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3 GREAT NOVELETS 3

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By John Wilson

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CHAPTER I

Wild Bill Sweeney was a hell-for-leather puckster. But when he signed up to fill the forward wall for the Raider, she was paired with another ice demon. For this wing partner, instead of helping Bill turn on the red light for a goal, turned on the green light—to the hospital!

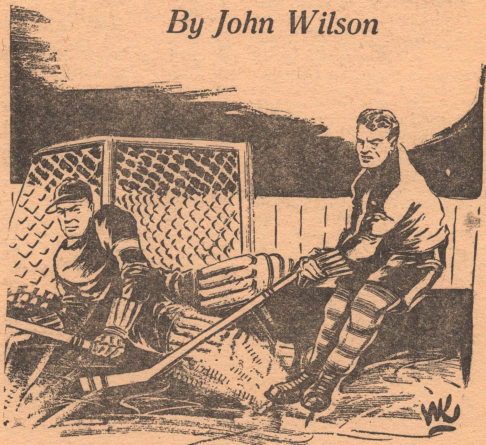
WILD BILL SWEENEY did not walk with his usual jaunty step this winter morning. The wind swept upon him and its coldness matched the chill in Sweeney's heart. But Sweeney did not seem to notice the wind or the cold. His footsteps lagged a little and his brow was knit in a worried frown. Whatever Sweeney's troubles, there was a definite "thumbs-up" expression about the set of his jaw.

You wouldn't take Sweeney for a guy

The Red-Light Express

Gripping Hockey Novelet

By John Wilson



who spent his business hours ragging a puck. Sweeney had a couple of nicks in his kisser, all right. But the boyish, handsome face somehow belied his trade. He walked along, turned a corner and paused at the entrance to the Coliseum. Sweeney looked up at the sign that was set in theater billing type. The sign read:

Hockey Thursday Night

Raiders vs. Bears

Sweeney felt a little comforted. He went inside and a quartette of heads suddenly jerked up, staring at him. Sweeney took a squint. The four guys didn't have

to have printer's ink on their collars for Sweeney to guess they were sports writers. Sweeney kept moving but he didn't get far. A heavy-framed, red-faced man grabbed Sweeney's arm, half spinning him around.

"Well, looka here," the red-faced man grunted. "It's the kid himself. Where you been hiding, Sweeney?"

Sweeney cocked an eye at the news-hound.

"Hiding from what?"

"From Angel Toland for one thing," the red-faced man said. "Don't make me laugh, Sweeney. Playing alongside of

Toland has got you scared stiff. Can't blame you much, either. The guy has put the jinx on better guys than you."

Sweeney threw back his head, laughed. It was a loose, clean laugh and it attracted the attention of a slim, honey-haired gal surrounded by three male escorts. They were all in formal attire. What they were doing at a hockey rink in that attire so early in the morning—or how they even happened to be around was something of a mystery. Sweeney was not interested. He snapped his fingers dismissively at the red-faced man.

"You're telling Sweeney," he chuckled. "I'm the guy who walks under ladders and likes black cats, and number thirteen is a nice number in my book. Bring on Angel Toland, jinx and all."

"Maybe you haven't heard the score," the red-faced man said pointedly. "You'll be the fourth victim this season to team up at forward with Angel. Have you heard what happened to the other three guys? Inquire around, brother. But you won't find any of 'em in the big leagues any more."

Sweeney knew about Angel Toland, the guy the fans called the Jinxman. He played a wing job for the Raiders and he played it with all the color and killer-diller stuff that a guy could get out of a stick. Angel always captured the fans' bravos, and, more important, the heavy dough for his act.

But there were things Sweeney knew about Angel Toland that the papers would never print because the proof would always be lacking. Sweeney had seen the proof, seen it in the wrecked bodies and battered spirits of men who had been Angel's former teammates. It was bloody boots, not a golden opportunity that Wild Bill Sweeney, fresh out of the minors, was stepping into. Sweeney said:

"Let's get together, guys. Me and Angel are on the same outfit. The only jinx involved is the one we've gotta slap on the other teams. Rock Gurnsey is looking for a winning combination. I got the idea that I'm a good half of it. I'm funny that way."

"Maybe you won't have to worry about a winning combination after all," another

reporter chimed in. "The only thing that can save Rock Gurnsey now is a bag of gold. The old boy is finished. He admitted last night that he can't get up the dough to see the club through the rest of the season. He's either got to get up the dough or sell. It's in the papers already."

