried Rick. For a moment Rick had had the big, still valuable Bozo swinging toward his way of thinking. For a moment, Rick had had his fingers on the threads of leadership. But now those threads were being tangled.

Rick had sought to take over and he had asked for what he was getting and if he let Tank Orson whip him, he would never be able to convince any of them again. This was pro football and it was played by men. If you stuck your neck out and then got your head knocked off, it was your own funeral and there were no sympathizers.

In front of him, inches from his face, loomed the big, perspiring face of Tank Orson. The only thing Rick could move was his head. Tank was panting, demanding if Rick had had enough.

Rick bobbed his head. He caught Tank below the ear with his own forehead. It was skull against skull and Rick's skull won. Tank swore, released his hold momentarily. Rick pulled his right loose and he drilled a nice shot at Tank's solar plexus.

Tank moaned and covered. Rick bounced off the locker. He pitched a swifty that Tank caught on the chin. He whanged a short jolt to the temple and he finished his chopping assignment with a neat hook to the heart. Tank Orson collapsed and his face had the green tinge of a slightly spoiled double chocolate Goodie Bar.

Rick swung toward the rest of them. He said, softly, "Somebody's gotta give orders around here and it may as well be me. Tank says if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Is there anybody else who thinks I can still be beat?"

Rip Winkle and Ed Spangle charged at once. Rip, the slower one, only managed to clutter up Ed Spangle's way. While Ed was trying to swing a looper over Rip's head, Rick ducked around and spewed a nice assortment of lefts and rights into Ed's body. Ed Spangle went down and when Rip Winkle took his three cuts, he, too, struck out and was driven back to the bench by Rick's hammering fists.

Rick stood there, grinning at them, swaying a little. He said, "Step right up, gents. There's more where the last bomb came from."

THE door burst open and Potsy Conklin came in. The dressing room was slightly shambled. Potsy blinked. "Migawd," he said. "That's the first earthquake we ever had in Midville." He took a long look at Ed Spangle, lying there feeling with the end of his tongue the place the tooth had punched through.

Potsy began to scowl. "What's going on here, anyway?"

Rick's eyes were belligerent. "I've been

teachin' a few of your boys that a little scrap is a nice thing for a football team to have. Spangle has decided I'm right."

Potsy said, "Now see here, Rick, I don't want you goin' around swattin' my players. They cost money."

Rick said, "They won't play. So I busted 'em. Any objections?"

Potsy thought that one over. Then he began to grin. He said, "I got another guy I wanted busted. Tank Orson. I'm gonna have to take him off steaks and start feedin' him oats."

Rick pointed to the opposite corner. "I'm away ahead of you, boss. That mound of blubber is our friend Tank."

Potsy Conklin grinned. "Well, I'm damned! So it is! You did all that yourself?" Potsy was incredulous.

Rick looked at his big right fist. "With my little hatchet," he said. He glanced up at Potsy and his eyes were serious. He said:

"Potsy, you don't know anything about coaching pro ball. You've got a wealth of potential power right under your nose and you can't even feel it tickling. I'm asking you to make me manager of this outfit. Let me run things awhile. I can't do any worse than you've done. When the season's over, if I haven't got this outfit out of the cellar, then I'll join the Grandmothers Crochet Society and leave football to you."

Potsy's eyes had a strange look in them. A bright speculative look. He champed down on his stogie. He waved at Rick and the tailback followed Potsy to one side.

Potsy said, "Until I saw you guys play the first half, I didn't think we could beat a high school team. Now I'm beginning to wonder. I begin to get goose pimples thinking about how it would be if we did get someplace."

Rick knew he was crazy. This was the town where football was buried. Still, these guys on the Ghost team were real flesh and blood and not a lot different from guys on other teams. Rick remembered his immediate problem and it gave him an idea.

Rick said, "Potsy, I need ten grand for the season. That's my price for coaching. I promise you a good team."

Potsy frowned. You could see what he was thinking. It would be nutsy, having a winner. And Potsy had seen enough today to convince him that while not very probable, having a winner in Midville was at least within the realm of such possibilities as rocketing to Mars.

"It's a lot of dough," Potsy repeated. "More dough than I can risk."

Rick said, "A first division team'd make you money."

"We been laughed at so long, they wouldn't take us seriously unless we won a championship. If you want to coach, you get three grand for the job. But I'll hang a string out for you. Get me a pennant and you get ten grand and a big contract."

Rick said, soberly, "You sure you can afford to risk all that dough on such a sure thing as a pennant?"

Potsy shrugged. "Maybe I sound like a cheap skate. But dammit, guy, you don't know how it is bein' disappointed so much. You don't know the way you feel when you pay your last salary and then look down in the cash box and find maybe two, three bucks left for margin."

Rick said, "Maybe you got something. But there's one thing I want you to remember. The price is ten grand when you get that championship!"

Potsy grinned. "Comin' from anybody else, that'd sound crazy. Comin' from you, I get goose-pimply again."

Rick joined the other players. He said, "I'm the new coach, gents. We've got work to do."

The Ghosts traipsed out and for once they did not look whipped. For once, they were stepping nimbly, as if it was going to be fun out there during the second half.

It was fun. The Ghosts knocked the Maroons into the ash can with three touchdowns. That night, when the papers printed the standings, the Ghosts were in a first-place tie with a neat 1.000 per cent.

IV

THE Ghosts won another game and then they won another before the tough teams from the East came into the picture. The papers paid little attention.

They blamed the Ghost victories onto the weather, onto Fate, onto war nerves and onto luck. They blamed everything but the one thing that was responsible.

Rick Hillman was sparking the Ghosts into a real winning ball club. The ten thousand salary, if they won, had something to do with it. Rick needed the money to square up those oil stocks. But after the first three wins, Rick was so tickled that he would have finished out the season for a package of peanuts after each game, had it been necessary. Rick was seeing a bunch of derelicts transformed into something that was causing the big teams trouble.

Rick's system was simple, even if it was novel. Rick made a chart of every ability of every member on the team. If a guy was in the Ghost lineup because a broken wrist had hurt his passing ability while with a leading club, Rick found out what else he could do. If he could block, from that moment on, his function became blocking. If a player was only half a player, so far as natural abilities went, Rick designed plays that took advantage of the abilities and ignored everything else.

It was a screwy system, on the surface. It called for screwy plays and plenty of blackboard skull practice. It called for diplomacy, for tact, for an occasional well-placed right hook to the chin. But Rick Hillman was in his element. He was playing the game he loved and the pressure was around his neck and up to his ears. It was rough, tough going. But Rick Hillman was a rough, tough guy.

It was against the Lions that they struck a snag. The Lions were in the first division. They'd given the Bisons a run for their dough. The Lions came out with three full teams and they shoved over two quick touchdowns during the first battering half. The score was 13 to 0 when Rick's team limped off.

Up in the stands, the crowd was beginning to nod wisely. It had been a nice dream for awhile. But it was swiftly turning into a nightmare. The Ghosts were flashes in the pan and why spend good dough to see them slaughtered when you

could see Hedy LaMarr for two bits at the movies?

Rick limped off after the pounding. He was worried. The thing he had feared had happened. The Ghosts had played their best, but they'd simply been out-classed. The Lions had a lineup filled with ex All-Americans and the Ghosts hadn't been able to hold them.

Rick turned up the ramp toward the dressing room.

"Rick. Just a minute. . . ."

Rick whirled. He saw a man he recognized. Tommy Marvin. Tommy was carrying a brief case. The same one he'd carried in college when he was Rick's roommate and went to law school.

Tommy was frowning. He said, "I got some dope you want to hear, Rick."

Rick paled. Tommy Marvin knew about the oil stock deal. It had been Tommy who had patiently traced those sales, who had bought back shares with Rick's money until the money ran out. Tommy looked worried.

He said, "I just got wind of something, Rick. A smart newspaper guy got hold of one of the stockholders and he's got a story all cooked up. It's a scandal sheet, Rick, and I don't need to tell you what'll happen to you if the story breaks. They'll make you look like a swindler."

Rick said, quickly. "They can't print it."

Tommy nodded. "That's right—at least, they can't say anything until the two years are up and those people have definitely lost their money. But the two years *are* about up, Rick, and if they *do* lose their dough, it's curtains for you. They can make you look bad. It's a nice little scandal sheet trick, making big shots look like bums!"

Rick said, grimly, "I'll have the dough!"

Tommy shrugged. "That's the only thing that will save you, Rick. I've got the rest of the stockholders spotted and they're plenty willing to sell, if they can get the six per cent interest I've promised them for selling."

Rick repeated it. "I'll get the dough! I've got to get it! See you after the game, Tommy!"

Rick went into the dressing room. He saw the trust in the eyes of his mates. It was funny what a little determination could do. These guys, despite the fact that they were behind, still looked to Rick to lead them from the wilderness.

He felt a swift stab of guilt. They trusted him now. What would they think of him, what would everyone else think of him if the story of that oil stock deal got out?

Rick said softly, "You guys don't need a lecture. Turn over on your bellies and grab some sleep. We won't worry about that second half until it comes around."

THEY worried, though. And when the second half began, they learned they'd had plenty to worry about. The Lions weren't resting on those two touchdowns. They swarmed down under the kick, knocking Ghosts right and left. They pulled Bozo Blozzis down on his own thirteen.

In the huddle, Stinky Hale said, "We better kick."

Rick frowned. "They expect a kick."

Stinky shrugged. "We could pass, maybe. It'd be dangerous, though."

Rick said, "When you're about to have your head chopped off by the high executioner, you'll risk a charge of buckshot any day."

Stinky said, "Okay. We pass."

They passed. Ed Spangle was in kick formation but the ball came to Rick on the short side. Rick flipped a lateral to Stinky. Stinky pivoted and fanned a nice sideline shot to Joe Dolan. Joe was covered and when he crossed the thirty, he fired a lateral back to the middle.

Bozo Blozzis was in the groove and Bozo took it out of the air. He got sweet blocking from Tank Orson and when Rick came up to knock the Lion safety out of the play, another number went up on the scoreboard.

A moment later Rick kicked goal.

He thought they were away. He thought they had the Lions on the run. But the Lions were footballers and they could take a shock and come back swinging.

They did come back. They came back

swarming. They began to drill the line. Short, choppy drives they were; drives that tore the Ghost line to shreds. Two, three, four yards at a crack. It was hammer and smash. It was slow, relentless football and it was taking the Lions toward another touchdown.

Tank Orson went to his knees and Rick called for time. Tank's face was green. He was moaning. "Damn them candy bars!"

Rick said, "You want to sit this one out, Tank?"

Tank glared. "Not me. There ain't anything wrong with me that a touchdown won't cure!"

Rick said, softly, "You're a liar, Tank. You're out on your feet, but brother, you got guts and that's what we like."

They went back. It was the Lions' ball on the Ghost seventeen. The Lions tried the middle. Tank Orson pulled out and let the interference through. Then he reached up, got the ball carrier by the knees and swung him down for a one-foot loss.

The Lions tried the same play over the other side. Rick crashed through the interference, found a leg. Bozo Blozzis found the other and they dragged their man down together. It was third and ten, and the Lions had a conference.

They came back with razzle-dazzle. They pitched a lateral that turned into a spinner. The play ran for thirty yards, but it was east and west yardage. When the sprint was over, it was still fourth and ten and the crowd was picking it up and yelling.

The Ghosts huddled while the Lions were huddling. Rip Winkle said, "Fourth and ten. They oughta pass."

"They'll think we think they oughta pass. So they'll run with it," Joe Dolan predicted.

"They'll think we think they oughta run with it so they'll pass," Stinky said.

"I'm all mixed up," Tank Orson groaned.

"Think of their poor quarterback, then," Rick said. "His problem's tougher than ours. All we gotta do is smear 'em. But, confidentially, don't let anyone get behind you."

Rick's advice was good. The ends fanned out and tried to break away. They came down the sidelines and then the pass blasted out of the welter of humanity in the Lion backfield.

Rick moved with the right end. He saw the ball soaring over him. He leaped. He stretched high, kicked for added height. The guy was behind him, beyond the goal stripe, now. Rick had to get that ball! It brushed his fingertips, shot straight up into the air.

The end cut back, but Rick had the ball. He began to run. Blindly, at first, then with smart direction. He cut to the right where the Lions were thickest. He watched them set up a hasty, ill-planned defense.

When he had them swarming around him, he whirled, fired a lateral to Stinky Hale who had been pulling a sleeper across the field. Stinky ran like a man with a fire in his pocket. He pounded over for a touchdown and a moment later Rick added the extra point from placement.

Rick said, "We gotta stay ahead! All over the league they say we're the guys who're washed up. They say we can't play this game and now's our chance to show 'em!"

The Ghosts showed them! There was nothing seriously wrong with them that a little high morale wouldn't cure. They had been kicked in the teeth so often that their incentive to win was maddening. And any athlete will tell you that as many contests are won on incentive as are won on ability.

The Ghosts finished the Lions, 21 to 13, and they were still undefeated when they raced off. For the first time that season the papers really began to take notice.

RICK HILLMAN kept his fingers crossed as the wins piled up. He was driving his team. Driving them hard and long. He was cracking the whip when it needed cracking. As the strain of winning mounted, as pounds were sweated off, tempers grew continuously shorter. Rick kept his fingers crossed and wondered what could happen to break the

spell and when it did happen, he wondered why he hadn't foreseen it.

The first trouble came in the Beaver game. The Beavers were a very weak outfit and the Ghosts this season were rated five or six touchdowns better. But they didn't win by five or six touchdowns. They were lucky to win by a bare point.

The team suddenly went to hell. Ed Spangle muffed a chance to score when he elected to run himself instead of pitch a lateral. Stinky Hale dribbled away a touchdown chance by making four straight unsuccessful quarterback rushes from one yard out.

Even Bozo Blozzis tripped over his feet when he tried to smile at a newsreel cameraman just before launching a tackle over near the end zone. All in all, it was a lousy showing. And it was Rick Hillman who was the most disturbed. That night, Rick called a meeting.

He was sore. He said, cryptically, "You stink!"

Nobody answered him. They sat there, glaring.

"What was eatin' you today?" he demanded.

Stinky shrugged. "You know without askin'."

Rick said, "On the contrary, sweetheart, I haven't the wildest idea. One minute you guys play like champs and the next minute you look like chumps again. I don't get it."

Rip Winkle rolled a sleepy eye toward Rick. "It said that *we* stink—not you. It said the flashy Rick Hillman had played his usual fine game again. It said if it wasn't for Rick Hillman, the Ghosts would still be in the cellar."

Rick said, "So that's the smell of the cheese. You guys are jealous."

Bozo Blozzis said, "Why not? We do all the dirty work. You get all the glory. In college, that's okay. But in pro ball, where you get paid in proportion to the publicity you get, it ain't so okay. Next year, you'll get the heavy sugar and we won't get much more than we get now. We're sick of the setup."

Rick said, "Of all the screwballs. I don't write the headlines."

"Naw—but you carry the ball whenever you wanta. You see to it that you make the long runs. You see to it that it's your picture that makes the papers—"

Rick said, bitterly, "Listen, you dummies! Football's my racket. I want to win! I'd rather win than eat regularly. I'm out for a championship and to hell with who gets the headlines."

He looked at them again. But he knew they didn't believe him. Maybe they *were* getting a raw deal in publicity. Maybe it did look as if he was trying to hog the glory. But why couldn't they realize that he shouldn't be blamed for what the reporters wanted to write? Rick knew how it was with footballers. They're a funny breed. When they get under pressure, they begin to see things down a goofy groove. They distort simple things until they're all snarled up. . . .

The papers played up the forthcoming championship game as big as they played the war news. They gave Rick most of the publicity breaks and while it bothered him, there was something else that troubled him more.

He kept thinking of that game the Ghosts had to win. They were tied with the Bisons for the championship, and this one game would decide it. He kept remembering how Maxie Luscombe drove his guys until the best was gone from them, then tossed them aside like old shoes. He kept remembering the way Maxie had given him the bounce when the going was tough, how Maxie had sold him to a team that was supposed to be the graveyard of all football hopes.

Rick wanted that win over the Bisons! He wanted to make Maxie Luscombe unhappy by trimming him with the very same team that Maxie had held in such disdain. The Ghosts were in a fit of temperament and it was showing up in their play.

But that wasn't Rick's only worry. Rick kept thinking about those oil stocks that were still out. He kept thinking of the gridiron comeback he had made, how he was set for life if he only got those stocks redeemed. But if he couldn't raise

the money, if the story got out and football's new czar made an example of Rick, it would be the end of a dream for him.

V

THE Ghosts sat there in their dressing room and outside in the Bison stadium it was so quiet you could have heard a bomb drop. The fans were upset. They had expected to see a tight ball game and they had seen a first half massacre.

The Bisons had rung up 20 points. The Ghosts, on a fluke recovery back of the goal line, had picked up 7. Now the Ghosts sat in the dressing room and they were back in their old form again.

They were sullen, silent. Rick, alone, had some fire left after the battering he'd taken. He said, "You guys are pitching a championship right out the window. It'd mean as much to you as it would to me but you're poutin' and we're losing a ball game. That makes you chumps in my books."

Bozo Blozzis glared. He growled, "You lied to us, Rick. You said all you gave a damn about was winning. You said winning was all that really mattered to you."

Rick nodded. "I said it and I meant it."

Bozo's eyes were scathing, now. "Well, then how do you explain the fact that if you win a pennant, you get ten grand? We heard the story and Potsy didn't deny it. You made us believe you were interested in the team's welfare. You rode us and drove us like slaves and for awhile we let you get away with it. It was a nice act when all the time you were really after that ten grand and to hell with what happened to us!"

Rick Hillman could have lied to them. But he decided to play it square. He took a deep breath. "Okay. So you want it straight. I'll give it to you . . ."

It didn't take long to explain about the oil stock deal. Rick concluded, grimly, "I spent every dime I had redeeming that stock. More than twenty thousand. I need the ten thousand Potsy's gonna give me if we win a pennant. I need it to buy back stock from a lot of poor suckers who had

faith in me. I don't care about myself. I—"

Tank Orson said, "You think we believe that?"

Rick said, "You can take it or leave it."

Joe Dolan had a queer, bright look in his eyes. Joe Dolan said, "Let's get this straight, Rick. You mean to say those stocks those two guys sold in your name weren't worth anything?"

Rick nodded. "Yeah. I mean exactly that."

"And you bought 'em back with your own dough?"

"I spent every cent I had," Rick admitted. "And I need nine thousand more."

Joe Dolan was a veteran. He was 33. He didn't have many more seasons to look forward to. The Ghosts liked Joe Dolan.

Joe said, "I think I oughta tell you guys something." He looked at Rick. "In a whole lifetime I managed to save three grand. I sunk that dough in Rick's oil stock and later I got my dough back, plus interest when a guy wanted to buy the stock. That dough was my nest egg. I've still got it. If it wasn't for Rick, I'd be a sick dodo."

You could see the change. Bozo Blozzis said, "So that's why you were playin' so hard to get that ten grand! Why didn't you tell us, Rick?"

Rick said, "I'm damned if I know. It's personal, my own headache, and I didn't want to talk about it, I guess."

Bozo Blozzis grinned. "You got nothing to worry about any longer. We're gonna present you with a pennant."

Rick said, "What about the headlines?"

"To hell with headlines," Bozo snapped.

It wasn't quite that simple. Maxie Luscombe's Bisons were out to win themselves another pennant. They had been promised big bonuses to bring home the bunting and there is nothing in pro football that screams quite so loud as the eagle on the back of a silver dollar.

The Bisons were loaded for bear. They had three touchdowns and they wanted more. On the first sequence of plays, they went after a touchdown the easy way. They pitched a pass.

It was a nice pass. The crowd thought it was very nice indeed. Until Ed Spangle got his fingers on it and ran 95 yards to a touchdown. The score went to 14 to 20 and it hung that way for a long time.

RICK HILLMAN was tired. The big clock at the end of the field said three minutes. The score hadn't changed. The Ghosts needed a touchdown and they needed it fast. The attack was bogging on the Ghost 40.

Rick lay there on the grass, eyes closed during a time-out. He could hear the fans pleading for him to carry it over. They thought he was a great guy, a game guy. He wondered what they would think after the scandal sheets got out. After people began to say that he'd made a fortune on an oil swindle. It was a hell of a thing to keep thinking about. He shook the thought out of his mind, but the imprint of it was still branded there.

The ref whistled the clock back into action and the tired Ghosts went back to work. They snapped down to the line. They were weary. But somewhere within their spent bodies was the energy it would take for just one more touchdown play.