Sweeney's lips tightened. He had a paper in his pocket. He'd seen the news. He owed the old boy who was owner-manager of the Raiders a debt from way back. It went deep, Sweeney's loyalty to Rock Gurnsey. But even deeper were Sweeney's obligations to another person. Sweeney did not talk about these. He looked up and the red-faced man was saying:

"If your baggage is outside in a cab, you'd better have the driver take it to the station. It might be easier for you to pick it up there just in case there's a new owner of the Raiders. In the meantime, you can spill what's kept you from reporting a week ago. Maybe I should say Angel Toland and let it go at that. You'll get your name in the paper, anyway."

SWEENEY caught the drift and he did not like it a bit. He was small time stuff to this reporter and was being shoved around. Sweeney's laugh had a pull in it.

"You've got a big lip, mister," he said evenly. "You better keep it buttoned or you're liable to catch something hard in your face."

"I'm Lew Harrigan of the *World Press*," the red-faced man boasted. "No tin-eared hockey player talks that way to me. You might discover that to your regret, Sweeney."

"I'll worry about that—if I think of it," Sweeney said.

The girl in the evening gown wore an ermine wrap. She looked directly at Sweeney as he passed her and the three male escorts. Her dark eyes twinkled and she smiled a little.

"That was very nice, Mister—er—Sweeney," she said. "Refreshing as the wind."

Sweeney turned. "I'm glad you liked it."

The girl had an impossibly upturned nose and it went up a little higher. But there was laughter in her eyes.

"We aren't reporters," the girl said pointedly. "Last night we celebrated and we've been every place and this is sort of a nightcap for us. We're going to watch the Raiders practice. They are going to practice, aren't they?"

The dark handsome man with the misplaced eyebrow on his lip, standing beside the girl, had a very bored expression on his face.

"Really, Connie," the mustached man put in, "you aren't serious about waiting to see the Raiders practice. This hockey business is a bug in your head that I'd suggest you get rid of."

Sweeney looked at the mustached guy, amused. "You really ought not to leave after waiting so long," Sweeney mimicked. "Do tell the man at the door that Sweeney said to let you in if you have any trouble. It might turn out to be a bloody good brawl. Perhaps we can find a waiter who'll serve you drinks, also."

"If it's bloody action, I'll love it," the girl said, smiling. "And I don't think we'll have to mention your name to get in—Mister Sweeney."

Sweeney found Rock Gurnsey in his office. The Raider owner-manager was a stocky, bushy-browed man. He stood up, put out his hand to Sweeney.

"How's things, Sweeney?" he asked. "And Alice?"

"Everything is great, Rock," Sweeney said, a grin cutting across his lips. "Alice is coming along fine. Why, one of these days—" Sweeney stopped short, the grin fading. Then: "You got my telegram, didn't you, Rock? I didn't figure I'd be this late reporting."

Rock nodded. "Yeah, I got it. You don't have to explain. Alice comes first in both our books."

Sweeney pulled the newspaper out of his pocket. He meant to show Rock the story of the Raiders' financial plight, ask him point-blank if the statements attributed to him were the McCoy. Sweeney started to thumb past the front page but stopped abruptly. On the lower middle

section of the page was a picture of a girl. Sweeney stared at it. The girl's name was Connie Leonard and she was the same girl he had encountered a few minutes ago. The picture showed her cutting a cake and the caption read:

*Connie's Twenty-One and Inherits
Five Million*

Sweeney scanned the first paragraph of the story that followed:

Connie Leonard, society debutante, celebrated her twenty-first birthday and it was quite an occasion. Today, Connie collected the down payment of five million of a twenty-million dollar estate bequeathed her by her late father, K. L. Leonard, the financier.

The beautiful young heiress, famous for her made-up escapades, has startled society biggies time and again. She's known to be especially fond of boxing matches and hockey games. Connie was recently quoted as saying, "Sure I'm crazy about fights and hockey games. And I like 'em good and bloody, too." Rumor has it that Miss Leonard's engagement to Barry James Pelham, her personal attorney, will soon be forthcoming.

Sweeney smiled. The story explained a lot of things. It explained why Connie Leonard had concluded her night's itinerary at the hockey rink. The dark, mustached man was undoubtedly her lawyer friend. Sweeney looked up to see Rock Gurnsey grinning over his shoulder.

"The gal's a nut on hockey," Rock said, smiling. "She hardly misses a game. One of Angel Toland's fans. But that doesn't help this situation. I'm afraid I've brought you on a wild goose chase. I'm ready to call it a day, Sweeney."

"It's really that bad, then."