Rick Hillman called the play. It was the one they'd saved all season. One that would either work or flop and in either instance, it would do it gloriously. It was the play where every man had to click.

It began with Ed Spangler. Everyone knew Spangler had had to stop passing because of a trick wrist. So Ed Spangler threw a surprise pass. He had practiced a long time with Rick, learning to toss it without hurting his wrist.

It was a short pass. A fast one. It came down in Slim Hopson's arms. Slim Hopson spun, cut sharply to his left. That left the Bisons flat-footed because everyone knew Slim had been fired from the Bears for being unable to run to his left. Slim had practiced diligently on that cutback. He could run to his left now.

He rifled across the fifty and was into enemy territory. Rick Hillman was trailing the play. Rick saw the way Slocum was cutting over to stop the run. He gave Slocum a nice piece of his hip and Slocum went back, chastened. Rick saw the safety man come in. Rick called; softly, to Slim.

Slim lobbed a nice lateral and at the same time he threw a sweet body block that tied the safety in a knot. Rick had the ball and there was no one between him and the line. He went over, standing.

A moment later he kicked goal and the ball game was over. The Ghosts went off moments afterward. They went off listening to the crowd shout Rick's name, shouting it even louder themselves.

Rick got a look at them, strung out there along the Ghost bench. He saw their faces. Faces of vets who had been sold or traded down the river to oblivion. He saw the new hope that was kindled there. He saw the pride, the contentment. He knew that Midville would never be a graveyard for gridiron derelicts again. Not so long as he was there. And he was going to be there a long time. He liked the place.

Rick paid Tommy Marvin the nine thousand and Tommy bought up the remaining stock shares. Rick was broke. He hated to kiss all that money good-bye. But he felt okay down inside.

It was a couple of weeks later that Tommy Marvin called up. Tommy Marvin said, "Rick—that piece of land those promoters bought. They bought cheap land where geologists said there wasn't a chance of oil."

"Yeah," Rick said.

"They drilled across the road from your acreage," Tommy said. "They quit drilling last night."

"Dry hole?" Rick asked.

"The absolutely damndest thing," Tommy answered. "They hit a three-thousand barrel gusher."



Base Hits by Request

Competition for a ballhawk prize started a feud between Dib Cameron and his pal, Stumpy Stonik. And no matter who won, the team was due to lose. For you can't mix base hits with bad blood.



By M. M. Tinney

DIB CAMERON got it straight from the best informed source in town. He was stretched back in the barber chair and Nick the Barber was scraping the stubble off his face. Nick was not an ordinary barber. He did not indulge in the usual chit-chat of the "trade." Nick was a red-hot baseball fan.

At the moment, Nick labored in painful silence. Dib grinned a little because he knew Nick's tongue was probably swollen in his mouth and would probably burst if he didn't soon get his five cents' worth in. That was one thing about Nick. He never opened fire unless the customer did the squaring off. Dib stuck his foot into it.

"Whattaya know, Nick?" he said cordially. "Everything okay with the wife and kids?"

"We-el," Nick said, wrinkling his brows. "The wife, she's okay, and the kids, they get their three squares a day. I got nothin' to beef about only sometimes I wisht I was a ballplayer. I wisht I played on the Cyclops and was in your shoes."

"You get fifty cents a haircut and sometimes a dime tip," Dib said lightly. "You don't have to worry about base hits and slumps."

"Only ballplayers can buy a new car and house with base hits and runs," Nick said soberly. "I wisht I was a ballplayer."

"I don't get it, Nick," Dib said puzzled. "What makes you say those things? Mebbe you had breakfast in a saloon or somethin', huh?"

Nick the Barber shook his head vigorously. But his eyes were twinkling, filled with a peculiar light.

"It's like this," he exclaimed. "Last night the Rooters Club held a meetin'. They decided to give a bonus to the player makin' the most hits and most runs at the end of the season. Yeah, they're givin' a new car and house as the prizes. They figure with that kind of prizes on the line the Cyclops will be a cinch to win the pennant."

THE Rooters Club was composed of a group of baseball-minded citizens who had a fierce pride in the Cyclops. All season long they had been showering the players with an assortment of gifts for various feats on the diamond. Now as the climax prize, they were offering a new car and house to give added inspiration to the players in the stretch down pennant drive.

Dib, glancing into the mirror, saw Stump Stonik, seated on the guest chair, suddenly stir with interest. Stumpy had a wide grin on his face and seemed very much in favor of the idea. He patrolled left field for the Cyclops while Dib covered the center pasture.

There wasn't more than a five-point difference in their batting average. On the field there was little to choose between them. Aside from being the stars of the class "B" loop Cyclops, Dib and Stumpy had married two sisters. The two ballplayers were inseparable pals on and off the diamond. On the road, Dib and Stumpy were roommates and at home they maintained apartments in the same building. It was a nice friendship.

"That's darn nice of the boys," Dib commented. "I guess I could kinda go for a new house myself. And the old buggy ain't what she used to be. You can't buy those things on a bush league salary. But there's the pennant to think about, Nick. That's the main thing. We owe this town a break."

"Sure, sure, the pennant comes first,"

Nick said quickly. "That's the whole idea. Jest the same it's between you and Stumpy for that new house and car. Looka here, I figured it all out last night."

Nick the Barber fished into his apron coat and came up with a slip of paper. He shoved it into Dib's hand. The figures were:

	<i>Hits</i>	<i>Runs Scored</i>
<i>Cameron</i>	98	43
<i>Stonik</i>	95	39

"You stick to your haircuts, Nick," Dib said a bit irritably. "Better let Stumpy and me worry about the base hits and runs."

Dib put on his hat and coat and Stumpy sidled along beside him. They went out the door and Dib turned to his pal.

"Nick is nuts about baseball and all that," Dib said dryly. "But sometimes I have my doubts about the guy. What's he tryin' to do, start a feud or somethin'?"

"Well," Stumpy drawled. "I'm kinda sweet on the idea myself. Y'know Ethel has always wanted a house of her own ever since we were married. And with a new car she'd be able to get to some of the out-of-town games. I'd like to grab off those prizes for her."

Dib nodded. "Yeah, Lucy has the same idea," he mused. "But hell, Stumpy, we can't play ball and be thinking about what the wives want. We got the Birds to think about and that comes first in my book." Dib paused, cocked an eye at Stumpy. He added: "May the best man win that car and house. Let's let it go at that. Whattaya say we shake hands on that, Stumpy?"

The Cyclops had trouble on their hands that afternoon. They were playing the Birds and the Birds were bubbling at the surface like beer foam, a lone game off the pace. It was Saturday and a twin bill was carded and the fans were hanging off the rafters like clusters of grapes.

The buzzer sounded and the Cyclops trotted in off the field while the Birds took their fielding practice. Dib strolled over to the water cooler, glanced expectantly into the seats in back of the Cy-

clops dugout. There was Lucy in her usual spot. The sight of her still made Dib's heart zoom. Wasps of her golden hair spilling down over her forehead, and her eyes twinkling and bluer than the Hawaiian sky.

Dib gave Lucy his best smile. He always did that before he went out there to earn their ham and eggs. He thought how nice it was the way Lucy and Ethel always sat together, cheered and inspired their husbands. Regular pals they were, even for sisters.

But Dib's smile suddenly froze on his face. His brows knitted in a frown. He walked over to where Lucy was sitting, saw the tense lines in her face.

"What's the matter, baby?" Dib asked solicitously. "You got a toothache or somethin'?"

Lucy shook her pretty head emphatically. She puckered her lips a little, pointed to Ethel sitting five seats away.

"Ethel told me that Stumpy promised to win the house and car for her that the Rooters Club is giving away," Lucy explained. "She said that Stumpy said you were a sucker and that he always could play rings around you. And there were a lot of other awful things that Stumpy said about you. I could just cry."

An incredulous light shone in Dib's eyes. "Stumpy said those things about me?" he asked.

"I wouldn't lie to you, honey," Lucy said brokenly. "You've just got to get more hits and score more runs than Stumpy."

Dib's jaw clamped into place. His gaze fell upon the box seat where Ethel was talking like greased lightning to Stumpy. Occasionally, Stumpy would glance at Dib and nod his head. Dib felt the red creeping up the back of his neck.

"Okay, baby," he said determinedly. "Watch pappy bust that apple wide open. I'll leave Stumpy so far behind in hits and runs that he'll think he's in London on a foggy night."

DIB strode into the dugout and a moment later Stumpy followed. Their eyes met in icy stares but neither

man so much as said "bah" to the other.

The Cyclops trotted out to their positions. Sam Boyd started limbering up on the mound. Sam was a veteran, a wise old codger who once had had a look-in on the majors. He still had plenty of stuff and enough swift to make him plenty tough to solve. He cut the Birds down one, two, three.

The Birds countered with their ace, Pete Hollis. He whiffed the lead-off batter, then made the number two man lift a pop-fly in back of the mound. That brought Dib to the platter. He dug his spikes into the dirt, leveled his stick menacingly at the Bird hurler.

Dib stood up there, open-stance, slack-muscled and loose as ashes. The ball came in, low and on the inside, dipping below his knees. Dib bent his knees a little, blazed the stick around in an arc, scooping the pill cleanly into left field.

The blow was good for a single. A tight grin etched across Dib's face as he watched Stumpy Stonik lug his ash into the square. Stumpy went into a shell-like crouch. He had a habit of exploding out of that shell and lashing the horsehide for an amazing distance. Ordinarily, though, Stumpy was a place hitter. He had a sharp eye and a knack for dropping the ball where they weren't.

He slammed the second pitch on the button, driving a scorching ground ball to the left of second base. Dib started streaking down the basepath. The Bird keystoneer, moving with the crack of the bat, had leaped in to field the ball. He was directly in the path of Dib.

Dib had only a split second to make his decision. He could slice behind the fielder or bowl him over and run the risk of being called out for interference. Avoiding a certain collision, Dib went around the second sacker.

Simultaneously, the Bird player half-dived for the leather, deflected it, raked it in with his bare hand. Stumpy Stonik had beaten the throw to first base. But the second baseman didn't even look in that direction. Propped up on all fours, he shoveled the horsehide to the shortstop covering the midway station.

Dib slid desperately into the bag. But

he couldn't lick a play like that one. It was big league stuff, the kind that happens once in a blue moon in the minors. It was a force play, the third out and Stumpy Stonik did not get credit for a hit.

Stumpy lost no time signaling his feelings. He pinned a glowering stare on Dib. It was easy for Dib to guess that Stumpy figured he had dogged it going into second. But that had been the farthest thing from Dib's mind.

With two men down in the second, the Bird batter hoisted one into left-center. Dib sprinted over, circled under the ball for the catch.

"Look out, I got it," he heard Stumpy cry.

Dib stepped aside, glimpsed Stumpy and saw that he was not in position to make the catch. Frantically, Dib lunged for the ball. It struck the fingers of his glove and plopped to the ground. The next Bird batter belted the first pitch into the stands and the Birds had two runs.

THE fat, dumpy man with the tomato-red complexion, pacing to and fro in front of the Cyclops dugout was Jake Pfeiffer. Jake was manager of the Cyclops and neither player nor umpire was his friend.

"Button, button, who's got the blankety-blank button?" he snorted with mock sarcasm when the Cyclops clumped into the dugout. "That little act out there cost us two runs, Cameron. Mebbe you guys think this league is a kindergarten. But try eatin' without playin' in it."

Stumpy Stonik shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"He called for the catch," Stumpy said dryly. "If he got ants in his pants it ain't my fault."

The lines tightened around Dib's mouth. The guy was out to rattle him in the field, probably hoping it would affect his batting average. Dib looked down the bench, saw the bat boy hand Stumpy a note. The scowl on Stumpy's face etched deeper as he read it. Suddenly he stood up, looked directly at Dib.

"Yun double-crossin' cuss," Stumpy said tightly. "An old woman with a washtub on her head coulda beat that throw to second. But not you. You make me laugh puttin' on that phony do-or-die stuff for the team. You shake hands with me and with the other hand you stick a knife in my back. All the time you're fixin' to cash in on that house and car yourself."

Dib bounded to his feet, jaw jugged and blood boiling inside of him. "You're a fine one to talk about double-crossin'," he said fiercely. "Behind my back you call me a sucker and then try to put the ole whammy on me. You ain't foolin' nobody, Stonik."

"So that's it," Jake Pfeiffer cut in. "I mighta guessed it. A couple of chumps tearing at each other's throats over a lousy house and car. I don't know why they hafta have rooters clubs. I don't know why they even hafta have baseball teams. I ain't gonna be left holdin' the bag for nobody."

Stumpy Stonik whirled around and everything but sparks started to fly out of his mouth.

"This is a private argument, Jake," he said sturdily. "So long as we get out hits and drive runs across the platter you got no beef."

The Cyclops manager stared bug-eyed. "We'll see how private it is," he said challengingly.

From that moment on, the real battle for base hits and runs began in earnest. In the fourth frame, Dib knifed a two-bagger inside the first-base line. Stumpy promptly followed suit, smashing a wallop off the right-field barrier.

However, the base knock brought little comfort to Stumpy. Every time he poked one with Dib on the sacks, he was ultimately aiding his rival in the runs scored derby.

Dib slapped his third straight hit in the sixth frame. Again Stumpy followed in his wake with a prodigious blast into deep centerfield. Dib tore around to third base with Stumpy on his heels. The Bird outfielder heaved a perfect shot into the plate and Dib started to retrace his steps to third base.

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Out of the tail of his eye, he glimpsed Stumpy high-tailing it for third. There was nothing for Dib to do but make for third. In a twinkling he was trapped in a "doggie" and run down while Stumpy scampered safely into third base. A moment later, Stumpy scored on a rap through the middle, knotting the count at 2-all.

In the Cyclops dugout, Jake Pfeiffer shook his head sadly.

"He got Dib trapped on purpose," Jake wailed. "He did it so the guy wouldn't get a chance to score another run. So it costs us a run and Stonik gets away with robbery in broad daylight."

Hunched alongside the manager, Sam Boyd shifted the quid in his mouth, smiled thinly.

"Yuh might as well take up tree-sittin'," he said slowly. "Because they practically got yuh up one now, anyway. Bench 'em and you lose the best one-two punch in the league. Fine 'em and that'll be cheap considering the house and car they'll get out of it. They got ya comin' and goin', Jake."

The Cyclops skipper lifted his cap, scratched his nude noggin.

"Only yesterday," he groaned, "I dropped in on them and they all had their feet under the same table playin' cards. And today they're shootin' poison arrows at each other. It's a helluva mess."

SAM BOYD grinned wryly. He unraveled a crumpled piece of paper that was wadded in the palm of his hand. It was a hastily scrawled note from Stumpy Stonik's wife pointing out that Dib had purposely robbed him of a hit in the first inning. It ended with the phrase: "I told you."

"Here's your problem, Jake," Sam said, handing the note to the saddened manager. "You're runnin' the team. But a couple of dizzy blondes are runnin' your stars. And when two blond sticks of dynamite set their hearts on a new house and car"—Sam shrugged his shoulders hopelessly—"you can kiss the pennant g'bye."

The Cyclops dropped that game, 3-2.

Dib and Stumpy got their signals mixed and played a line drive like a couple of chorus girls. Dib tried to come up with a shoestring catch and the ball rolled through him. It went all the way to the fence because Stumpy Stonik was studying the landscape instead of backing him up on the play. The Bird hitter circled the bases with what turned out to be the winning run. Yet you couldn't chalk up an error for either player. It was simply an error of omission. And a shabby one at that.

The sun-down contest was a wild and woolly affair. Dib pounded out four hits, two of them four-masters. He crossed the plate three times. Stumpy, playing his shots close to the vest, punched the ball through the infield twice and scored both times. Not once did he drive Dib across the plate. It was slick strategy. Yet, in spite of the barrage of hits, the Cyclops absorbed a 14-12 drubbing, sinking into the second slot in the league standings.

There seemed little doubt about it. The whole town was as much hopped up over the bitterly waged duel for base hits and runs as over the pennant scramble. Nick the Barber kept a giant tally sheet in his shop window giving the day by day totals of the two feuding Cyclops players. Nick was no dummy. His barber shop became practically the official headquarters of all parties concerned. Nick had to hire two extra barbers to handle his booming business.

On the home front, events moved swiftly toward a showdown. Dib and Stumpy, and their wives, no longer were on speaking terms. In fact, relations became so strained that Stumpy and Ethel started looking for an apartment in another building.

It certainly did not appear as if Stumpy and company were going to move into the new house. Dib was setting a sizzling pace, steadily widening the gap between him and Stumpy. He was threatening to make a cake-walk out of the hits-and-runs derby.

The Cyclops played the Eagles. Dib emerged from the dugout to take his spot in the on-deck circle. The bat boy

handed Dib his war club. Dib stared curiously at the stick, shook his head.

"That's not the wood I've been usin', kid," he said. "Get me Big Bertha. That's the stick I've been hittin' 'em on the nose with."

A look of holy terror spread over the bat boy's face.

"I—I—can't find it anywhere," he said shakily. "It's missing!"

Dib stared wide-eyed. Big Bertha was his prize bat. He had spent hours boning it down at the handle till it had felt like a part of him. He had been hammering the opposing fingers dizzy with that ash. It would hurt plenty to lose it.

"It's gotta be around," Dib said tersely. "There was no wings on that stick. I stuck it in the bat-rack myself before the game."

Dib strode over to the bat-rack, scanned through the whole pile for the big black ash. But no Big Bertha. It had simply disappeared.

"Get a batter up," the umpire bawled.

Angry clean through, Dib fixed his gaze on Stumpy Stonik crouching in the on-deck circle. Stumpy's eyes were filled with gloating mockery. Dib grabbed another willow and went up to the plate.

He swung all the way around on the first pitch, missed. A jug-handle curve zipped in there and Dib savagely laced the wood to it. The ball plopped off the bat and dribbled foul down the third-base line. Dib let the next one go, a slow, wavering thing loaded with spin and stuff. It split the corner and Dib was called out on strikes.

That was only the beginning. Dib whiffed three times that game and went hitless. And each time, Stumpy followed him to the plate and banged out safe blows. He went four for four and crossed the plate three times. That was trouble enough for one day, but even more cutting was the grin Stumpy wore all during the game.

Dib was starting toward the ramp when he suddenly pulled up short. One of the fans had bolted over the rail and was sprinting across the field toward the nearest exit. His progress was none too fast because his strides were jerky,

crutch-footed. The truth of the matter was that he had a baseball bat jammed into his pants leg. Dib easily overtook him, grabbed him by the arm.

"Hey, you," Dib ripped out. "Lemme have a look at that stick."

The kid's eyes rolled wildly. "I didn't steal it, mister," he blurted. "Honest I didn't. One of the players gave it to me."

Dib watched the kid pull the bat out of his trouser leg. One look at the bat and he knew it was Big Bertha. A look of relief spread over his face.

"What player gave it to you, kid?" Dib asked.

"Stumpy Stonik," the kid said quickly. "He gave it to me just before the game. He told me to take it home and he'd get me into the game tomorrow free. But I figured I could hang around and see this one, too."

Dib nodded. "Okay, kid," he said mildly. "I'm pretty lucky to get it back. But don't go around takin' things from Stumpy Stonik. They're sure to be counterfeit. Anyway, you stop by the clubhouse tomorrow and I'll give you another bat to make up for this one. And I'll throw in a couple of tickets, too."

THE next day, before the game, Dib was standing in front of the dugout, leaning on Big Bertha. Stumpy Stonik, coming into the dugout, stared at the ash. Dib saw his eyes pop.

"Yuh got a long arm, Stonik," Dib said coolly. "But you're gonna need a hook and ladder to beat me out of that house and car now. Mebbe I'll start shoppin' around for some new furniture."

"But, honey," a girl's voice directly over Dib cut in, "I've already done that. It's lovely furniture, darling." Lucy turned a frosty glare on Stumpy. Then: "With that *other man* so far behind you, Dib, I thought it was silly to wait any longer to order the furniture."

Dib flushed deeply. "But, baby," he said, a trace of rebuke in his voice, "you shouldn't have done that. Not so soon anyway. You can't be sure of anything in baseball."

Stumpy Stonik laughed shortly. "Mebbe you'll get a chance to use that furni-

ture," he ventured. "And mebbe you'll be wantin' to sell it for almost free."

In the games that followed, Big Bertha beat out a steady tattoo of base hits. Stumpy dropped so far behind in the parade that it wasn't even funny. But even with Dib on a hitting binge, the Cyclops were not playing a consistent, winning brand of ball. They hung onto the second slot a while, then slipped back another notch.

Jake Pfeffer lashed into the team, threatened, condemned and tried to move heaven and earth to get them going again. But the spark was missing. The old lift and spirit and fight weren't there any more. Sam Boyd summed the situation up after the Cyclops had dropped a series to the tail-end Ravens.

"The boys feel that it's Dib's and Stumpy's show," he said. "They're only the fixtures around here. Yuh can't blame 'em much, either, for feelin' that way."

"What Dib and Stumpy need is a shot in the head," Jake clipped. "Once I pin 'em down, watch me give it to them, too."

That same night, when Dib opened the door of the apartment, the scene that greeted him sent him rocking back on his heels. There was Lucy and Ethel, sitting and chatting, a picture of sisterly love. You'd never guess an ill word had ever passed between them.

"I thought you two were on the outs," Dib remarked, puzzled.

Lucy got up, threw her arms around him and planted her best kiss on his cheek. Then Dib noticed that Lucy's eyes were dancing, brighter than usual.

"Honey, you're going to be a big leaguer," she said breathlessly. "Ethel just told me about it. You're to report to the Seals at the end of the season."

Dib sucked in his breath. "Ethel told you about it," he repeated. "The news sure gets around in a funny way."

"It's supposed to be a secret," Ethel said quickly. "But Stumpy and some of the other players overheard Jake Pfeffer talking with a Seal scout."

"Since when is Stumpy goin' out of his way to do me a favor?" Dib said

skeptically. "He gives my best bat away and hands me an all-around lousy deal. Big league or no big league, I'm gonna enjoy every minute in that new house."

"We won't really be needing the house and car," Lucy cut in, "if we move to the big city."

Dib's brows shot up. "But you've already ordered the furniture," he protested.

Lucy's face became very solemn and lines of concern etched into her forehead.

"We ought to see that Ethel and Stumpy get the house and car," she said slowly. "You see, honey, Stumpy's father had a stroke and the expense has all been on Stumpy's shoulders. He's had to borrow money and everything else. If he wins the house and car Stumpy can sell them and get out of debt. After all, Dib, we are practically one big family. The least we can do would be to help Stumpy if he's in trouble."

"You see, Stumpy has a lot of pride," Ethel interpolated. "I wouldn't want him to find out about this for the world."

A baffled look shadowed Dib's face. "If I fudged it on the diamond somebody would be bound to catch wise. Besides I'm so far out in front of Stumpy that it's practically impossible for him to catch up with me in hits and runs."

Lucy looked at Dib. "You could develop a sore arm," she suggested. "Players do get those things, you know. If you didn't play for about ten games, Stumpy would have a good chance to get more hits and runs than you."

Dib nodded thoughtfully. "Lemme think the proposition over a while," he said.

UNDER the circumstances Dib could understand how Stumpy had been driven to give his pet stick away. The guy had probably been desperate. Worry had blinded his senses. Still, Dib had his doubts about Stumpy. However, they were completely dissipated when Dib scanned the sports sheets the next morning. In a column itemed "Sports Scribbles," he read the following squib:

It seems to be more than a rumor that Dib Cameron is ticketed for the big league Seals. Jake Pfeiffer has refused to confirm or deny that final negotiations are about to be closed for the slugging Cyclops outfielder. . . .

That was the clincher. Dib was convinced then that Ethel had not fed him the old malarkey. Before game time, Dib suddenly developed a "sore arm." He sat on the bench and watched Stumpy Stonik collect three hits and score twice. Dib sat out the next nine games, during which time Stumpy Stonik continued his batting rampage. Not only did Stumpy close the gap in hits and runs, but he seized a commanding lead over Dib.

"Good goin', Stumpy," Dib remarked. "It'll be okay with me if you cop the honors. I'm gettin' my crack at the majors. That's cake enough for me."

"Majors," Stumpy roared, letting loose a side-splitting laugh. "That's rich. It was between you and me, sucker, who got that job with the Seals. While yuh was warmin' yourself on the bench, I've been makin' hay. I'm the guy the Seals are buyin'. If ya don't believe me, go ask Jake about it."

Dib stiffened. "The deal was practically closed for me," he insisted.

"Sure, sure it was," Stumpy said haughtily. "But thanks to that phony sore whip you developed, the scout changed his mind about you and took me. While you're sweatin' for chicken feed back here, I'll be playin' with the Seals. But don't feel too bad about it, sucker. Mebbe I'll invite you over to my new house. And mebbe I'll drive ya downtown in the nice, shiny new job."

Dib's face went pale as a plate of vanilla ice cream. Red spots began to dance in front of him. Of course, he had been tricked, framed—lo, triple-crossed. Stumpy and Ethel had apparently known about the Seal scout and had cooked up a nice scheme to get him out of the lineup. Not only was Dib's big league chance gone but Stumpy was practically a cinch to cop the prizes offered by the Rooters Club. A rising knot of fury burned inside of Dib.

He advanced toward Stumpy. Stumpy

saw the light burning in Dib's eyes and lost no time belting with the right. Dib piled into his erstwhile pal, rocking him with a blizzard of stinging rights and lefts.

Stumpy surged into the thick of things. The blows were flying fast and furious. Stumpy pumped two jolting rights to the face. He uppercutted, winged over a sizzling right.

Dib slid inside the right. He bounced a left off Stumpy's head, then a terrific right-hander that caught Stumpy flush on the button. It was short and sweet. It was funny the way Stumpy lost his momentum and sat down quite suddenly on the concrete. Dib whirled around, almost smacking into Jake Pfeiffer.

"The Seals can have the double-cross-in' bum now," Dib flared. "I'm through with him."

Jake was silent for a moment. He stared down at Stumpy but didn't so much as flick a muscle in his face.

"The garden job with the Seals was all sewed up for you," he said slowly. "But Stumpy started hittin' like hell's bells and you was sittin' on the bench with a bum flipper. That's the story and I guess the Seals can do anything they want with their own dough."

It didn't take any great imagination for the rest of the Cyclops players to guess that there had been some dirty work at the crossroads. Ballplayers can see things on the field that the ordinary fan misses. The Cyclops knew that Stumpy Stonik had been putting the screws to Dib. Sure, Dib had been out after the big prizes, just like Stumpy. But he had kept plugging for the team. Nor had he gone out of his way to mess things up for Stumpy. And there were other things unspoken that the Cyclops could read between the lines.

Against the Badgers, Dib started to club the apple. He clubbed it hard and solidly. From that game on, the battle for base hits and runs became a fierce ding-dong affair. On the wings of all this stellar hitting and revived team spirit, the Cyclops rode into second place. Then they crept within the shadows of the top rung.

THE season was rapidly drawing to a finish. The top-notch Birds began to feel the pressure and hit a snag. When they finally snapped out of it, the galloping Cyclops were breathing on their necks.

Neck and neck, the teams went into the final crucial series of the season. The Birds walked off with the first game. But the Cyclops stalemated the race the next time out. The blue chips were on the table and the third and decisive game was coming up.

But that was only half of the drama that turned the whole town berserk with excitement. The other half was the huge tally sheet that Nick the Barber had in his shop window. The figures spoke volumes.

	<i>Hits</i>	<i>Runs Scored</i>
<i>Stonik</i>	154	73
<i>Cameron</i>	154	73

One game to go and the whole shooting works including the kitchen sink riding on it. A pennant—a house—a car. Brother, they were crammed in the ball park for that third game like the biceps in Hercules' arm. And it was a ball game packed with the stuff that makes real ball fans go pleasantly crazy.

Old Sam Boyd wiped the sawdust off his ancient flipper and began doing business on his own terms with the Birds. He whiffed the lead-off batter, demolished the next two hitters on grounders to the infield.

Of course, the Birds had their best, Pete Hollis, serving them up. He did some nice chucking on his own account. He crushed three blinding fog balls past Tiff Hughes. The same ignominious fate befell the number two hitter. Then Dib squared away at the plate and an excited buzz rippled through the stands.

The Bird hurler wasn't playing any favorites. He reared back, lashed his long right arm around. A white bomb-shell snapped down across Dib's chest, biting the inside corner. Again the stretch, the pitch. A throbbing buzz ball swept low, flashed across the pan. Dib stepped into the curve, jounced it on a line over third. It was a base sock and a

throaty roar boomed into the blue August sky.

On first base, Dib watched Stumpy stride to the plate. Stumpy had copped the real duke, the chance to play with the Seals. There was only the crumbs left to battle for now. Stumpy had hooked him at every turn. Well, if nothing else, Dib was determined to spoil his plans for the house and car.

He noticed that Stumpy was crouching lower than usual at the plate, his hands well up on the stick. Stumpy whacked the second pitch, a blooper beyond short that fell in for a safety. Place hitter that Stumpy could be, Dib knew he had hit that one exactly where he wanted it. It was a cinch that Stumpy didn't want to poke any long clouts, not with Dib on the bases anyway. With two men on the bags, Pete Hollis bore down and slammed three strikes past Joey Hazlett.

In the fourth inning, Dib and Stumpy repeated their act. Dib singled and Stumpy punched another safety through the infield. That left them still deadlocked in hits and runs. The innings were reeled off. The game scoreless, the crowd was swaying with every pitch, every play.

Dib whaled the pill deep into center-field in his third appearance. The Bird outfielder made a one-handed stab of the ball. With opportunity knocking, Stumpy Stonik smashed a shot down third. He was thrown out on a close play.

The seventh frame was scoreless. Lou Birney led off the eighth, slapping a sharp single into center. Dib started toward the plate. Jake Pfeiffer came out of the dugout, called Dib back for instructions.

"Lay one down on the second pitch," Jake snapped. "Get that runner down to second base."

Dib stood there slack-jawed. If he bunted and Stumpy followed with a hit and scored, it was bingo, the whole shooting match. The Cyclops manager must have sensed what he was thinking.

"The pennant means more than a lousy house and car—at least, to the rest of us," he said briskly. "We're playin' this

game to win. It's your job to get Birney in position to score. Mebbe Stumpy can bring him home."

Jake went back into the dugout and Dib glanced at Stumpy who was swinging a couple of sticks.

"Too bad, sucker," Stumpy said lowly. The guy had a nasty grin on his lips.

The tension was dynamite when Dib dug his spikes into the dirt. The first pitch was a strike. The next one came in high and on the inside. It would be easy to foul it off. With a pair of deuces on him, he could swing into the Bird hurler's stuff.

But there was a pennant hanging in the balance, and the base runner digging for second. Dib shoved the bat in front of the pill, tapped it down the third-base line. The third sacker swooped in, grabbed the ball with one hand, winged it to first. The throw was low, in the dirt. The Bird prime sacker scooped for the ball, but couldn't hold onto it. Dib's foot stabbed the bag and he was safe—on an error.

WITH the hit and run on, Dib bolted for second with the motion of Pete Hollis' arm. There was a loud, hollow crack. A sudden, startled shout went up from the crowd. Then Dib felt something smack against his thigh.

"Yer out!" the umpire was bawling.

A player hit by a batted ball is automatically out. Perched on first base was Stumpy Stonik, a wide grin on his face. The reason was obvious. On the play, he naturally received credit for a hit. Besides, he had removed Dib from the basepaths, thereby eliminating any possibility of his scoring. Stumpy with the aid of fate had killed about six birds with one stone.

A moment later Len Kensecke belted a rousing double off the scoreboard, scoring both runners. That blow spelled the ball game. It also meant that the house and car belonged to Stumpy. Sammy Boyd set the Birds down in the ninth. The final score was Cyclops 2, Birds 0.

Jake Pfeffer was the last man to enter the clubhouse. His disposition did not

seem sunny nor did his frown befit the occasion. He strode directly over to Stumpy Stonik.

"You're a very smart guy, Stumpy," he remarked quietly. "All season you've been aiming your shots down second when Dib was on first base. It's a nice stunt and it worked fine this time. You purposely aimed the ball at Dib. I'm finin' you one grand, Stumpy."

Stumpy's face purpled. "You can't prove that," he said hoarsely. "You couldn't make anybody believe that."

"Mebbe not," Jake conceded. "But the gang knows that you've pulled some pretty shabby stuff on Dib. It damn near cost us the pennant. And that nice little mother goose stuff you framed Dib with was just too sweet. Only that phony sore arm he suddenly came up with didn't fool me. It was like pullin' teeth—but I got the drift from Dib's wife."

Stumpy laughed shortly. "You can forget about that fine," he said huskily. "I'll be playin' with the Seals next season and you can mail your complaints there."

"Unfortunately for you, Stonik," Jake said slowly, "the contract hasn't been signed yet. I don't hafta sell, y'know. This ain't the stock market."

"You wouldn't back down now," Stumpy said strickenly. "Anyway, I couldn't raise no one grand."

The Cyclops skipper grinned wryly. "In that case you can turn over the house and car to the club. That'll square things. The club will give 'em to Dib."

Dib looked up. "I got an old flivver and it's good enough for me," he said sturdily. "And me and Lucy have kinda gotten used to an apartment. I wouldn't take those prizes on a bet. Stumpy got the most hits and runs. You oughta let 'im have the house and car, Jake."

Stumpy stood there, an amazed look on his face. "You mean you're turning it down," he said, finding voice. "Well, I don't want the stuff either, pal. It's all yours."

A tall, grey-haired man, standing unobserved in an adjacent corner of the room, strolled over.

"You guys better make up your minds,"

he said quietly. "You'll both be needin' that house and car. The Seals are buyin' both your contracts—but you're stayin' right here next season. You need another year in the minors."

There was an awkward silence for a moment.

"Better take his word for it, boys," Jake broke in. "He's the chief scout for the Seals."

Stumpy Stonik's face broke into a grin. "Dib's got his furniture ordered," he said. "So he gets the house. But from now on, the wives do the cookin' and we do the ball playin', huh, Dib?"

Dib nodded approval. They shook hands all around and there was a grin on every face. Stumpy really had something. Wives and base hits didn't mix—especially when they're blondes.

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Blocking Spot Blues



By Theodore J. Roemer

His own teammates wouldn't block for Keg Ditman's gridiron snakehips. And the only way Keg could line up the touchdowns—and win over his pigskin pards—was to take himself out of the scoring position.

HE WASN'T a good-looking guy. A flying cleat had pushed his nose over and another had tried to put it back, and he had too much jaw. But he was clean-cut, with a crewman's shoulders, and his eyes were gray and steady, and most of the time friendly. But they weren't now.

"Thanks, Kravac, for letting that guy in on me," he said.

The locker room of the Jays suddenly stilled. Bo Kravac, blocking half of the Milltown Pros, stopped clawing off his sweaty shoulder gear. His heavy lips curled.

"Can't take it, college boy?"

Keg Ditman's mouth hardened. "I didn't mind the first dozen times, Kravac. After that it was rank. A blind cop could smell it from the press box."

The trickle of red started from his mouth again and he wiped it away with a wide hand that fought to keep from trembling with the anger he felt.

It was Keg Ditman's first game with the Milltown Jays. He'd been signed by J. B. Martin at an undisclosed figure. Martin, pursuing his usual policy of getting one brilliant, hipper-dipper college runner at any cost and then building his team around him, had chosen the Bowden All-American flash and turned him over to his coach, Pug Reeves.

"Build this new kid up, Reeves. Nicki Hawes has shot his wad."

That was the obvious understanding Kravac, Bruels, and the rest of the Jays had of Keg Ditman's coming and they didn't like it. Nicki Hawes was a great kid with them.

"Still thinking of the press, college boy?" Kravac sneered.

Keg Ditman dropped the sweat-blackened, orange jersey. He started across the room. Kravac arose catlike, welcoming.

"Lay down, Ditman," suddenly snarled a voice and Pug Reeves came fast across the locker room, his reddish, bullet head lowered. "You can't start that stuff in here, get that straight at the start. You were putrid out there an' we all know it. You're not a pampered college star now; you're in the pro game. So stop your bleatin' an' take it or I'll give you something to whine about."

Reeves stood there rocking on the balls of his feet, two hundred and twenty pounds of bone and meat, and Keg stopped, but not from fear of Pug Reeves.

It was the college code that was still strong in him; the coach is master.

The reek of stale whiskey came from Reeves' breath and Keg shuddered with sudden distaste for this man. He said tightly: "I'm not bleating, Reeves, don't ever think that. But I'm taking just so much, so call off your dogs or I'll bust hell out of them, and you, too." He faced

the roomful, hard-jawed, with blue-steel eyes glinting.

"Oh, you will, huh?"

A happy gleam shot into Reeves' small eyes and he started forward when the door opened and a tall, gray-haired man entered with a football player in uniform. The player's suit showed some signs of play but nothing like Keg's. He had yellow hair and a thin, brown face almost too small for his lean, trim body. It was Nicki Hawes and his brown eyes were troubled.

"What now?" Martin, the owner of the Jays, said sharply and Reeves dropped his fists.

"Nothin' much. Jest the kid soundin' off here."

Martin looked at Keg. His deep-set eyes were worried. "That 18-to-6 plastering won't help us much. What was the matter, Ditman?"

Keg looked around the group first, then said slowly: "I can't imagine, Mr. Martin."

Martin caught the glance, the inflection. He hadn't been blind that afternoon. He said with a trace of weariness:

"Cut that stuff out, men. We got the line, the blockers, the passing and punting, everything—and the newspapers know it. There's no excuse for not grabbing the championship, except one. We have to have a man who can carry the mail. Ditman, come to my office." He turned and went out.

KEG DITMAN walked slowly down the corridor of the Milltown Jays' football plant. It was big. There was a lot of dough tied up in this stadium, these lockers and offices. And some of it was Keg Ditman's dad's. In fact all his dad had was tied up in the Jays. But no one knew this.

J. B. Martin and Ditman, Senior, had been boyhood buddies and when Martin started on lean years Hank Ditman began dipping into his little pile. The pile was all dipped out now; Keg had had a hard time making it through Bowden the last year. He wasn't getting the highly fabulous salary Kravac, Bruels and the rest thought. He was getting exactly the same

as the other first-string men dragged down for each game.

Martin looked up through craggy brows as he pushed into the office. "What was the trouble now, Keg?" he asked. Alone, he used Keg's first name and his voice was kindly.

Keg shrugged. "Same thing it's been the past month of training. Kravac and the boys don't like me, want Hawes in there. You saw his blocking today."

Martin nodded. "You took a beating. At this rate you won't collect that two grand bonus."

"Win a championship with them?" Keg smiled grimly. "I'll win a long black box if anything." He clenched his fists suddenly. "What is the matter with this outfit? Since I've been here I've heard some things, that smell. Last year they lost games that were cinches, games that had a lot of dough riding on them. And Hawes was in the backfield with them. In news stories I read stuff between the lines this fall. What's the matter? Is that why the crowd stays away? Why we aren't making money? Where is the blame?"

The owner shook his head slowly. "That's something I'd been hoping you could find out for me, Keg. Being on the inside, hearing things. The team seems to be run right, the fellows play ball seemingly well enough, surely I've got good stuff in the Jays. I've decided to give you the job, Keg. Find out where the leak is."

"Me? Among that band of cutthroats?"

"You're the only one I can absolutely trust."

"You don't trust Reeves?"

"I did. He's got more football brains than any man I know of. But since he's taken to drink—" He shrugged. "And Kravac, Hawes, Bruels—all good men, but kids from the poverty coal holes. One can't tell a thing about any of them. It's your job, Keg."

Keg thought of his dad and the night he'd come up to Bowden and talked to him. Keg had turned down a five-thousand-dollar Lions offer to go to the Jays. His father thought his speedy legs and

tricky hips could do things for the shaky Jays.

Keg remembered all that now, in the light of the past four weeks, and a grim smile came across his lean, hard face. He said tightly:

"I can see, J. B., I won't be increasing my popularity with this outfit in the very near future." He nodded and went out.

REEVES was a smart football man. He used a single-wing back and unbalanced line formation that, with a dozen lightning shifts, was the trickiest thing in offensive ball. He could read a man's worth in a glance, could spot flaws in a flash, and could think of more trickery in a minute than the opposition could all afternoon. On your side he was a good guy.

"Swipe that tackle lower, Morrison. And shake the lead in getting out to that half. If you think Johnson will be checked by that baby-pat next Saturday you're going to be counting sheep. All right. Number eighty-one. Drive!"

In faded sweatshirt he stamped around the orange-jerseyed first team who had driven to the second's thirty-five. Keg pulled his golden helmet tight and crouched. Smith had almost torn off his head on that last play. Smith played tackle and Kravac had let him through. Reeves had said nothing.

The big orange team shifted. The ball rifled to Keefer, the quarter, who faked to Bruels, then came out and tossed a short shovel pass to Keg, ripping for Smith's tackle. Keg's big hands plucked the whirling pigskin; he cut at just the right moment and was glued to Kravac's tail.