ROCK GURNSEY nodded. "I've tried everywhere to raise the dough to see the club through the rest of the season. I've got till game time Thursday to get up the dough, sell or forfeit the franchise."

"Maybe you could stall the wolves off awhile yet," Sweeney said. "If the team could get a couple of winning games under its belt maybe the fans would start coming around."

A thin bespectacled man had come into

the room. He put his hat on the rack, laid his eyes on Sweeney. They were sharp, appraising eyes. He said:

"I'm afraid it isn't as simple as all that—Sweeney. Even if Rock could raise the necessary funds, it would only be throwing good money after bad. I've dug up a party interested in buying the Raiders. Rock can get out of debt and still have a few bucks in his pocket."

"I won't sell to Bo Madden," Rock said levelly. "I'd rather the franchise go back to the league than see him get it. Madden's been putting the pressure on me a long time, trying to force my hand. But he'll never get the Raiders from me. The guy's a heel and a low one at that."

"I don't think you're in any position to bring character into the picture," the bespectacled man said. "The league doesn't give a damn about you. So you sell to Bo Madden. Then you're out of it. Let the league worry about Madden."

Sweeney gave the bespectacled man a close, scrutinizing stare. He wondered if the guy was actually acting in Rock's best interests.

"Supposing Rock does return the franchise to the league," Sweeney said. "Nobody can ever lay a finger on him for going out broke and honest. But if he sells to Bo Madden"—Sweeney paused, fixed a stare on the bespectacled man—"things might happen that will boomerang in Rock's face. I think you'd better let Rock decide this thing for himself."

The bespectacled man's eyes cut into Sweeney. "You're a hockey player, Sweeney. Your connection with the Raiders is strictly in the muscle department. You ought to confine yourself to that."

He got up, walked into an adjoining room. Rock shook his head.

"Sam Jenkins is okay, Sweeney. He means well. Sam's been my right-hand man all along. You know me. I never was much for figures and the business end of things. I let Sam handle that stuff."

So that was the setup. Sam Jenkins handled the financial angles for Rock. The doubts thickened in Sweeney's mind. He knew Rock was too honest, too trusting for his own good. More than once his

faith in the other guy had cost Rock plenty.

"Hold tight awhile," Sweeney told Rock. "Maybe it isn't too late to get the wheels turning yet."

Rock smiled hopelessly. "The same old Sweeney. Still got the old moxie and spirit. But let me worry about this one. You go down to the locker room and get togged out. But lemme give you a tip about Angel Toland. I don't want you running into any trouble there."

"Never mind about Angel Toland," Sweeney said. "There's other things that come ahead of him."

Sweeney started toward the locker room and he thought about Rock Gurnsey. Sweeney's mind backtracked to the debt he owed Rock. He had been young and hungry and desperate when he had first come to Rock. Rock was the manager of a minor-league outfit then. The breaks were beating hard against Sweeney and Alice.

HE HAD spent every nickel he had paying off doctor and hospital bills because Alice had been in an automobile accident. The almost fatal accident had happened before Sweeney and Alice were married. When Alice had learned the doc's verdict—that she'd probably be crippled for life, she had released Sweeney from his promise to marry her.

But Sweeney had loved Alice and had gone ahead and married her. He had continued to pour his hockey earnings into helping Alice toward complete recovery. It had been a case of everything going out and very little coming in. Sweeney's worry and concern over Alice during the critical weeks when she had hovered on the brink of death had put a snag in his play. The pink slips started coming.

That was when Rock Gurnsey had given Sweeney his chance. But Rock went further than that. Somehow he found out about Alice, and Sweeney always found an extra ten spot or twenty in his pay envelope. Sweeney did not want sympathy. But Rock was a stubborn guy. He would not listen to Sweeney's protests. He put Sweeney through the mill, taught him the tricks of puck ragging and smoothed out

his play, Rock made a hockey player out of Sweeney.

But Fate is one umpire that has a way of reversing itself. Now Rock was on the spot. Sweeney wished that he had not been so late reporting. Maybe there was something he could have done to help Rock. But the doctors were trying a new and expensive treatment on Alice's crippled legs. He had waited to hear the first reports. Sure, Alice had insisted that he leave without her. But Sweeney would no more run out on Alice than she would on him.

The locker room was empty when Sweeney got down there. The Raiders were already out on the ice ragging the puck and practicing defense plays. At that moment, a stocky, moon-faced figure ambled from behind a section of lockers. He motioned to Sweeney and Sweeney followed him to a locker.

"You'll find everything you want in there," he said in a mild voice that seemed to grasp for each word. "If there is anything I can do, just let me know. The name's Buzzy Barnes."