Kravac went in, bumped Smith and went rolling for the fullback, deliberately leaving Smith standing.

The big Smith ploughed head-on for Keg.

Keg saw daylight to the left. He gave Smith a closed fist to the forehead, whisked through the hole. Somebody hit him. He whirled, working his knees high. The hands fell away and he was ripping across the other side of the line, slashing

in that peculiar style that had gained him fame at Bowden.

An iron shoulder jarred him from the right. He fought away, staggering. Another hit him from behind. He lunged, then a third fell into him, blocking, and he saw it was Kravac himself getting in his way. He went down under a punishing smother of blue seconds.

He came up and saw Kravac's beetled dark face laughing. He didn't think; he just let the right go. And Kravac sat down suddenly.

Fire exploded suddenly in Keg's head and he opened his eyes. He was lying on the ground. Reeves was standing over him.

"I told you once, college boy"—Reeves was grinning—"we won't stand for that around here."

The red fury within Keg became white. His entire body was suddenly trembling with a hard furious queerness. He wanted to come up, lash at that grinning red face and green eyes. He wanted to pound that round, black face of Kravac's, gray with fury, behind Reeves. He wanted to get at any of them, all of them. But he didn't.

He got up, aware of the cocked fists all around him. He was alone against this bristling gang. He said in a tight, queer voice:

"Let's play ball."

Keg Ditman took a lot that afternoon. And he gave a lot. He ran over three touchdowns against the blues. But it was Keg Ditman who did it, not the orange team. He came off the practice field, his body scored in a dozen places. There was a sick drag at his middle and the dizzy weariness that enveloped him made him reel and stand in the showers gratefully, overcoming the nausea. He was the last one to leave.

"You softened him up this afternoon."

Keg stopped. The voice came from outside the window by the south entrance.

"I'll say," Kravac's heavy voice chuckled. "And we're going to keep right on until Nicki's back in the running spot."

"Martin sure handed Hawes a raw deal all right," the first voice went on and

Keg didn't recognize it. "Shelving him after the sap's gone from his legs."

"Where do you get that stuff?" Keg heard Kravac bristle. "Nicki's got all the touchdowns in his pins we'll need this year. So lay off that stuff, Leiser, 'cause if it spreads to the papers I'll bust you."

Kravac's voice died away and, listening to their footsteps in the gathering October twilight, Keg wondered who Leiser was. It was no secret to him or the team that Hawes' running stuff was gone from his legs.

He found out after the Eagles' game next Saturday. The Jays won 24-18. It was a wild game with loose scoring and loose defense on both teams and Reeves seemed wild at the poor showing. Keg played the first and fourth quarters. He made one touchdown in the first. Hawes made the other three.

Trotting in after the affair, he heard Kravac say to Hawes: "That'll show Leiser we're in there yet."

The veteran left half looked at his teammate quickly. "I wouldn't be seen with that guy. He's got too much money on these games, 'specially ours lately."

Kravac laughed and was about to say something when he saw Keg behind him. He shut up like a clam.

THAT night, nursing his wounds, Keg wondered if it was Kravac who was selling out games. Or Kravac and Hawes together. It'd be very simple. He went over the Jays' record of last year. Three close games and they could have been in the playoff against the Bears. He wished he'd seen Kravac work those games. And Hawes also.

Keg went his lone, slashing way and, oddly, the Jays continued to win games. They took the Washington Reds 12-2, the Chicago Tigers 14-7, and pounded out a desperate win over the league-leading Titans 13-12. Kravac got hurt in this game. It was his leg and there were honest tears in Hawes' eyes as they carried the burly blocker off. Keg wondered. He hadn't known they were so close.

Redheaded Stu Branner of the seconds came up into the blocking slot. Keg

looked him over the first time they lined up.

"Hello," he said.

The thick-shouldered redhead looked at Bruels and growled: "Let's get going."

Keg took the cut with smiling, chill eyes. He'd hoped for some blocking now but it was plain to see where Branner was. He was puzzled why all this gang stuck so by Hawes. Hawes maybe was a good man in his day, but injuries and physical punishment had robbed him of his sheer speed and a great deal of his cunning. Now, why should they be so loyal?

Key thought of Martin's veiled accusations as to games being thrown and the job J. B. had given him and wondered if there was any connection. He kept his mouth shut and his eyes open, and slaved.

They never gave him the blocking Hawes got when he was in. Keg had to fight for every inch and after the Dayton game it trickled into the papers. Martin grew tight-lipped about this war against the college star, but Reeves shrugged it off.

"We're winning games. The guy's too cocky."

Martin didn't say anything. He was thinking of the championship, the clutch games at the end of the season, the finale against the Titans, and he knew no team fighting internally could hope to take that Newark club again.

But Branner wasn't smooth at covering up and he had to give Keg some blocking. It began to show in the scores: Nats 25-6, Wildcats 33-7, Lanyard 28-0. The Jays had power all right.

Keg went into these games with a chip on his shoulder. He came out the same way. But, strangely, his presence seemed to ward off the taint that had haunted the Jays' games of last year. There was no leveling off; the men fought hard to outfight him and he fought right back until sometimes a close observer wondered whom the orange team was playing—the opposition or the big, tawny-haired No. 84 back in their own backfield.

But that big back made gains, and gains made touchdowns, and the Jays came through November to Thanksgiving

Day tied with the Titans and a championship hanging on their game.

And that week Bo Kravac came back into uniform.

The squad was hilarious; even Stu Branner didn't seem to mind. But when Keg saw Kravac's black eyes look him up and down he knew what he was in for. Kravac could cover his blocking slips cleverly from the crowd. And Pug Reeves didn't seem to care.

This week, Keg knew, he'd find out who was crooked on the Jays and why.

They had secret sessions and open sessions. The reporters were allowed in the latter and Keg threw himself into these with such fury that his place on the first string was a cinch in the eyes of the sports writers. A blackness grew on the rest of the squad but Pug Reeves smiled.

"Sure," he said to the questioning writers, "Ditman looks as if he'll be the starter Saturday."

KEG heard him, the squad heard him, and on the next play a heel got him on the jaw and laid him out cold. They dragged him to the sidelines and Hawes went in. When practice ended Reeves whistled them off and there was a horsy grin on his big mouth.

"Great kids. Great fighters. They'll do all right Saturday." The reporters shook their heads dubiously.

Keg trotted in, tight-lipped. He had a hunch whose heel that had been. Kravac's!

But at the locker door he froze. Inside, Hawes was slumped on a bench, hands to head, and the fellows were clustered about him. Kravac had his hand on Hawes' shoulder and a yellow telegram was on the floor.

"Don't take it so hard, Nicki. She'll pull through." His voice was strangely low.

"I'll give you my share for Saturday's game, Nicki," Bruels said.

"Me, too," Chuck Hanshel, a burly tackle, said and a quick chorus came from others.

Keg stepped in. "What's it all about?" he said quietly.

The men froze. Silence gripped the room. Then Stu Branner turned. "I don't

.....
think we need a Ditman to ask us that, fellows, do we?"

Keg controlled his temper. His keen eyes read the telegram. "Rochester Specialist Needed Immediately. Chartering Plane." He said to Branner:

"I'm still asking, nevertheless, Branner." His eyes were very steady. He was getting something, at last.

"Your hard-headed old man wrote our contracts," Branner exploded. "He squeezed us down to every penny, shaved every tight-fisted corner. Hawes' reads he had to play in every game to rate first-string wages—a mere two hundred—and we been keepin' him in there in spite of the Bowden college flash, in spite of Scrooge Ditman's son. But I'm fed up on you and your—"

Branner made a rush but Keg, instead of hitting him, ducked the heavy fists and tied the sub blocker's arms up.

"Hold on," he gritted. "I don't know anything of this. What's Hawes want dough for?"

"His wife is sick, has been for weeks," Bruels said.

"What's it to you, Ditman?" Kravac snarled.

"What's it to you?" Keg shot back, throwing Branner from him.

"She's his sister," Bruels said.

"Oh."

Keg felt suddenly as if someone had kicked him in the chin again. He saw a lot of things now. He'd never known they'd known his dad had an interest in the Jays. He'd never known his dad had drawn up the contracts. He'd never known Hawes was married. And she was deathly sick. And she was Kravac's sister.

It all told a lot of things, all but the thing he wanted most to know. In fact, it made things deeper and more muddled. Who had queered the Jays those close games and why?

He looked around the ring of drawn, snarled faces and said quietly: "If we win Saturday I'll know something. If we win there'll be extra dough for us, I'll guarantee that. If we don't—" He ended dramatically and stamped to his locker bench

"If we don't . . . if we don't . . ."
The phrase pounded in his brain as he walked down the long corridor of the Jays' stadium for the locker room. Above, the roar of the crowd was coming like some gigantic cataract. It spelled success, piles of green money, the financial road of comeback for the almost bankrupt Jays—if they won.

The phrase began pounding again. He almost bumped into Pug Reeves coming out of his office.

Keg's blood became chilled just a bit about the edges. He swung in with the ox-shouldered coach as they walked toward the ominously silent locker room.

"You know, Reeves," he said. "I been thinking a funny thing. It'd be pretty hard for one man to throw three ball games out there on the field. Even two men out there."

Reeves' little green eyes slitted suddenly. "What are you driving at, Ditman?"

Keg ignored the question. "But I've also been thinking it wouldn't be so hard to juggle, say, men on the line, non-working combinations that would let the offense sift through for easy first downs, or let holes for the opposition to drop passes into a weak zone. A man would have to be smart for that kind of juggling under ten thousand or so eyes. Mighty smart."

"What the hell you mean?" Reeves' big jaw was ugly now.

"Nothing," Keg said quietly. "Nothing, only I've been thinking and I figure it wouldn't hurt out loud—in your presence. I'd like to win this game for a kid in there." He pushed on ahead into the locker room, leaving Reeves staring uglily at his broad back.

THE ominous silence of the room didn't lift when he entered; rather it deepened. Keg dressed swiftly. Men pulled into harness, jerked jerseys tight and sat down. Everything was grim, silent. Reeves came out. He didn't look at Keg. He snapped:

"You got everything I'm going to give you. We go up and stay up. Regulars start, all except Ditman. Hawes is playing left half. Get out."

Keg arose. Maybe he was wrong about Reeves. Maybe he was playing the kid so he'd qualify for his first-string pay. And then, remembering the sneering indifference at their fighting on the practice field last week, maybe he was confident Hawes hadn't the stuff to produce touchdowns even behind Kravac. And against the Titans Reeves knew he, Keg, couldn't! He trotted out with the squad, tight-lipped. He hoped Hawes could carry the mail, for his own sake.

Keg sat beside Branner in an orange and black blanket and watched the panorama unfold before him. It was old stuff to him—four years of college ball after prep, and now pro—but oddly a little tingle began in his spine as he watched Bo Kravac and Hawes and the orange Jays line up against the Titans, burly and red and fast as a streak. Keg's eyes could read football in those Titans. The little thrill shook his heart, held it.

The dull roaring from the jammed cement bleachers suddenly dropped. A whistle pierced its lull; the orange line started moving; there was a thud as Bruel laid into the ball, and the game was on.

Red converged where the tumbling pigskin dropped into the end zone, and then they came with a rush. The orange line broke. Red and orange figures sprawled, then a heavy orange man shot through the tangle, nailed the weaving Titan back and it was first and ten on the Titan's twenty-three.

The Titans had a number twenty-eight who was a sheer buzz-saw. He was as big as Kravac, as fast as Bruels on the straightaway, and had a tricky, running style all his own but somewhat similar to Keg's feinting and weaving. Behind a brace of plough-horse blockers, he ripped to the twenty-eight, the thirty-four, the forty-one in three consecutive off-tackle slashes. Then Kravac bolstered Bruels on the shift and they stopped him.

The Titan quarter shifted tactics and threw his thunderbolt at the ends. Then with the halves sucked up close, the speed merchant dropped coolly back, lofted a thirty-yard pass into Hawes' territory, and the Titan right end scampered over for the counter.

The same half plunked it between the crossbars and it was Titans 7—Jays 0. And the game was but five minutes old!

"Weber is hot today," Keg heard Branner mutter beside him and he knew number twenty-three was Duke Weber of former Tech fame.

And watching Kravac and Hawes and Bruels out there, he knew something more. Those boys had never thrown a game in their life. They were fighting shoulder to shoulder, battling together for each other as they had done probably since they were kids in a hard-coal town, and Keg Ditman knew his last hunch was right: It was the Jays' own coach who had thrown those games!

He watched the red eleven kick off, saw Hawes go down savagely on the eighteen, and his mind was racing fast. He couldn't pin anything on Reeves now. But he could win this game to upset his apple cart. He and Leiser, chances were, had everything on this game for a killing, and Reeves was going to keep Keg out.

"Listen, Branner," he said. "I get two grand for a bonus if we win the championship today. I'll give you that for Hawes if you really buckle down when we get in and give me some blocking."

"We don't want Ditman charity," Branner sneered.

Keg held his temper. "Listen, you lug," he whispered. "Don't cut off your nose to spite your face. It isn't charity; it's for the Jays, for Martin, for my old man too. We'll get real dough next year. Don't be silly."

Branner's heavy brow puckered. "But the fellows—we swore none of us would block for you."

"It's for your own good!" Keg cried.

Branner scuffed his big cleats in the frozen turf reluctantly. "I don't like you, Ditman, but—"

"Branner!" It came like the report of a bull whip and Reeves was standing before them. He couldn't help but have heard some of their words and the hair on Keg's neck suddenly felt crinkly.

Then he saw something else. Out on the playing field orange jerseys were

clustered about a prone figure. It was Kravac!

"Get in there, Branner," Reeves said, smiling unpleasantly. "And you stay right where you are, college boy."

Keg's hand leaped into fists, then he caught himself. From the stands everything would look all right: Branner substituting for Kravac. Now when he went in, it would be with the third-string Hartley. And Hartley wasn't man enough to take out those Titan plough horses backing on the wings. He said tightly:

"You're the coach, Reeves."

The unpleasant smile widened and Reeves settled again into the line of orange-jerseyed subs.

KEG DITMAN crouched, hard-eyed, on weathered planking and watched the first quarter fade into the second. Hawes, Branner and Bruels pounded down to the Titan's thirty on body-jolting rams inside the tackles. Weber got it back the easy way, a triple lateral, a twenty-yard forward and the ex-Tech gridder skipped to the Jay's thirty-eight before Branner smashed him out of bounds.

The Jays held on their eighteen, punted. Weber came slashing back. They scored. The game went on. The sun went under a cloud. It became gray and cold and a wind swept down from the open stadium end in bitter gusts. Keg sat, clenched hands bloodless, wide shoulders open and stiff in the growing cold. Now the Jays' offense was stopped cold at every turn.

With four minutes to go, Reeves sent him in with Hartley, Luker, and Smith. It felt as if he were a board being broken in two the first time he hit that red wall. He made two yards. Luker was outsmarted skirting the end and they punted.

Keg had his hands full backing Reeves' 6-2-2-1 defense, then the horn tooted.

He jogged into the dressing room, impotent fury eating at his heart. Reeves had him over a barrel. Reeves had them all over a barrel. He was brainy and smooth and football wise; he'd tell the reporters Keg Ditman had a break with the rest of the squad—it was no secret

there'd been ill-feeling—and Pug Reeves would be exonerated in the eyes of the public. And the team didn't care for him. Reeves would be still solid with them. If only he could find J. B. in the next ten minutes

"Your timing's terrible; that's why you aren't clicking," Pug Reeves' grating voice came to him. "You look like a bunch of saps out there. You're making a sap outta me."

The safety valve in Keg slipped. He went forward, jaw working. "Wait a minute, Reeves," he said and at his tone the coach spun as if jerked around by an invisible hand. "Who's making a sap outta who?" And Keg swung with everything he had.

But his rage destroyed his timing and the blow shot past Reeves' face. A happy light shot into the squat coach's mottled face. He said:

"I've been waiting all season for this, Ditman." And he swung.

That same red fire exploded in Keg's head. He knew he went back against the wall, and down, and he knew he had to get up.

He did. Through fogged eyes he saw Reeves coming. Reeves had beaten him to the punch. Reeves always had. But this time *he* had to come through.

He worked his big shoulders off the wall, slid around into the open and with cleats braced on the tile floor attempted to spar off with the sure-footed Reeves.

He got in one blow, then Reeves hit him again, laughingly, and Keg went down. He got up again, biting his lips in fury, and, still laughing throatily at Keg's predicament, Reeves measured him for a third blow when someone in football uniform launched between.

He hit Reeves. The unexpectedness of the attack threw the coach into a locker stand. The man, sure-footed in sweat-socks, was on him in a flash. Reeves, open-mouthed, tried to see who it was, beat off the blows. But the other would have none of it. Like a whirlwind he was in, pummeling, hitting that mottled face, and with a sudden bull-like roar, as Reeves finally recognized his assailant, the two powerful men came to grips.

Keg stared. The other was Stu Branner!

It didn't take long. Branner had all the advantage: padding, footing, weight. Reeves lay under a toppled bench out cold, Branner hung to a sagging locker, bleeding from a score of cuts. There was no sound in the room except his breathing.

"Fellows, I—this guy—" He slumped to the floor his big, homely face twisted white with pain and Keg said:

"It's his leg. When that bench fell on them. Get a doc!"

No one moved.

Keg glared at the stony-eyed men, then J. B. Martin burst in the door.

HE AND Keg got Branner laid out. Martin didn't say much; his eyes told him enough. Dr. Linten, the squad doctor, came and took over. A timer came in, shouted: "Three minutes," and Keg once more faced the hard-jawed, silent squad.

"Martin, here, told me to find out who was two-timing this outfit out of close ones. It was Reeves. Branner believed me. I'm not asking you to; I'm asking you to win a game this afternoon."

Silence, then Bruels grunted. "Kravac's out; Branner's out. How?"

Keg said evenly, "I can do the blocking. How many can you run over, Nicki?"

Slim, yellow-haired Nicki Hawes started, stared at Keg, then closed his thin, wiry hands very slowly. "I'll run as many as we need, Ditman."

"Bring your coal heavers." Keg took a helmet and walked out the door.

He hadn't been a blocker since he'd been a kid in high school. His size made it imperative there; the runts carried the ball. Now—he looked at the Titan backs getting ready to kick off. Pro ball isn't prep ball. And he'd been a college runner ever since.

He worked his yellow leather helmet down tight, looked at the silent men lining up about him, then dropped into the right half blocking slot ahead of Nicki Hawes.

At the whistle the ball came catapulting toward him, sailed over his head, and

he jogged out warily as Nicki Hawes gathered it in and came sweeping. Red juggernauts broke through the screen of orange. Keg took Hawes to the right, bumped a big end, saw Hawes cutting back, and with a mighty effort went over the fallen end to take Duke Weber, just leaving his feet, in a flying tackle.

It was like hitting a cement post three feet wide coming toward you. Keg felt the jar down to his cleats, then heard the swish of Hawes' silks going over and he knew that Weber, at least, hadn't made the tackle.

Hawes was downed on the twenty-eight. Weber got up. There was no expression on his flat, stolid face. He trotted to defensive full and Keg shook his shoulders gingerly. This was going to be something. He wondered if Weber's two plough horses were of the same brand.

They were. The one on the right topped Weber by an inch and twenty pounds; the one backing the left wing had a scar across his cheek and a dirty way of using his knees in pile-ups.

In two plays Keg got Hawes to the thirty-four. List, the quarter, ordered a punt, but Keg said, "Run it once more," and List checked signals.

It was a straight smash outside tackle. Bruels helped on the hole and Keg went through with Hawes on his tail, going fast. Keg saw Weber. He gave him an iron shoulder, spun him off balance and went at the scar-faced back.

He hit the man full, went into a rolling block, then something hit him and when he opened his eyes they were sloshing water in his face.

He struggled up. The ball was on the forty-eight. The big Titan backs were watching him curiously. He looked at his own men. They too were watching him curiously.

He said: "Let's go."

He led the play through guard. He hit Weber, then Hamm, the big right half. Hawes made eight yards. When Keg got up, the stolid look was gone from Weber's big, flat face. The right half had a trickle of red working down his brown jowl. His eyes, too, had gone small and bright.

Keg's face didn't change expression,

but it was very hard and gray, and one could tell there was a battle in store for three certain guys that afternoon.

Bruels helped him on some of the blocking. Hawes went over for the counter in eight and one-half minutes. There were three penalties for both sides for roughing. But it was pro football. There were thirty-three overlooked.

Bruels kicked off. Keg made the tackle. They had to walk him around after the pile-up. He went back of the line and Weber began coming at him. Four yards, three yards, five yards

Keg came to his feet each time silently, grimly, the gray about his lips giving way to whiteness now. Weber's brace of dogs were working on him each play. They weren't gentle.

Then the Titan quarter shot the triple lateral with the twenty-yard forward tacked on the end. Keg, watching Weber, had it spotted.

He and the Tech flash went up at the same time. But Keg's taloned right fingers scooped the ball and his cleats hit the sod and he was running.

HE INSTANTLY fell into his old college role. His legs flashed. He cut to the right, his silken-clad hips twisted from Hamm's gorilla arms. He saw daylight back through the torn line and in a twinkling he was wisping through, found the other side clear and went all out for the goal. His brilliant speed left four Titans six yards in the ruck.

The stadium went mad.

Bruels kicked the leather over and it was 14-14.

The battle became more furious. The Titans slashed their way to the Jays' twenty where Keg intercepted another pass. He was cut down on the spot.

He tried to block Hawes out into the clear, but he was stone-walled in three tries. Bruels kicked to the Titan thirty-eight. The quarter ended.

Subs raced in. Keg looked to the bench. Martin was running the team. Reeves was nowhere in sight. Keg looked at Hawes, the only two remaining in the backfield. The running half's thin face was white and streaked raw down one side. Hawes

looked at him; neither said anything. The fight dragged on. Keg lost track of time.

Keg went back to blocking. He knew he wasn't a pretty sight. He knew he couldn't go the full quarter against that triumvirate. He knew they needed one more score. He saw Weber's bull-like shoulders exploding through the hole and he threw himself into the breach. It was a habit now.

He got up. The jarring didn't leave the base of his brain any more. It was funny, he thought. He watched the shift across, read a reverse by the point of Hamm's left shoe, and at the snap-back went across fast. This too had become instinctive.

He was right. The ball shuttled, Weber came around, and Keg was waiting for him.

The crash of shoulder harness against thigh pads shook the ground. But it was Weber who went back.

Keg got up, shook his head. He thought he heard bells ringing. Then he saw Gorman, the sub quarter, shouting soundlessly at him and saw Chesley, their guard, had recovered a fumble. It seemed this thing had gone on for an eternity already.

His hearing came back as they broke the huddle. Gorman snapped the number and he went instinctively for the end.

He rolled the man, then realized Hamm was upon them, and stiffened his legs. His right cleat caught Hamm across the shins and he went down, Hamm across him.

Hawes seemed slow in cutting. Keg fought to his feet and lunged futilely after the pack, twisting downfield. He thought his insides were loose the way they felt as he ran. There was a mad roaring somewhere but he decided it was the stands. They'd been raising hob all afternoon. He wished he could lie down on that hard, frozen grass instead of this running and he wished this damn game was over. They'd never accept him

He blinked his eyes. Oddly, the pack was just in front of him. He'd run swifter than he'd thought. He saw Hawes skipping around on wooden, injured legs, saw

Weber chasing him, with face tense with fury.

Weber and the Titan quarter closed in on Hawes. Hawes gave ground, worming desperately, trying to break to the wide side again. Keg saw the desperation in the runner's brown eyes. He shouted and went up for Hawes' wild lateral.

It juggled his battered fingers. He grasped frantically, felt the seams and pulled the round hard leather to his middle. He loved it, clung to it, and pumped his weary legs for speed.

Three hit him at the same time. He lunged forward and down, the chalk spattered his face. He'd made it.

When things came into focus again he saw Martin was beside him.

"Guess you've had enough, Keg. For a pinch blocker you did all right." He waved for Hartley.

"No you don't," Keg gritted. "That guy can't block Hawes through against those guys."

Martin grinned and pointed. Two red subs were helping Weber off the field. Hamm was following, limping painfully. His eye caught another movement and he saw Nicki Hawes going off on a stretcher.

"Bruels and List didn't like the way those two piled on the kid and they piled on. I'm shooting in a new backfield—by request of the ref." Martin's grin widened. "It's a defensive battle now. Want to watch it from the bench?"

Keg looked, saw Kravac there, Braner, Bruels—all battered, bloody, but sitting there to watch it out, a sweet victory over the haughty Titans. And then Keg saw Kravac wave at him, and the other two grinned and moved over. Keg nodded to Martin.

"Okay, J. B. They're good guys, once you get to know them, and something seems to tell me you've got a team for next year. Let's go."

The sick drag had left his stomach. He suddenly felt pretty happy.

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AT ALL NEWSSTANDS NOW—10¢ A COPY

Miracle Moundsman

By Mac Davis

His Yankee teammates jeered when broken-down Ray Caldwell vowed a moundsman's vengeance. For Caldwell, who in his heyday had been a top-line flinger, sought a new kind of soupbone cunning to change those jeers to cheers.



MOST any season some pitcher comes along to earn for himself the loud hurrahs of the fans by hurling a no-hit, no-run game. But no

pitching performance will ever pack the drama of that moment long ago when Ray Caldwell had his revenge.

About twenty-five years ago when such titans as Ty Cobb, George Sisler, Rajah Hornsby and Shoeless Joe Jackson roamed the baseball vineyards in all their pomp and glory, Ray Caldwell was a pitcher in the American League. Wise men of baseball said that some day "Slim" Caldwell would reach the heights of a Christy Mathewson.

But great pitcher that he was on the mound, a foolish man was he off the diamond. He was a devil-may-care sort of fellow who loved the temptations of the ages—wine, women and song. Caldwell burned the candle at both ends. He began to hit the skids, finally hitting bottom in 1918 while with the New York Yankees.

The Yanks at that time were a powerful crew, with men like Home Run Baker, Wallie Pipp, Roger Peckinpaugh and Ping Bodie in the lineup. But Ray Caldwell, with all that backing, couldn't win. The fans booed him at every appearance, the baseball writers panned him mercilessly. One day boss Ed Barrow called Caldwell into the office and told him he was through, washed up.

Slim Caldwell laughed nervously and asked for another chance. "I still have some games left in this arm," he pleaded. "I'll get going again!" But the boss of the Yankees shook his head and dismissed the broken-down ballplayer.

That winter Caldwell was sent to Boston with two other players in a trade for Leonard and Shore. The two players were thrown into that trade as a sort of extra bargain piece of ivory, without charge. That hurt Ray Caldwell's pride.

"Some day I'll come back and lick those guys," he muttered. "I'll lick them in a way Ed Barrow will never forget."

These words seemed but an empty threat of a bitter, brokendown ballplayer. Ray Caldwell had reached the end of the line. He did nothing with the Red Sox, winning only against Washington. Finally even Boston cast him adrift, giving him his unconditional release. The career of Raymond Caldwell, who might have been a "Matty the Great" was closed.

Broken and forgotten, Caldwell turned up in Cleveland in August, 1919. He begged Tris Speaker, the Indian manager, for a job. Speaker didn't think much of him, but took him on when Caldwell offered to work for a song.

Then came the afternoon of September tenth. Cleveland arrived in New York to play the Yankees a doubleheader. Those two games meant a baseball fortune to both teams, for they were in a hectic race for second place and close to copping the league lead.

"Tris, let me pitch the first game!" Caldwell pleaded just before the teams

took the field. "I want to pay off some old scores. Give me a chance and I'll lick them so bad, they'll have no heart left for the second game!"

Tris Speaker knew that Caldwell had courage, for only a few days before, the pitcher had insisted upon finishing a game after he had been knocked down by lightning. But did he have the stuff to lick the powerful Yankees? Well, it was worth a gamble.

"All right, Slim, you've got the assignment," said the manager. "Good luck!"

So, before a crowd of twenty-five thousand, Caldwell took the mound against the Yankees' superb star, Carl Mays, the tricky submarine hurler. In the very first inning Joe Harris, another Yankee discard, belted a homer with a man on base and Cleveland had two runs to start with.

THE innings slipped by as broken-down old Slim Caldwell stood on that mound pitching his heart out, expressing his pent-up bitterness, his hunger for revenge in pitching cunning. He had the Yankees guessing. Batter after batter fanned or popped out.

In the seventh inning Home Run Baker hit a slow grounder to Wambsganss, the Indians' second baseman. Instead of gulping up that easy out, the keystone man fumbled and Baker reached first. But Caldwell wasn't to be daunted. He

was fighting Time, Fate and the breaks of the game and he wasn't going to let any of them lick him now!

He came down to the ninth inning with not a Yankee hitting safely yet. The fans were too shocked to understand this miracle. Surely that discard, that baseball tramp wasn't going to turn in a no-hit, no-run game? Where was Home Run Baker? Where was Peckinpaugh, who at the time was fighting it out with Ty Cobb for the batting lead of the league? Where were all the other Yankee sluggers?

There were still three men to go! In a minute there were two left, then one—and then Caldwell burned in three fast ones and the game was over. Cleveland had won three to nothing! Ray Caldwell had had his revenge.

As the crowd stood dumbfounded, disbelieving what their own eyes had seen, Caldwell stuck his glove into his hip pocket and walked off the field. Passing his manager, Tris Speaker, Caldwell said:

"Thanks for letting me pitch. Told you I could lick those guys! They'll be a cinch for the second game!"

Just for the records, Cleveland won the second game, too and knocked the Yankees right out of the pennant race. Such was the revenge of Ray Caldwell, the washed-up pitcher who resented getting the skids.

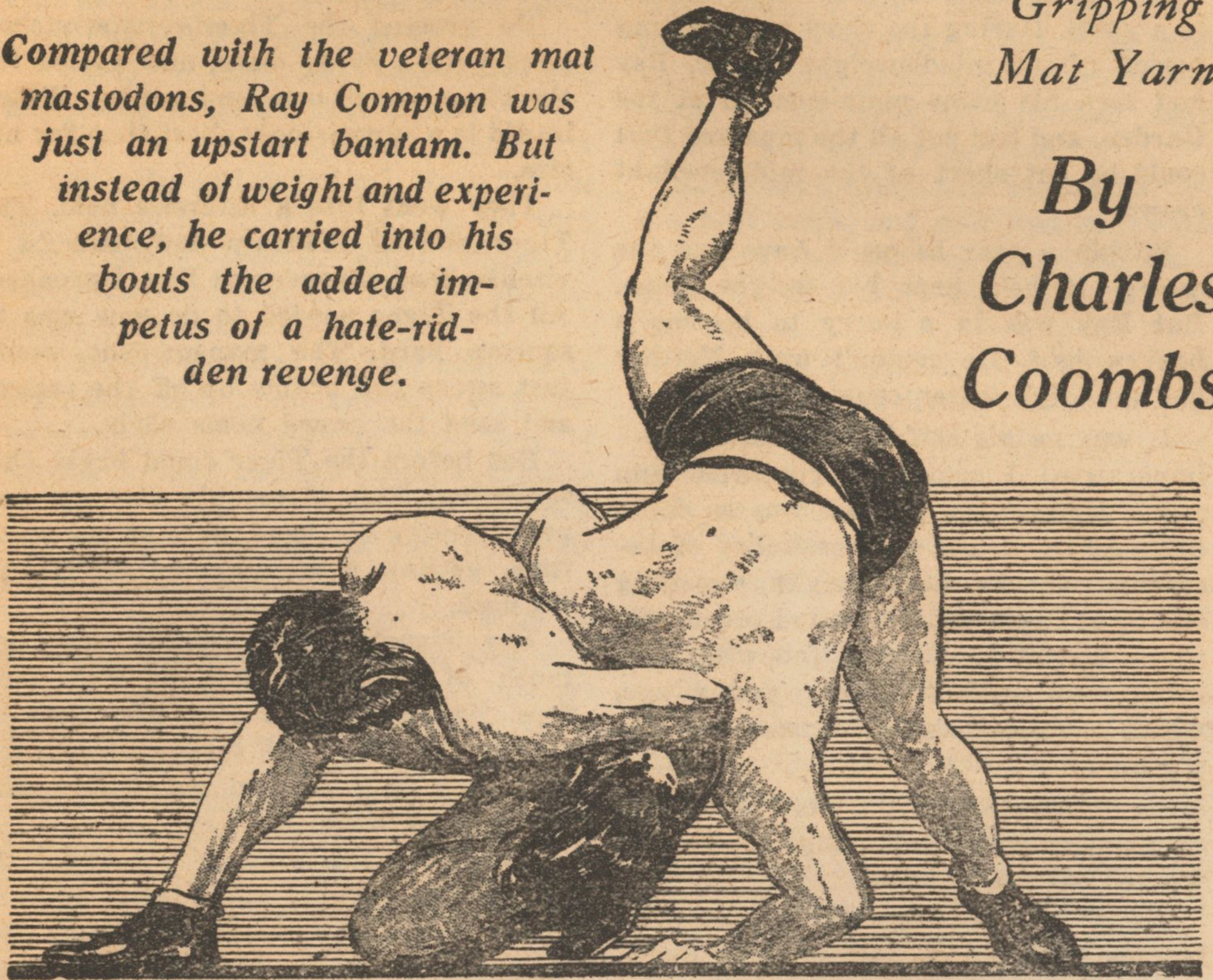


Not Grappling for Glory

*Gripping
Mat Yarn*

*By
Charles
Coombs*

Compared with the veteran mat mastodons, Ray Compton was just an upstart bantam. But instead of weight and experience, he carried into his bouts the added impetus of a hate-ridden revenge.



RAY COMPTON stepped on the scales. I knew just what was coming. But I wasn't anxious.

"There you are, Baldy." Ray turned to me, grinning. "A hundred and seventy-seven. I'm a full-fledged heavyweight now—with a little leeway even. Well, ain't I?"

"Yeah. Them Fairbanks don't lie. I wish they did. Yeah, you're a heavyweight—just."

He stood on the scales. A faraway look came into his brown eyes. He was thinking of something, something I wished he would forget. I gave him a good long gander from sandy head to heavily muscled feet. He stood five-ten. The hundred and seventy-seven pounds were wisely distributed in his chest,

arms, shoulders, and legs. He was as wasp-waisted as a Gibson Girl.

"Why don't you give up wrestling, Ray?" Funny for me, his manager and trainer, to be giving that advice. "Try fighting. You're a heavyweight now. Those two-hundred-and-fifty pound mastodons will squash you, Ray."

"Crusher is a wrestler, not a fighter," he said with a finality that tossed my advice in the ashcan.

He was right. Crusher wasn't a boxer. And, of course, that made all the difference in the world.

There was no use trying to argue Ray out of the heavyweight field. In the first place, he had had only one purpose at the outset of his short wrestling career, the culmination of which could only be

reached through his becoming a heavy-weight wrestler. Not only that. He must become the world's heavyweight champion.

You say that's kind of a heavy side order? Granted. Still, Ray wasn't exactly a yokel. During the short and exciting period of his middleweight career, Ray had seen his name main-evented at the Garden, and had cut all the mustard that could be cut short of the middleweight crown.

Within a year he could have had the crown—if he'd kept his weight down. But Ray was in a hurry to become a heavyweight. He couldn't wait. Neither hell nor high water could make him.

It was on his self-imposed schedule—imperative! I couldn't argue with him much, because his purpose was so damn extraordinary, and his possibility of becoming world's heavyweight wrestling champ so fantastic, that I had practically given myself up to just following him along and collecting my percentage, which was usually good, because Ray was a favorite with the fans.

He practically didn't need a trainer or manager, as he had things pretty well worked out for himself.

Being a favorite, we found little trouble in lining up heavyweight bouts. Our first one in the big time was with Tiger Holkestad, a two-hundred and eighty pound Norwegian.

"Now, Ray,"—I was working him over on the table, waiting for our call—"all this guy has to do is sit on you once, and it'll take a lot of blotters to—"

"He won't get a chance," Ray stopped me short. He seemed awful sure of himself, too.

SOON we were in the ring. Brother, this Tiger was no kitten. He gnashed his teeth, beat his hair-mattress chest, and tried to pull one of the corner posts out by the roots. All this did not faze Ray, who just stood waiting for the bell.

At the bell I was tempted to turn away and count the house. It would be murder. But, being curious, and not hav-

ing seen a murder for some time, I watched.

The Tiger was anything but sane. He was much more of a hippo. He clumped out to the middle of the ring. Ray was there and waiting.

He greeted the Tiger's outstretched hand with a flying mare, and waited for the Tiger to roll over and get up. Which he did in a surprisingly short time for his size.

They went into a referee's hold. The Tiger shifted suddenly and clamped a viselike head chancery on Ray. I groaned. All the Tiger needed to do now was to squeeze hard. The management would just sweep the brains up off the canvas and send the crowd home early.

But before the Tiger could begin this squeezing, Ray threw his feet up and over, freeing his head, and, at the same time, getting a scissors on the Tiger's fat neck.

The Tiger's bullet noggin was not much of a handle, and he was soon free. But Ray didn't give him time to rest much. Like a bull terrier after a fat bull, Ray was in and out before the Tiger knew what had happened.

Sometimes the Tiger would find himself on the canvas; other times an arm or leg would be missing, but would end up painfully behind him in Ray Compton's possession.

Ray harried the giant for about thirteen minutes. The big boy was dripping wet with a greasy sweat, and was doing no small amount of panting.

Then Ray stepped in fast, maneuvered into a cross buttock and leg hold. With an earthquake-like thud, the Tiger was staring at the battery of arc lights over the ring. Before he got a chance to reconnoiter, Ray took a flyer at him and lay across the Tiger in a body press until the ref patted him on the back. Thirteen minutes forty-two seconds.

The second fall was a little longer and a little tougher. But the Tiger's size was more of a liability than an asset. He had too much. Ray finally weakened him with a figure four scissors, and sat on him for the second and final fall.

The crowd liked it, the newspapers

liked it, Ray was pleased. I remained alone in my pessimism.

"He was just too big for his own good," I told Ray. "If he'd been forty pounds lighter he'd have whipped you."

"Forty pounds lighter, huh?" He got that look in his eyes. "That's just about what Crusher'll weigh, huh?"

"Yeah," I said, and was sorry I'd mentioned it in the first place.

Well, you coulda pasted a pink bow to my scalp and called me Mary if this Ray Compton didn't take 'em as they came. Sailor Nelson, Butch Byskoski, Stony Brooks, and the rest of the so-called up-and-comers.

It turned out that his very size was to his advantage. These two-fifty to three-hundred-pound mammoths were used to leaning around on each other, and pushing each other in their own leisurely fashion—with nothing in view but their share of the gate.

They were at a loss as to what to do with this slippery jumping jack who was in and out like a rapier, always leaving his mark. Neither did they know how to handle this boy who took his wrestling seriously and was headed for a definite goal in the shortest time possible.

Ray had just polished off Stony Brooks in two out of three falls, and we were in our dressing room.

"Okay, Baldy, there we are," he said simply. "Stony was the last hurdle. Now get my match with Crusher."

Just like that. Get a match with Crusher. A cinch. Except that Crusher happened to be the world's heavyweight champ.

"But, Ray—"

"No buts, Baldy. Either you get the match or I get a new manager."

IT DIDN'T take much deliberation though, to realize that he was entitled to a championship match. Guess I just wasn't able to accustom myself to the fact that Ray had taken all the leading contenders in stride. He just didn't seem cut out to be a grappler.

But, having done this, and being popular with the fans, I could find no logical

reason why he shouldn't get a crack at the champ—except maybe one.

The champ happened to be Ray's older brother—Crusher Compton.

Why was Ray so determined to take the crown away from his brother? Well, that's a very long story, with a good many side tracks. But it all totals up to the fact that Crusher got started early on the road to wrestling fame. Only it was the wrong road.

He forsook his family during its very toughest years, and wallowed in the luxury furnished him by Bilge Agnew, a promoter with more shade than a weeping willow.

Ray hadn't minded working day and night to keep the family's stomach from disappearing. The folks stood that fine; so did Ray.

It was when talk began going around that Crusher Compton, Inc., was not a right outfit, and that Crusher Compton was no better than the Inc. (which was the reproachable Bilge Agnew).

This almost killed Ray's mother, who was a nice little lady with plenty of family pride, and whose family was her world. Crusher was dragging the Compton name through the mud.

Then Crusher became champ and conditions became no better. Ray had tried to talk to him, but Crusher had brushed him off like the little brother he was.

Oh, he'd send his folks ten bucks every once in a while, but he was making thousands. It was the wine, women, and song that took most of his money. He didn't do much singing either.

It was about then that his little brother Ray thought something should be done. He also thought that he was the one to do it. The project he laid out for himself was terrific in all its simplicity.

It merely called for him to put wrestling and the Compton name back on the legitimate side of the ledger. This could be done, he reasoned, by his licking his brother—the champ. By his making the Crusher realize that he wasn't so high and mighty, after all.

Our pairing up was a natural. I'm the manager that Crusher put in moth-

balls when he began crawling up Bilge Agnew's rickety ladder to fame. Naturally, anyone who had even a remote desire to make things uncomfortable for the Crusher was my bosom pal. I wasn't a freshman in the grunt and groan school either, and I'd also handled plenty of fighters in my time.

Well, there was Ray, the lightest heavyweight in the game. Surprisingly enough, he was doing all right. I kept lining 'em up and he kept knocking 'em down.

Which was all fine and dandy to everyone but me. I knew what was coming. You see, I was careful in arranging his matches to get the biggest lard barrels possible. Ranging anywhere from two-sixty up. Those hippos had been doing fat-man duets for so long that they didn't know what to do with a speedy little hundred-and-eighty-pound bantam.

Ray would exhaust 'em like a wolf at a cow's legs. Then, before they realized what had happened, they had been dunked in resin.

Why was I worried? Well, in a short time a match with Crusher was impending. Crusher was no lard bucket. He tipped the beam at about two-forty, and was solid as a National Defense Bond.

Not only that, but it was rumored that the Crusher was very displeased indeed at Ray's little crusade. He publicly threatened to give Ray a short and painful lesson if they ever met within the hempen strands.

And here the time had come when I must arrange a match with the champ.

So we barged into Bilge Agnew's joint one day. It was one of those plush and chrome-plated layouts that a guy wants to be cautious of.

"Oyez," Bilge said, giving Ray a thorough gander. "We've been keeping up with your boy. Doing okay, too—with second-rate men."

"Second-rate?" I bristled. "He took all the leadin' contenders."

"There ain't no leadin' contenders," Bilge dripped out over his cigar. "Crusher Compton's a class all hisself."

JUST about then the Crusher stepped in from a side door. He was all dolled up, even to spats. He looked at me, and looked at Ray, a puzzled expression on his knotty pan. Then he turned to Bilge Agnew.

"What's all this? What's the kid doin' here?" He snapped.

Bilge leaned back. He studied the Crusher a minute. Bilge would sell his mother's teeth if he could make a little profit. But even a guy as crooked as Bilge Agnew must have wondered at this kind of action between brothers.

"Why, he's here to arrange a match with you." Bilge rolled the cigar to the far corner of his flabby mouth and squinted through the smoke. "He thinks he can take the crown away from you."

The Crusher took a long look at Ray. Amusement began to curl his lip; then he let out a howl of laughter. Much quicker he cut it short.

"Listen, kid," he turned to Ray. "I don't know whatever got you started in this wrestling game, but whatever it was, forget it. You cut a little mustard as a lightweight, and you've been rolling over some of these bubble boys. But that's just as far as you'll go."

"I'm not so sure, Don." Crusher's real name was Don. "I think I can whip you—else I wouldn't be here now."

"That's a laugh." Then the Crusher must have noticed the searing look in Ray's eyes. "Say, what's this all about anyway?"

"Yeah, what's your hurry?" Bilge Agnew put in. "Hell, you've been a heavyweight less than eight months, and already you want to be world's champ."

Ray ignored Bilge. "You let the family down, Don. Ma's in bum health, partly because her family is busted up. Pa's handling a pick and shovel, and he's way too old for that. You could have set them up nicely for their old age and never even have felt it. You let 'em down. You're disgracing your own folks. You're no good, Don, and I'm going to whip you to prove it."

The Crusher looked at him a minute. Ray's little speech had done anything but soften him.

"Well, if that ain't a cute little after-dinner speech!" he said smoothly, poisonously. "You musta been readin' a lot of books lately, Ray, especially poetry. You should be a preacher, not a fighter. Besides, ain't I been sendin' the folks money every so often?"

"Chicken feed. And that ain't so important anyway," Ray spat. "You never stop in to see the folks or anything. You ashamed of the place they gotta live in?"

"Aw, can that poverty stuff. You ain't crippled none. Besides it's the old man's lookout to see that his family is—"

I didn't have time to grab hold of Ray. He stepped up to the Crusher fast. A couple of quick lefts in the ribs brought the Crusher's chin down. But a short right from down under snapped that chin back up again. In fact, way back up—against the wall. I always knew that Ray should have been a fighter.

It took about three seconds for the Crusher to realize what had happened. He began to gather himself. There was murder in his eyes.

That three seconds was just long enough for Bilge Agnew to swing out of his chair and confront the Crusher. I had picked up another chair, and was trying to hold Ray back like Clyde Beatty would an angered lion. Ray just stood there tense, and waited for the Crusher to break away from Bilge.

But Bilge Agnew was talking sixty per. Pretty quick Crusher relaxed a little, and Bilge motioned for us to sit down. Which we all did slowly. Neither the Crusher nor Ray said a word. We were all sitting on a short-fused powder keg.

"Well, if that ain't a beautiful piece of nonsense!" Bilge leaned back thoughtfully. "You know, if I thought you guys would really mix it, maybe we could arrange a match."

Ray sat with a deadpan, but I bet his insides weren't dead. The Crusher said: "There wouldn't be much mixin' it. I'd salivate the brat quick—brother or no brother. We never saw things alike anyway," he added as an afterthought.

Bilge Agnew stared at the ceiling a minute, fingering a paper knife.

"It's got possibilities," he mused softly. "Two brothers scrapping for the world's championship. Two brothers who hate each other, and—"

"Nuts," Ray interrupted. "I don't hate Don. He's just let a little success go to his head. He's forgot what's honest and what ain't. I think maybe I can straighten him out a little, bring him down to earth. He thinks he's too big for his pants." I'll have to admit it sounded a little on the melodramatic side.

"Oh, ain't you the fair-haired little boy!" the Crusher spat. "I don't know where you think that baby talk's gonna get you. But it won't be the championship."

All this time I saw that Bilge was watching closely and listening. His feet suddenly come down with a thump.

"By golly, I'm gonna match you two."

That's really about all there was to it. He did a little phoning, we signed some papers, and left.

All this time no small talk passed between Ray and the Crusher. The animosity was there. It needed no ballyhoo. I knew that the coming match was going to be a lulu.

WE HAD two months to get in shape, so we headed for high altitude and timber. Ray put all he had into his training. I could see he was doing a little worrying. Crusher was going to be tough—and plenty. I had little doubt but what he'd be too tough.

Remember the whole thing was Ray's idea, not mine. I believed he had been rushing things too darn fast. At the same time, I'm not the bird to lose a match before we even step into the ring, and I really put Ray through the mill during those two months.

The publicity boys had hopped on the match like a starving Great Dane on a pound of hamburger. It was the biggest thing since Cain and Abel (wherever they fought). They used every reason available to their news-warped imaginations for that murderous clash between two estranged brothers. It looked like it was going to be a very nice juicy job of fratricide. Pride keeps me from men-

tioning the Main Street odds on the Crusher.

The papers mellowed the impending disaster to Ray somewhat by counter-acting his lack of weight with speed—on paper. I happened to know that, besides weight, the Crusher had a great plenty of speed also. That's what worried me so much.

Ray got harder, more relentless as the days until the match diminished. The Crusher had been giving the reporters choice little bits of propaganda which Ray thought were strictly family business.

This and other things kept feeding the fires of Ray's animosity until I'm sure he had forgotten that there was any such a thing as a relationship between himself and the Crusher.

All the time there was that impending feeling of defeat in camp. I felt it; I know Ray felt it. It saturated the very air. We had bitten off a mighty big hunk.

By the end of the two months Ray was in as good condition as he ever would be. We broke camp, headed back to town.

Came fight night. The Garden was a milling mob of anxious, excited humanity. This was the match of the age. Everything had been well handled, with a minimum of cheap ballyhoo, and everyone knew it was a kosher match.

"Okay, Ray." He was on the table, and I was giving him a good going over. "Here's what you've been wanting. Now don't muff it, because it'll be the only chance you'll ever get."

"Yeah," he said simply. His fingers dug nervously into the leather padding on the table.

He wasn't really as bad as I tried to make him believe. That's just my way—the reverse optimism method. I knew he'd put up a scrap that the Crusher would never forget. Still—well, fact is fact.

Then we were on. Down the aisles through the thundering crowd. It was a great feeling—like an Englishman walking into a meeting of the Gestapo. That

mob was there to see an exhibition of torture in all its fineries.

You could see it in their pitying eyes. You could sense it in the fourth row gambler's odds of 5 to 1. The Crusher hadn't got his name for picking dahlias.

The Crusher's entrance, wrapped in his fiery scarlet satin robe, brought a blended mixture of cheers, jeers, applause and birds. He drew the crowds because of his ruthless methods of intentional mayhem.

He turned a deadpan towards our corner. This, I figured, was a more foreboding sign than if he'd made a few typical grimaces.

The bell brought the two off their stools. They stood there a moment sizing each other up. The Crusher's two hundred and forty-two pounds were as solid as a bride's first biscuits. Ray was an iron wedge, having tipped the scales at one seventy-nine. They were built very much alike. But the contrast in size was foreboding—disastrous.

They went into a referee's hold. Suddenly Crusher jerked free and caught Ray across the side of the head with a jolting forearm. That was a good enough indication that the match was going to be rough—wide open. It was.

For ten minutes there was a whirlwind of flying limbs and heavy grunts of exertion. The periodic thud of bodies on the canvas pad echoed through the Garden.

IT DIDN'T take the crowd long to realize that this was no grandstand match, but something much more sinister. There was no pulling of blows, no easing up of holds. The match was obviously for keeps. Both were giving their best—and worst.

Ray got a double leg hold on the Crusher. With a mighty heave he put the Crusher flat on the canvas. Ray dived to pin him, but the Crusher's knees were working overtime. One caught Ray in the midriff and sent him spinning. Then they were both back on their feet, circling, maneuvering for an opening.

Suddenly the Crusher lunged in, flopped Ray with an arm grip shoulder throw. Ray twisted over on the mat. He

started to push himself back to his feet when the Crusher clamped a quarter-Nelson on him, twisted him over on his back, and threw his full two hundred and forty-two pounds across Ray's chest in a body press.

Ray flapped like a landed bass. The Crusher reached down, grabbed a flying foot, and pulled it painfully up under Ray.

There was no doubt about the pressure the Crusher was putting in that toe hold. The blood raced from Ray's face. Pain rose in his half closed eyes. A little more pressure on the Crusher's part, and something was bound to give.

"Let him have the fall," I yelled from the apron of the ring. There would be two more falls. A guy doesn't stand much of a chance with a broken ankle.

But Ray had his own ideas. Quick as light he heaved upwards, frantically wriggling from beneath the Crusher, and rolled. He kept rolling, at the same time kicking his foot free. It took plenty of guts, because, had the Crusher suspected his move, he could have pulled a

Ray got safely to his feet and, as best he could, tried to kick the cramping pains out of his ankle before the Crusher could get at him again.

But the Crusher was on him fast. Ray took the defensive. I could see that his ankle was bothering him. The Crusher pressed his advantage. He crashed Ray to the floor with a flying body slam. Then he pounced on Ray hard, knocking the wind out of him.

Before Ray could get himself organized the Crusher pinned his shoulders to the canvas and took the first fall.

As he started to get up, the Crusher turned to Ray. "You see," he said between breaths, "this ain't no pink tea racket for kids. You wanna call it quits, or you want to get hurt?"

Ray just stared at him scornfully, crawled back to his feet, and came to his corner.

We didn't say much as I worked over him. This was no time for pep talks. Ray was obviously outclassed. In his hasty anxiety to put his brother in his

place, he had overstepped common reason. I never should have let him do it.

It's all fine and dandy to crusade for right, but that can't eliminate proper preparation. We both felt the impending disaster of the next fall.

"Give him a real fight for it, Ray," I said as the bell rang. "Don't give him any gravy."

But I didn't need to worry about gravy. Ray had no intention of letting the Crusher even take the second fall. If Ray had had sleeves they would have been plumb full. For what began to happen in that Garden were things very extraordinary.

THERE is one thing I'd like to set straight right now. You who have been to wrestling matches during the last few years no doubt have noticed that the American catch-as-catch-can, or free-style, wrestling allows everything but striking with the closed fists or gaining holds which encourage strangulation. Even kicking and biting have been somewhat removed from the universal taboo list. Okay, so you know what's kosher.

Well, Ray went in fighting. Only he went in fighting with forearms, elbows, head, and shoulders. Popular opinion would not consider it wrestling, but technically it was okay. The crowd whooped, whistled, and screamed. They loved it.

The Crusher was bewildered as Ray bore in, shoulders weaving and arms pistoning. Every time the Crusher tried to tie Ray up he found himself in a maelstrom of flying arms and legs. He couldn't grab hold.

I always contended that Ray was real fighting material—not wrestling.

It turned into a rout. Ray never gave the Crusher an opportunity to build up a defense. He opened up the Crusher's lip with an elbow. Banging shoulders rattled the Crusher's teeth. Ray had become a very slippery cyclone.

I wasn't exactly happy at the way my boy was going at it. It wasn't exactly wrestling, but it was legal; so I really couldn't kick.

Ray had the Crusher's head ringing within three minutes. The Crusher's face was smeared with blood. The Garden was in a panic.

Then, before anyone realized it, the Crusher's two shoulders were having a resin bath. Ray came to his corner. He wasn't very exulted over his having taken the fall.

"Nice going, kid," I said, for the first time getting my breath—but I didn't really mean it.

The ref came over. There was disapproval on his flattened face.

"That ain't wrestling, Compton," he said gruffly. "Maybe it's legal, but it ain't wrestling. And you'll never make a champ if you have to resort to stuff like that."

He only gave voice to my thoughts. For wrestling, in my opinion, will always be the art of holds, grips, and leverage—not slam-bang savagery of tooth and nail. You never heard of Gotch, Zbyszko, Lewis, or Munn using any of that grandstand vaudeville. They were wrestlers.

Ray didn't say anything. The ref left. Then:

"He's right, Baldy," Ray said to me. There was a little moisture in his eyes that I'm not so sure was sweat. "This fall is going to be wrestling—win or lose."

At the bell the Crusher stalked out warily. By the way the Crusher carried himself I was afraid this last fall would be more of a knock-down-drag-out fight. But my boy had started it.

They go into a referee's hold. I noticed Ray's lips moving like he was saying something to the Crusher. And the Crusher answered back with a nod of the head.

Then there began an exhibition of wrestling that the twenty thousand people packing that Garden will never forget.

In spite of his weight deficiency, Ray was wrestling like I had never seen before. He was possessed—possessed to prove to his brother that he wasn't so

high and mighty that he could outgrow his own family.

Suddenly Ray was in close, and with an arm grip shoulder throw he put the Crusher on the mat. Then, before the Crusher stopped bouncing, Ray clamped a viselike scissors around his middle and began applying a hammerlock.

It had happened so fast that few people realized that Ray had a very decided advantage right then.

Ray put a little pressure on the hammerlock, and the Crusher winced. At the same time the muscles in Ray's legs drew around the Crusher's ribs and squeezed with the grip of a python. The Crusher was going to have a heck of a time getting out of that hold. All this time, there was anything but silence in the Garden.

The Crusher tried to kick out of the scissors, but Ray quieted him with a little added pressure on the hammerlock. He drew the scissors tighter and tighter around the Crusher's aching ribs. An agonized look came across the Crusher's face.

His free hand started to claw for Ray's face, but he pulled it back. Even the Crusher wouldn't resort to gouging.

Harder and harder Ray squeezed, at the same time pulling harder on the hammerlock. Beads of sweat broke out on the Crusher's forehead.

"Come on, Don. Don't let Buddy whip you!"

It was just an ordinary yell like that which rains down by the thousands on a ring—except for the "Buddy" part. To the two on the mat that call filtered out from all the rest.

Their heads turned to the direction from which it came. Yes, they were both there, six rows back from the ringside. Both Ma and Pa Compton.

Pa was standing up. He had done the yelling. Ma just sat looking at her two sons—no indication of partiality. A certain horror was in her eyes at the sight of brother torturing brother.

And there was the old man yelling—not for Ray, but for Don, or Crusher, the underdog at the time.

NEITHER man on the mat moved for a moment. Only by going to the vaults of the news camera film library can you see a duplication of the look that came over the Crusher's face. It was terrific.

Here, after forsaking his family in the face of whirlwind mat fame, the family was pulling for him—the same as they used to pull for Ray when Ray was getting the worst of it in their frequent brotherly tiffs at home in years past. It was the good old encouragement for the underdog.

Certainly the Crusher didn't care what happened to him. For, with a mighty heave, he flew in seven directions at once. And he was free. Not even a broken wrist.

Ray was quick getting to his feet. For ten minutes the fall see-sawed back and forth. Then the Crusher's superior weight began to tell on Ray. Ray was slowing down.

The Crusher was wrestling beautifully, much as I hate to admit it. But much more surprising was the sight of the action itself. The Crusher was not using any of his notoriously dirty tricks, and he had plenty of opportunities.

Something seemed to have come over the Crusher. He was putting everything he had into his holds. Ray was in and out, tied up; then free. Each time he was a little slower in breaking free, though.

Then, in a surge of body slams climaxed by a triple flying mare, the Crusher had Ray on the canvas. He rolled him over with a half-Nelson and slammed his body across Ray's shoulders—taking the third and final fall. The Crusher had successfully defended his title once more.

I ducked inside the ropes and was about to help Ray up, but someone beat me to it—the Crusher.

The Crusher was smiling as he helped Ray to his feet.

"That was a nice match, Ray," he said earnestly, sincerely. "I had to beat you though. I had to show the folks I'm still the big brother."

Ray was grinning now. This was the old Don as he remembered him.

"I thought you were full of a lot of sentimental slush," the Crusher went on. "But when I saw the folks down there, and Pa cheerin' for me after what I done—because I was takin' a shellackin'—well, I guess a family's still a pretty good thing."

And his arm went around Ray's shoulders. I think Ray liked it. But I was too busy glowering at Bilge Agnew who was trying to lay a pretentious cigar smoke screen around the ring.

"Well, I think I'll have Baldy try to make a fighter out of me," Ray grinned in my direction. "He always told me I wasn't a wrestler, anyway."

"Yeah?" Crusher queried. "Maybe he could finish makin' a wrestler out of me, then. That is, if he'll take me back. Bilge Agnew hasn't any ties on me. I owe Baldy something too. Eh, Baldy?"

Eh, is right. As Ray and Don started toward where the folks were standing, waiting; and as Bilge Agnew proceeded to swallow his cigar, the kaleidoscope of coming events flashed before me.

How the hell can any one man train and manage a world's heavyweight wrestling champ, and a very potential heavyweight boxing champ at the same time? And brothers at that.

It can't be done. But I'll do it. And love it too.



Beef Tabor was a good furniture mover, but on the gridiron he was just a

Pigskin Chopping Block

By Jay Thorburn



IT DIDN'T seem right for any man to have the shoulder span Beef Tabor had. Beef got those wide shoulders moving pianos. It could be said without exaggeration that Beef Tabor was practical-

ly a one-man moving outfit.

In the spring and in the fall, while some men's thoughts dwelled on feminine subjects, Beef's turned to moving people's furniture from one house to another. Beef was never more happy than when he had a bureau drawer on his shoulder or was pushing an innocent piano around. Beef Tabor was happy because this was how he earned the dough to pay his tuition through Sunbury College. It was a much more manly method than selling magazines from door to door.

Now Beef was in his element. He had a heavy oak table on his back and a couple of chairs in his huge hamlike hand. Staggering a trifle under the load, he clumped into the foyer of the brick house. There, a tall man with an expressionless, tanned face and a thin coating of hair on his head, regarded Beef closely.

"Haven't I seen you some place?" he asked, squinting his eyes a little. "You might have moved me once before. I dunno. I've been on the go quite a bit during the last several years."

Beef took the load off his shoulders. A big grin spread across his square, honest-looking face.

"I'm on your football team, coach," he said informatively. "I'm a tackle and I

was around last season. And a couple of more seasons before you came to Sunbury. I sat right near you for nine games last season. Remember?"

The Sunbury coach screwed his face up in a knot.

"Yes, yes," he said, nodding. "Thoughtless of me to forget you. Never could remember the faces of my scrubs. I'll be seeing you at football practice tomorrow."

The coach picked his way through the scattered pieces of furniture and went out the door. Beef stood there, puzzled and let-down. This was his last year at Sunbury and he had great hopes of earning his letter. And Coach Smokey Stover had hardly recognized him. But Beef had one consolation. There were numerous stories and legends of Smokey Stover's absent-mindedness.

You couldn't blame the coach in a way for wanting to forget what had happened in his first season at the helm of the school's gridiron destinies. Sunbury had been walloped in six of its nine games. Already there were rumors that the Board was going to forget to renew Stover's contract when it expired at the end of the present season.

Beef Tabor was out on the practice field bright and early the next afternoon. Beef's spirits skyrocketed when Coach Stover stuck him in the second-string lineup against the maroon-clad varsity. Beef crouched on the defensive opposite Trigger Fleming, the varsity left end.

Fleming didn't tip the beam at an ounce more than one-seventy with lead in his boots. Beef wondered how he had played on the varsity three seasons without somebody breaking him in half.

"I see you're around again, Beef," Trigger said, looking up. "I guess it wouldn't be football without you to kick around, huh, pal? It gives me great relaxation pushing your snoot into the dirt."

Beef's face registered scorn. "This is another season, runt," he said huskily. "I am practically a new man and can carry more pounds on my back than ever. Get me sore, and I'm liable to lift the skeleton out of your skin."

"We'll see," Trigger said skeptically. "It will just take a moment."

The backs shifted to the right. The pigskin spun to the tail-back. The ball carrier swung wide and a host of maroon-clads formed in front of him. It was a straight power smash directed at Beef's slot. Gleefully, Beef charged forward, blasting and using sheer force to dynamite his way into the varsity backfield.

BEEF got just so far. Then a pair of shoulders suddenly clamped into his stomach, began driving him back with short, digging steps. It boiled Beef's blood, being shoved around by a squirt the size of Trigger Fleming. Fighting furiously, Beef tried to wrench himself loose but Trigger clung to him like a leech. Suddenly Beef found himself sprawled on the turf, looking up at the passing parade.

Beef slowly got to his feet, trudged downfield twenty yards to where the play had finally been stopped. He dug his spikes into the turf, determined not to suffer another such humiliating experience.

"Same ole slow freight," Trigger flaunted. "A ton of muscle, not an ounce of brain-seed."

There was no describing Beef's wrath. Out of desperation, new-born savage fury went into his lunges. But Trigger Fleming was like a flea riding an elephant. Beef could scratch him but it was utterly impossible to shake him off. The varsity carved themselves two touchdowns off Beef's tackle position. Beef's big chance was going to pot. He made a miserable showing. After thirty minutes

of scrimmage, Coach Stover's whistle shrilled.

"You, there," the coach snapped, staring at Beef. "Is this your first time out?"

Beef dolefully shook his head, not knowing what to make of the query. There was muffled laughter from his teammates. Coach Stover was having one of his absent-minded moments.

"You know me," Beef managed. "I'm the piano mover."

"Oh, yes," Stover said, flipping the ball at him. "See if you can move this. Start runnin' with it."

"I'm a tackle, not a back," Beef protested.

"I'm sorry but I can't agree with you," Stover retorted.

There was nothing for Beef to do but run with the ball. The next thing Beef felt was his feet flying out from under him and he was bouncing on the ground a couple of times. His face was a mixture of relief and pain when he regained his feet.

"Stay out there, Beef," Stover barked. "There's more of the same comin'."

One by one they loaded into Beef. And each tackle made crashed Beef to the sod as though he was a huge hunk of marble to be hammered to bits. And Beef absorbed the shocks with heart-tearing gameness.

He looked up to see Trigger Fleming making a lunge for him. Beef's body was sore and bruised and the thought of being slashed down once again made him do something strange. At the last instant he fainted toward his right, then darted in the opposite direction. The suddenness of the maneuver caused Trigger to miss the tackle completely. More out of necessity than anything, Beef began to feint, maneuver and work from different angles. He wasn't taking those blasting tackles on the button any more.

On the sidelines, Coach Stover turned to an assistant coach.

"Beef is findin' out the difference between bein' a piano mover and a football player," he said slowly. "He doesn't know it but he's learning the science of the game—the hard way."

The next day Beef had more lumps and



bruises than a turkey egg has freckles. Coach Stover scrimmaged the first and second teams again. He threw Beef right into a tackle position.

ON the first play, the massed herd of maroon jerseys slanted wide of tackle. Beef glimpsed Trigger Fleming darting toward him, set to throw that shoulder block into his stomach. The effects of the previous day's scrimmage

were still vivid in Beef's mind. Instead of trying to power-house past Trigger, he floated out a few yards. Then he broke at a sharp angle and nailed the ball-toter for a two-yard loss. He was surprised at the ease with which he had shucked off Trigger.

It was gradually dawning on him that tackles must have more than mere brute strength. Two blockers converged on him on the following play. Beef submarined, broke through them on his hands and knees. He clamped a rolling block on the varsity back leading the interference, toppled him and piled up the play.

The varsity put three blockers on Beef, unloosed the full brunt of their attack at his position. Beef didn't stop every foray but he played a good, solid brand of tackle. He was mixing stamina, brawn and brains.

Fifteen minutes later, Beef limped into the locker room. Coach Stover strode over to him.

"You've finally gotten around to takin' the piano off your shoulders," he said, eyes a-twinkle. "I had to make a real chopping block out of you to stop you from being one." Coach Stover paused. He added: "I'm not so absent-minded as some people seem to think. In fact, I purposely ignored you. I figured I could make you angry enough to play the kind of ball you were capable of. It didn't quite work out that way . . ."

A chunky figure with a shock of gray hair came into the locker room, interrupting Coach Stover. The coach winked at Beef, walked over to the visitor.

"Tubby Heffner," he exclaimed. "Class of '15. Ardmore's greatest star."

Beef looked at Trigger Fleming. "Listen to that," he blurted. "That guy ain't absent-minded."

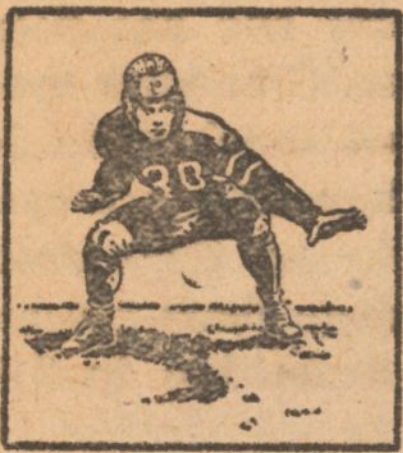
"Mebbe not," Trigger said, a grin on his lips. "But the guy who just came in is Stubby Welch. He played for State and his class wasn't 1915!"

Coach Stover interrupted his talk with the visitor to say a few words to Beef Tabor. "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, Beef," he said. "Tomorrow you report with the varsity."

Thrill-and-Spill Men

By Theodore Stratton

Who's the top player on the modern, streamlined pigskin eleven? The smashing center? The hipper-dipper back? The giant guard? They've had their day. In the "football of tomorrow," says this former collegiate and pro grid star, keep your eyes peeled for football's thrill-and-spill men.



THE college football coach who has three or four outstanding players on his squad this season is well-blessed with material, but he's a mighty lucky individual if he has one great player. Around that single individual he can build a fine eleven such as Bob Zuppke did at Illinois with Red Grange, as Fritz Crisler did at Michigan with Tom Harmon, and as Lou Little, Clark Shaughnessy or any other coach will do with one immortal.

Let's suppose that college coaches had the choice of a single great player for a team nucleus—whom would they pick? Your conservative, the man who believes that the cornerstone of good football rests on a solid defense, might select Lou De Filippo, Fordham's 1940 center, who stopped rough-riding Jim Kimbrough cold in the Cotton Bowl.

The experimenter from the fancy-Dan school who likes to see the boys cut and caper would prefer a change-of-stride, swivel-hipped stepper along the lines of George Gipp or catlike Scooter Warburton. The I-like-to-chuck-'em mentor would corner a Davey O'Brien, the wizard who cracked all forward-passing records in his farewell professional exhibition against the Redskins.

The "power" coach would prefer a line-smacking giant of Kimbrough stature, or an annihilating blocker such as Carl Snavely had in Matuszczak at Cornell.

But there's another type of coach, the fellow who's always a half jump ahead of his teaching brethren, whose eyes would glisten as he yelped in ecstasy: "Give me Don Hutson! A great end is a thrill-spill man!"



An end, do I hear you mutter in surprise? That's right. The end men on a modern eleven are like their counterparts in a minstrel show—they click or the performance is a flop. Good ends win next Saturday's ball games. They earn higher salaries for their already high-salaried coaches, assistants and

tub-thumpers, and supply a high-grade form of job security. Let's go back a bit and find the reason.

Football patterns are constantly changing. The 90's were the diapered, guard age days of football. An eleven had only to make five yards in three tries to retain possession of the pigskin and the slogan was: "Straight ahead or almost straight."

Broad-shouldered giants of extreme nimbleness played at guard. They ran interference or carried the ball on offense, halted the power plunges or tore apart the "flying wedges," a football maneuver so terrifying in striking power

that it had to be banished. Fans spoke in hushed accents of Orvill Hickok, Trux Hare, Gordon Brown, Wharton, Rinehart of Lafayette, Big Bill Edwards and the incredible Pudge Heffelfinger, all guards and all more famous than any back of the period.

IN THE 1900's coaches attacked along wider lines, bringing their tackles into the backfield in what was known as the tackles-back, a tandem bucking formation. Mighty men played in the tackle slots and fans heard a lot about strapping, muscular Cutts of Harvard, Yale's Jim Hogan, Jim Cooney of Princeton, Dex Draper, Dan Knowlton and Ham Fish, now a United States Congressman from New York. The rules of 1906 restricted the tackles to the line and set the pattern for the golden age of the running halfback.

Defensive ends played "stationary"; that is, they waited on the flanks to see what happened. The Jim Thorpes and Eddie Mahans, the Brickleys and Oliphants, and the will-o'-wisp Ellery Huntington and Chic Harley circled end faster than a Panzer spearhead. After the World War I the coaches stopped the haywire backs by pulling the center out of the line and presto! the centers became the big household news in football.

"When we have a great fullback at Michigan," Hurry-up Yost explained, "we make a center out of him. Great centers make great football teams."

Where was the lowly end? Tiny air bubbles—the forward pass, the six-man line, the crashing end—showed he was slowly fighting to the surface of recognition. Knute Rockne, a great end at Notre Dame, where he laid the groundwork for the modern passing game, was perhaps the first real exploiter of sensational end play.

Rockne used ends in three new ways in the middle 20's: As the principal receivers of the forward pass, as forty percent of his pass defense and to handle the defensive tackle alone. Rockne pooh-poohed the tackle's importance, placed one blocker on him, the end, and succeeded.

"Why is it," a fan asked a football scout last season, "that you don't see so many great tackles these days?"

"Simple," came the swift retort. "To-day a speedy tackle plays end."

Take Ed Weir, whom Knute Rockne called "the greatest tackle I've ever seen." Weir weighed 210 pounds, stood six feet two inches among his native Nebraska corn, could and did run the 120-yard high hurdles under sixteen seconds. For a big man, that's under par for the course! If this All-Time All-American played today, under the changing styles of football, he'd be one of the greatest of ends.

Your modern defensive end has been taught to kill the offense. Glue your eyes on ends this autumn and watch them go to work. In the first place they are eye-filling specimens, catlike on their feet, and a glance at a poundage chart reveals they weigh anywhere from 190 to 215 pounds.

They bolt across the scrimmage line like runaway tanks and smash into interference. They rush the passers so furiously the ball gets hot; they chill the punt catchers with their ferocity; slam-bang into the punter and hurry his kicks. When they make a tackle the ball carrier loses anything from his silk pants up to fifteen yards of terrain.

You might ask: "Where are the defensive guards and tackles?"

Ox DaGrossa supplied the answer. DaGrossa is the football technician about whom Dick Harlow once remarked: "He coaches line play in the fourth dimension."

Recently the Ox told me: "Ted, when we played football all we worried about was how to get the tackles out of there. But today?" Ox laughed. "I dare the tackles and guards to cross the scrimmage line!"

The mouse-trap play, the modern version of said-the-spider-to-the-fly, is the answer. Fast charging interior linesmen rush to their own annihilation—they'll be sideswiped off their feet and the offense will rush to victory through their unguarded territory. It's the end who

dares to cross fast and he commits assault and battery on every play.

What about the end's offensive role? Let's look first at the tasks of the other ten men. The center's primary job is to pass the ball, not a too difficult task. With the exception of the T-formation and certain plays off the Notre Dame system, he had help in many of his blocking assignments.

PRIMARILY the guards run interference, a task demanding initial speed and maneuverability. Tackles are used less frequently as interferers, their basic job being to block alone at short range.

Backs? Remember these two facts about backfield play. First, a ball carrier has ten men doing heavy duty for him; second, modern tactics throws a superior weight of men ahead of him at any weak spot in the defense and this reduces his value. Any back worth his salt can take advantage of sound blocking and can gallop in headlines throughout his collegiate career.

Now back to the thrill man, the end. He's got to be versatile, big, and clever enough to block a tackle alone. On mouse traps he slides away from the tackle to cut down the backers-up, or he veers wide to pick off a defensive halfback. That calls for speed and skill.

As a sample of what is to come, let's look at Harvard Dick Harlow's "football of tomorrow"—and that's not a wise crack at the inability of the Crimson to win with the regularity of Michigan or Notre Dame.

Harlow's ends use the technique of "blind-spot" blocking. They slip across the scrimmage line, cut sharply and hit defense men from an angle which keeps them unseen until the moment of impact. So devastating is this type of block that backers-up instinctively step into the scrimmage line at the ball snap—for self-protection!

Perhaps your modern end is a ball carrier. Carl Snavely, admittedly one of the smartest coaches in the big business of football, used Brud Holland, an end, as a principal carrier. Look back over the

records and you'll notice that Holland specialized in the fifty-yard jaunt to a touchdown.

Other coaches will follow the Snavely pattern because modern ends are fast and elusive. When an end carries the ball, the offense has a five-man backfield which increases the pressure on the hard-pressed defense.

Finally, the greatest touchdown threat today is the spectacular forward pass which breaks up more ball games than any other play. Fix your eye on that stalwart right end in the white jersey. The team lines up in right formation. At the ball snap, begin to count: "One—two—three—four—five."

The right halfback has circled behind the tail or bucking backs and takes the ball on a wide reverse. Teammates shield him across the field—I'm explaining this because you're watching the right end!

At the "one" you see the end crack the tackle, bumping him until "two," escaping on "three." Then he races straight at the halfback. Watch! His shoulders are bent forward, he swings body and eyes sharply to the left in a fake. The halfback steps in. The end turns on speed and bolts past the surprised back like the hammers of hell.

Once in the clear, he looks back over his shoulder and begins to coast. You glimpse a pigskin spiraling across the tilted pattern of green and white, and you instinctively spring to your feet. The end shifts gears into high, runs the ball out and, never breaking stride even though he jumps, plucks the ball out of the air with his fingertips. It's a touchdown. Try and catch up with him!

You sit down on your chunk of concrete and begin to think back. What a dandy passer that halfback was: laid the ball on a peg for the receiver to pick off. Wait a minute! I'm telling you that a great pass receiver can make your average passer look like a sharp-shooting Sammy Baugh!

Let that end loaf under the pass. It drops to earth far ahead and you think: "That passer—he couldn't hit a barn if he were inside!"

Suppose the end turns on too much

speed instead of coasting. The ball drops behind, probably for an interception. Mighty few passes are intercepted when a good end is the potential receiver. It makes no difference to him where they are thrown; he's fast and tall enough to out-fight anybody for the ball, and if he makes it the yardage gained is more than adequate for the risk involved.

Suppose the end gets clogged when the tackle, or his fake doesn't outwit the defender? The passer looks for a secondary target or—he ducks downfield hoping to reach the scrimmage line.

IF YOU ever get a chance, buy your way into a professional game some Sunday afternoon where the Green Bay Packers play. You'll see a tall, lithe, broad-shouldered young man at right end. Watch him; the name is Don Hutson. The pros say he's the deadliest touchdown menace on the gridiron.

The Packers shift and Hutson drifts out into the flat. Every man on the defense starts to shiver. One, two and even three men have been detailed to cover him. He takes his position either on the scrimmage line or behind it, depending on the formation. The ball is snapped. With the whole field to run in, Hutson takes a fast stride—and stops! Arnie Herber rifles the ball out to him. Hutson sidesteps the first lunging tackle. He runs like a breakaway back, ten, fifteen, twenty yards.

Again the lineup, and the wide-placed nonchalant Hutson. The defenders creep in and Hutson trots a couple of steps then gets up momentum like a clutchless streamliner. And how he can run! Herber poises, then fires a long looping pass downfield. Perhaps Hutson catches it for a touchdown. If not, he's so close to it that the rival coach doesn't bother until the ball hits the turf.

Hutson may take a spot pass over center; he may tack a lateral on the end of it; or he may be a decoy, a man with such tremendous touchdown threat that another Packer sneaks into the clear unobserved and catches the pass.

When you've seen Don Hutson play, and remember he has rivals, you begin to understand what that coach, a half jump ahead of his brethren, meant when he yelled: "Give me Hutson! That's my nucleus." He might have added: "He's my team."

Guards, tackles, centers, backs—they've all had their innings at the top of the glory heap. But today the end is top man. As you read the resumé of games won and broken up this autumn, the names of ends will rank highest. Ends will be all over the field, in the thickest part of every scrimmage, at the focal point of attack, behind the goal line touching the ball down for six points or the old ball game.

They've got to be. Ends are football's thrill-spill men.



Stooge to a Sky-Climber

Chick Levering didn't like to play stooge to a sky-rider, for Chick had his own record-breaking ambitions. But when he soared to his greatest high, he came face to face not with glory—but with a heart-breaking tailspin.

By

Richard Brister

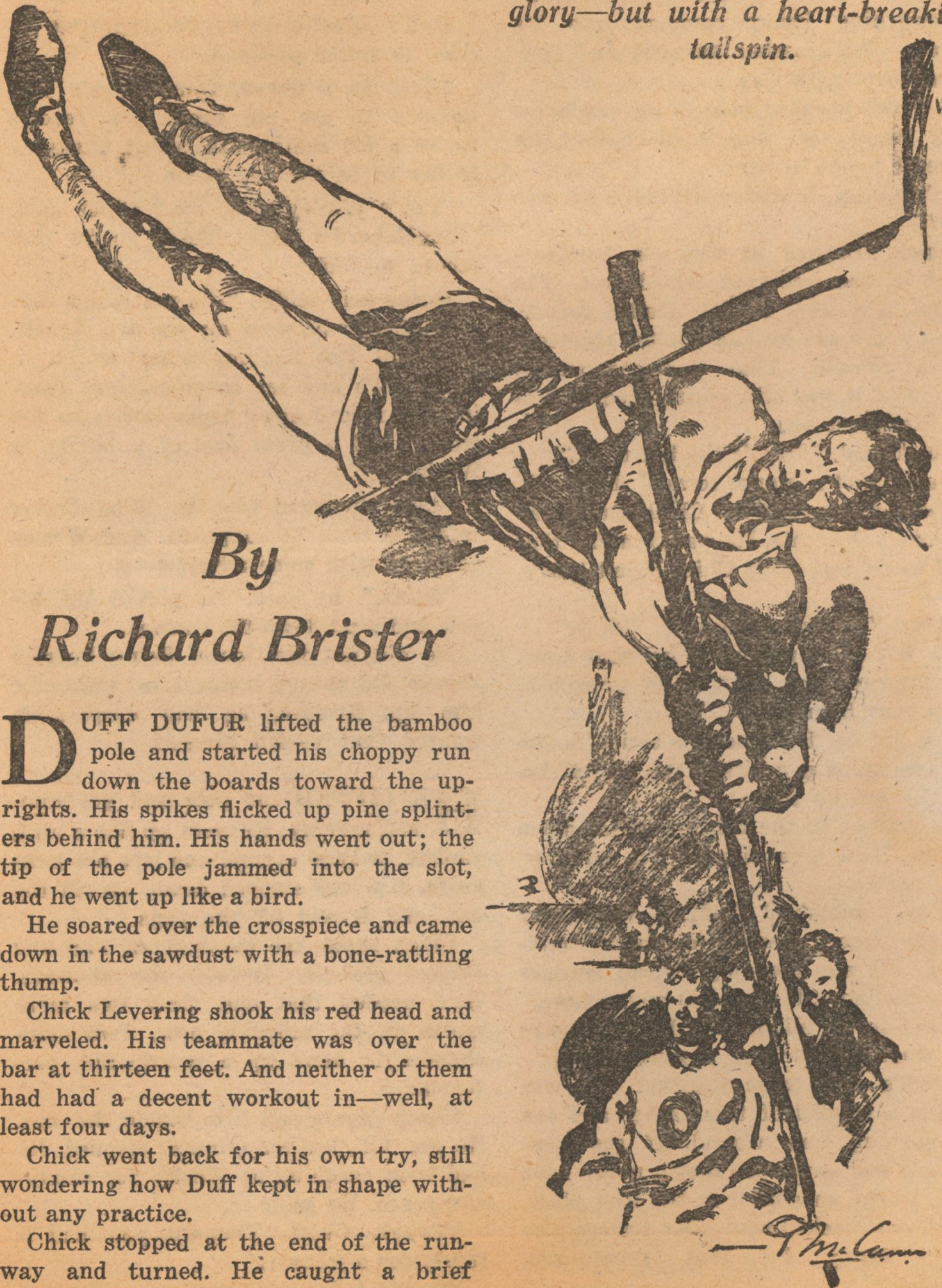
DUFF DUFUR lifted the bamboo pole and started his choppy run down the boards toward the up-rights. His spikes flicked up pine splinters behind him. His hands went out; the tip of the pole jammed into the slot, and he went up like a bird.

He soared over the crosspiece and came down in the sawdust with a bone-rattling thump.

Chick Levering shook his red head and marveled. His teammate was over the bar at thirteen feet. And neither of them had had a decent workout in—well, at least four days.

Chick went back for his own try, still wondering how Duff kept in shape without any practice.

Chick stopped at the end of the runway and turned. He caught a brief



glimpse of Coach Myers watching, and then he was running. The pole swung beside him, bobbing up and down with each step.

He came into the take-off fast. He felt a jolt as the pole took his weight. His feet went swinging. He jerked down, watched his shoes climb to the ceiling. He closed his eyes momentarily, twisting.

Something heavy rammed into his middle. The crossbar snapped and clattered down with him.

A ruddy-cheeked man in an expensive dark tweed suit and a black bow tie waved a pencil at him.

"Two more, Levering. Hurry it up, will you?"

Chick frowned at the silk handkerchief in the imported tweed suit. The official was Mr. Dufur, Duff's father. Many years ago he had vaulted thirteen-five at Wesley. That was phenomenal then. And it was still pretty good. It was the Wesley record.

Chick said, "What's the big rush?"

Dufur shot a glance toward the bench, where Duff was sitting. Chick could read the man's thoughts. He was thinking that Duff would cool off if Chick didn't hurry, and—

"Okay," Chick shrugged. "Okay."

He felt a bit peeved as he went down the runway. You can't vault your best when your hurried.

Nor did he. He upset his stride in the last two steps and kicked the bar off before he got up there.

He walked to the bench and sat down grimly. He'd give himself five minutes' rest, before—

"Hey," grumbled Duff, "I wanta try for the record some time before midnight." He was kneading his calf muscles and scowling. "If you had any chance," he went on, "it might be different. You're just wasting time and cooling me off."

Chick's eyes came together. He was getting a skinful of this father and son act pushing him around. If the committee'd had any sense they'd never have made Dufur an official in the first place.

The red-cheeked man came toward him now. "Ready for that third try, Levering?"

"No," Chick said flatly.

The wealthy alumnus started. "What?"

"This is a track meet," Chick reminded him. "The rules say I'm entitled to a rest between jumps. I'm going to take it."

He relaxed on the bench. Dufur stood staring at him, lips working silently.

Duff's eyes were smoldering, but he tried to sound pleasant.

"Give us a break, Chick. Pop's just anxious to see me break his record. We're a bit sentimental about having a Dufur to be the one to do it."

"I'm a Wesley man, too," Chick said. "Remember? I might like to go for that record myself."

Dufur said stiffly, "It's not just a personal matter between my son and myself. I'll admit I've had my heart set on it, but there's another consideration. Passing the record down from father to son will attract a great deal of publicity to Wesley."

Chick shrugged wearily. What Dufur said was true, he supposed. And Wesley could do with some advertising.

"Relax," he said. He picked up his pole and went down the runway.

He did not feel loose. Being hurried always did things inside him, tightened him up. Besides, he had desperately wanted that record himself.

HE LIFTED the pole and got himself moving. He went up like a bird, yanked, twisted around and into his jackknife. His legs slapped down, struck the bar, and it slid off the pegs.

Chick shook the sawdust off him and walked gloomily toward the showers. He'd needed that one. Only two more meets on the schedule now. Two more chances to hand up a worthwhile performance.

Coach Myers met him beside the exit. He was tall, leather-skinned, stooped. He had been coaching at Wesley for thirty-one years. He said:

"Tough, Chick. Thought you had it there, for a minute."

"So did I. I needed that one. I'll never

land me a coaching job on the strength of a twelve-ten performance."

"I don't know," Myers mused. "Twelve-ten's not bad. If we had an indoor track I'd expect something more." His pale eyes were brooding. "How long since you had a decent workout?"

Chick tried to think. "Snow came on Tuesday," he said. "Monday, I guess. Hey!" He grabbed Myers' arm, swung him about. "Here comes Duff for the record!"

Duff was giving it hell. He swung up there. He had the height, but his hip caught the bar and it came down with him. He slammed a handful of sawdust onto the floor as he walked out of the pit. He was limping!

Chick said, "He's hurt himself."

He and Myers ran over. Duff sat on the bench and rubbed his ankle. Chick said, "How bad is it, Duff?"

"It'll do. I won't make any more tries for the record."

Duff, Sr., was glaring at Chick. "If you'd hurried a little," he growled, "it might not have happened."

"Sure." Chick made a face. "Sure, it's my fault."

He wheeled and walked toward the exit. A glance at the board showed Wesley in seventh place. Not bad, Chick thought, considering their lack of training facilities. But Coach Myers' face wore a gloomy expression.

Chick told him, "Shucks, we might've been eighth, don't forget."

The old man's eyes were bleak. "We might've been first, if you boys had a real place to practice." He made a disgusted sound in his throat. "Snow all week! And an outdoor track! Wonder we made *any* points!"

"What gets me," Chick said, "is the way Duff comes through. He didn't practice at all except Monday. But he made thirteen. He almost had that record."

"Yeah," Myers said. There was something shrewd in the tired old eyes. "Yeah, I been wondering about that myself."

All day Monday it rained. Chick worked out on the rope and the rings in the Wesley gym. He practiced pull-ups

and pendulum swings but there wasn't room for running indoors. So he had to let his legs go stale and hope for the best.

Later, walking into the locker room, he bumped into Duff. Duff had his spikes and sweat clothes under his arm and was just leaving.

Chick said curiously, "Where are you goin' with that stuff today? You can't work outside in this rain."

The tall man shrugged. "I know it," he said. "I'm taking it home. Be safer there."

Duff lived with his mother and father on a huge estate just outside town. Chick didn't get it. "But what for? Who'd wanta steal that stuff?"

Duff frowned. "I don't see how that concerns you, Levering." He kept on walking.

Chick stared after him, shaking his head. Duff was a queer one. He never bothered working out in the gym when the weather was bad. He was far more nonchalant about his vaulting than was his father. Why, then, had he been so concerned about taking care of his sweat clothes? It didn't make sense.

The rotten weather continued right through the week. Chick could manage only one outdoor workout—one day's work with the pole—and his chances of landing a job as a coach depended on hanging up an impressive performance! The way he'd been going he was just another guy named Joe, but if he had a record under his belt. . . .

Duff's father apparently had more money than he knew what to do with. He offered to pay the team's way to State on the train, but Myers insisted they'd be all right on the bus. Duff, however, was permitted to ride the Pullman along with his father.

When the bus pulled to a stop in front of the State gymnasium the student manager picked Chick's pole off the floor to hand it out the window to him. Suddenly he stopped, eyes on the pole, his face white as a sheet.

Chick stared at him. "What's the matter?"

"Your pole!" the man gulped. "It's—"

Chick grabbed it from him. His eyes froze on the thin dark lines that ran from one end to the other. It was cracked, useless.

Coach Myers came running up behind him. His sharp gray eyes took in the situation at once. "How'd it happen?"

"The radiator on the bus floor was too hot," Chick guessed. "When the pole came out of the cold and hit that heat it just split, that's all." He passed a sweaty hand across his forehead. "What'll I do, coach? It's too late to send back to Wesley."

"Rotten luck," Myers mused. Then he brightened. "Might be able to borrow one from State, though."

"Yeah," Chick breathed. "It's a chance."

JENKINS, State's best vaulter, was a nice guy. He gave Chick the choice of all the spare poles State had, but there wasn't one really good one in the lot. Chick finally found one that looked as if it *might* hold him. He approached the uprights to take a few practice vaults.

Duff came in about then. Chick glanced wistfully at the pole the star was dragging behind him. It was unimpaired, having made the trip in the baggage car of the train.

"Look," Chick said slowly. "This pole I borrowed—it's pretty small. I'm not sure it'll hold me. Could I borrow yours, in case this one—"

Duff said testily. "You're too hard on a pole. You don't vault smooth. You'll break it sure."

Chick said, "All right. Skip it."

The hell with it, then. Let him have the pole. It was clear Duff didn't care which team won the meet.

Chick took three experimental shots at eleven-six. He went over but the pole bent badly. He had little confidence in it.

"All right!" Dufur was very important, very pompous in his role as official. "Jenkins vaulting," he said. "Levering on deck."

So they started. Two State men flubbed out at twelve feet. Only Jenkins, Duff, and Chick were left to aim at twelve-six.

Jenkins and Duff went over nicely. Chick kicked it, going up. He watched the official put a checkmark alongside his name.

He sat down, panting. When his breath returned, he took his second. He hit the take-off with plenty of speed and really swung up there. The bamboo twisted and writhed beneath him. But it held. It even gave a snap at the end, and helped throw him over. He made it by plenty.

"All right." Dufur's face was less ruddy than usual. "Where to? Thirteen even?"

"Suits me," said Duff.

Chick held out for twelve-nine. He was worried about that damn pole.

But Jenkins wanted thirteen feet too, so thirteen it was.

Jenkins was right. He looked like a high diver going over the bar. There was a burst of applause from the gallery for him.

Chick's legs were tiring, but his arms were in shape. He yanked harder than he'd ever yanked on a pole before. His feet went straight at the ceiling, a perfect handstand.

He flipped himself out, away from the bar. Then he heard the crowd roaring. He was over it nicely.

Dufur was holding his eyes down the runway, where Duff was standing. Duff came down with a rush, went up straining, yanking. He flipped himself over by the barest of margins.

It was very exciting. Three of them over thirteen feet. Chick got reckless and said, "Thirteen-six. How about it?"

Duff said, "Sure."

Jenkins wasn't so sure. He still wasn't sure as he took his jump. He didn't come near it.

"Levering."

Chick put all he had in it. He went swinging, then yanked, but nothing happened.

At least, nothing he could have expected. The pole snapped beneath him. He went out, sailing. He was sitting on nothing, the broken pole still clasped in his hands. He lit on his shoulders on the edge of the pit. The backboard dug into him and he quivered with pain. He rolled

forward and came gingerly to his feet.

He knew at once he was through for tonight.

He walked toward the exits, then turned. A roar came up as Duff started running. The tall blond vaulter went up, up. He was over, over the bar at thirteen-six!

Dufur ran into the sawdust and joyfully thumped him. The older man's burning ambition, to see his son break his record, had been realized at last!

Chick grinned wryly. "Well," he thought, "there go my chances. To break it now, I'd have to go thirteen-nine. And I can't even swing thirteen without almost killing myself!"

Still, as he moved toward the showers, he thought it was nice for Duff. He'd never liked the guy or his old man either, but he could understand how they felt about it. Old Dufur had watched Wesley vaulters threaten his record for twenty-three years. Naturally he'd been proud of the fact that they never broke it. Natural, too, that he'd want his own son to be the one to come through and break it.

People said this was an unworthy ambition for a man of Dufur's years and position, that he was "hipped" on the subject, a crank about it. They couldn't understand how a thing like that could mean so much to him.

Maybe it was just a father's natural pride in his son, Chick thought. Ormonomania, an obsession that had grown down the years as the record remained intact.

Lord knows, the man had little else to occupy him. He'd inherited money at twenty-one and his income had grown until he hardly knew how to spend it. He didn't work, so officiating at the track meets was no hardship to him.

COACH MYERS came into the dressing room. Chick said, "I suppose Dufur's happy now. Think he'll come through with another endowment for Wesley, now that he's got his ambition?"

"What ambition?"

"Why, to see Duff crack his record."

"He didn't."

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"But I watched him," Chick said. "It was pretty."

"It was pretty close. But it sagged. When they measured, they found it was only thirteen-four."

"Gosh," Chick said. "That's tough. Well, it'll give Duff confidence. He'll come through in the Garden next week."

And, he thought, so would Chick Levering, or bust in half trying. He would show them something next week, in the Garden.

The ride on the train to New York the next week was strangely quiet. Duff sat with Coach Myers during most of the trip, but eventually left for the Pullman—he wasn't used to day coaches—and the coach plopped down next to Chick.

He didn't say anything for a long while, so Chick said, "What's on your mind?"

Myers said, "You going out for that record tonight?"

Chick grinned. "Sure. I can dream, can't I?"

Myers said uncomfortable, "It's really important to you, isn't it?"

"It means the difference between a job or not. My Physical Ed. course alone can't swing it. With a record, I'd have a good selling point."

"It would help some," Myers said. "To hang up a record. I don't deny it. But—" He stopped, his leathery cheeks suffusing with color.

Chick said curiously, "What's eating you, coach?"

Myers said, "I was hoping you wouldn't care so much, Chick. About winning."

"Not care!" Chick exploded.

Myers was dead serious. "I want to ask you something, Chick. Let Duff win. I know," he went on, as Chick's eyes hardened. "It's a lot to ask, but wait till I tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"I just had a talk with Duff's father. He's thinking of building an indoor track for us. If Duff breaks that record tonight, I know he'll come through. The old man, I mean. And you know how we need an indoor track, Chick."

"Sure we need it. But what've I got

to do with Duff? Either he's got a record in him tonight, or he hasn't. Whatever I do won't make any difference."

"Dufur's got an idea that having you in there up at the final heights is bad for Duff. You take too much time, he says. And that cools Duff off."

"Nuts!" Chick said wildly. He was getting sore fast. It would be like Duff's old man, to pull a weak gag like that. "Listen," he rushed on, "tonight's the last time I'll vault for Wesley. My course is over in February. My chance for a job depends to a good extent on how I make out tonight. Or doesn't that matter?"

Cracked skin at the corners of the old coach's lips drew taut. "I'm only telling you the circumstances," he said crisply. "I can't make your decisions for you."

He moved away down the aisle. Chick sat against the cushions and thought about it. They did need that track. That much was certain. Was that more important than looking out for his own career? Coach Myers, for one, seemed to think so.

CHICK had never seen anything quite like the Garden. Bright lights, the different college colors, music pouring out of the big horns, hawkers going through the crowd. Like a circus, Chick thought. Sure, a circus, and he was the star clown—if he let Duff win. After all, Duff wouldn't do that for him. But was he really doing it for Duff? It was for Myers, not Duff. For Myers and Wesley.

Dufur was eager to get them started. It was a big field and he would have to work fast to complete the event before the last race was run.

Chick took his try at the starting height eleven-six, went up and over like a human kite. A foot to spare. His hopes went soaring. Then he thought about what Coach Myers had asked him to do, and his spirits drooped.

He watched Duff come down for his jump. Duff went up smoothly, up and over the low bar without wasting strength on a pull-up. He looked good, Duff did.

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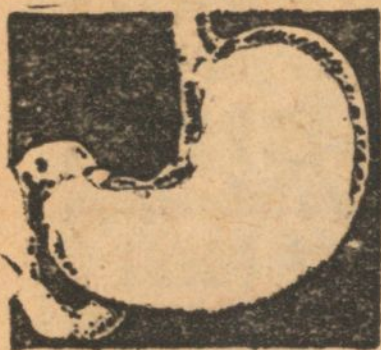
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"Simpkins. Cory on deck."

Two men flubbed at eleven-six. The bar went to twelve. Chick took more care. He went over nicely. Simpkins and Duff looked better than ever.

But Simpkins flopped at twelve-six. So it was Chick and Duff, aiming at thirteen even. This was the one. Chick had only made this once before in his life.

He came rushing down at it, pumping his knees. He turned on every last bit of power. It was enough, with his pull-up. He went over, but there wasn't an inch to spare.

Duff came racing down and lifted himself over as if hardly trying.

Chick looked at him coming out of the sawdust and said, "Nice jump," and then, "Where to now?"

Dufur, Sr., said firmly. "Thirteen-six. Duff's going for that record."

Chick knew he had a right to object, but thought, why bother? As if it made any diff. He had never gone thirteen-six in his life.

He came thundering down there, driving, pounding. He went up. He yanked with every ounce of strength in him. He saw the bar under him and squirmed to stay away from it. His jersey flicked it, and then he was falling. He lit on his right leg in the sawdust. He felt the ankle twist. Then his weight came down. A needle of pain darted through his foot.

The bar clattered down on top of him.

He got up, cursing. He stepped out of the pit, and his ankle folded. He hopped on one foot to the bench.

Coach Myers said anxiously, "What is it? What's the matter?"

Chick shook his head glumly. "Twisted. Nothing serious."

"Can you go on jumping?"

"I'm finished, I guess," Chick said wearily. He sat down, watching Duff prepare to try for the record.

The guy came down the line, graceful knees flowing out and back like pistons. The pole hit the slot; his body whipped in a graceful arc toward the

ceiling. The crowd held its breath. Duff hovered up there. Then came a gasp of relief, a roar of pleasure. He was over. He'd made it!

Chick hobbled over and reached out a hand to him.

"Congratulations, Duff."

Dufur, Sr., was thumping his boy on the back. His face was creased with pleasure. He knew it was really a record this time. He had taken the precaution of measuring the bar beforehand.

He turned to Coach Myers, beaming. "What I said goes," he announced. "About building that track. Your boys deserve it."

"Fine," Myers said. "Fine."

He could go on repeating the single word. Then he scratched his white head. "Can't see how Duff keeps in shape with so little practice. Why, if he'd had an indoor track to practice on—"

"He did," Dufur said simply. "I rigged up a runway and pit at home for him. In the barn."

Chick turned to Duff, jaw dropping. "So that's where you've been toting your duds on rainy days!"

Duff shrugged. "Sure. What of it?"

Chick drew Coach Myers aside and asked quietly. "Can you strap up my ankle?"

"You can't vault with an ankle like that," Myers frowned. "The shock of the take-off would—"

"I take off with my left foot," Chick said. "Not my right. I'd be able to run, if you strapped it."

"But—"

"Duff's got his record. That's all you wanted. If I tie the record it won't make any diff. Dufur's promised us that track now, hasn't he?"

Myers thought a moment. "Here," he said finally. "Let's see that foot."

He knew his way around with a tape, Coach Myers did. When the ankle was strapped, Chick found that he could run almost without limping. He was all set, he decided.

HE PICKED up the pole and walked down the runway. The crowd grew still, and he could feel their eyes, watch-

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ing, waiting. They probably thought he was crazy, trying to vault thirteen-six with a taped up ankle.

Well, they *could* be right. Thirteen and a half feet is getting up there.

He stared at the bar until it seemed to go down a little. When that moment came, he started jogging into his run. He got the long bamboo moving back and forth alongside him.

He came in fast, and there was the big white slot in front of him. He jabbed out. The tip of the pole slid home.

He was rising, swinging. His legs curled up. He bent at the middle. Then he was yanking. He pulled his arms and shoulders almost out of joint with a terrific wrench on the pole.

He felt himself flying straight upward. His elbows unflexed. He flipped the pole away with his thumb. There was the crossbar right beneath him.

He bent, slammed his legs down, hoisted his arms back over his head. He went rolling backward. He saw the bar dip down as his chest touched it. The bar wobbled, slid over the pegs.

He flopped in the sawdust and lay there watching it bounce up and down. Then he was scrambling out of the pit. The bar finally stopped its jiggling.

On the return trip to Wesley, Chick sat with Coach Myers.

"Well, it all worked out, coach. We get a new track. Duff gets his record. I'm co-champion. Now if I land me a job, it'll all be perfect."

"You've got one right now," Myers said, if you want it."

"Huh?" Chick gulped.

"I'm no Spring chicken," Myers said. "I'm going to retire, say the end of next year. I'll need an assistant, some one I can train to take over. The job's yours, Chick, if you're interested."

Chick grinned a mile wide. "Yeah," he said softly. "I'm interested, coach. I'm interested plenty!"



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