Sweeney recognized the name. Buzzy Barnes had been an ace puckster for many years. Sweeney didn't remember the details too clearly. But he knew they had picked Buzzy out of a rink smash-up one night and he had never been the same again.

"Okay, Buzzy," Sweeney said cheerfully. "I'll hop into my things in a minute. I've been waiting a long time to get a look at Angel Toland."

"You'll get an eyeful," Buzzy said slowly. "You're a wing on this outfit. Toland's the whole team. You wanna remember that if you expect to last around here."

Sweeney couldn't help but detect a trace of bitterness in Buzzy's voice. But he didn't give it a second thought.

"One job is enough for me to handle, Buzzy."

CHAPTER II

THE Raiders were going through various defensive maneuvers when Sweeney went on the ice. A moment later Sweeney saw the wide-shouldered man skating toward him and knew it was An-

gel Toland. Angel Toland was a big, rugged man with a bullet head set on a tremendous pair of shoulders. The man's eyes were as chill as the ice beneath his blades. He glared at Sweeney.

"And when does the rest of the choir arrive?" he asked sneeringly.

"This is a solo, palsy. We're all here—all that's needed."

Rock lined up the teams, the regulars in purple shirts and the second-stringers donning white sweatshirts. They took plenty of time aligning themselves on the ice. Sweeney noticed a couple of them shrug their shoulders, bored with the whole thing. Sweeney could understand that. The Raiders didn't know whether Rock was in or out of the driver's seat. Rock tooted his whistle and the centermen engaged for the face-off and the action started.

The puck slid loose and Sweeney swept in, grabbed it. An opposing defenseman made a half-hearted attempt to back-check the rubber away. He quit and went down the ice. Sweeney's skates burned under him. He flipped to Nails Hearne. The forward line, Sweeney, Nails and Angel Toland, swung into formation.

Angel broke in on the goal and Nails let loose a pass. A defenseman stepped in, intercepted the puck. That brought Sweeney roaring into action. He caught the defenseman along the sideboards, hook-checking the rubber away. Sweeney whirled in a burst of zooming speed and ripped in on the goalie for one of those quickies. The goalie barely made the save. Sweeney let out a howl.

"Here we go! Look out!"

Sweeney was on the rebound, whipping it to Nails Hearne across the face of the goal. The surprised Nails flubbed the shot. The white shirts in their own methodical way took the puck out of the danger zone. They rode right down the left defense lane where Happy Holliday was doing business. Happy simply moved over and the puck-carrier went in and rang the bell.

"Don't move, palsy," Sweeney said, griped. "I'll throw you a dime to stand on. This is all in fun, huh?"

Happy Holliday was a stocky guy, built

low and hard and all out of proportion. He didn't seem the least perturbed over Sweeney's remarks. He grinned amiably.

"My, such loose talk. Take it easy, man. You ain't going no place we ain't. Right now it looks like we're all heading for the cleaners—except, of course, friend Angel. He follows the beam."

Play was resumed and it was a dull, listless affair. Sweeney was all over the ice, back-checking, stick-handling and giving an all around nifty exhibition. But it was nothing to get excited about. Nobody was putting the pressure on Sweeney. They were letting him ride wide and handsome. That infuriated Sweeney, the nonealance and the what-the-hell attitude of the Raiders. Nevertheless, time and again, Sweeney looked up to find Angel Toland's stare pinned on him.

AT THE fifteen-minute mark, Sweeney saw Angel Toland skate over to Rock Gurnsey. Angel said something and Rock shook his head. Angel persisted and Rock finally nodded.

"Okay, Sweeney," he said. "Swap shirts with King and work for a while with the second line."

There was a significant exchange of winks among the Raiders and Sweeney had an idea that the going would be harder and rougher. It was. The first time he laid his stick on the puck he was jolted in his tracks. Sweeney did not come upon the name "Wild Bill" without reason. A battle royal was right down his alley and Sweeney didn't mean to pass this one up.

Sweeney really pitched into things. He dug the rubber out of a scramble around the cage, spilled one man, and his skates began to spout sparks. He crashed over the blue line and Angel Toland was waiting for him. Sweeney feinted, swerved, but Angel had the answer—a cross-check. Going down, Happy Holliday whammed into him from an angle.

It was rink warfare from that point on. The Raiders turned the heat on Sweeney, pummeling and hammering him severely at every turn. His own teammates fed him passes, sent him driving into the "death" zone. Sweeney never flinched. He kept pounding in, trying to smash through a

defense that was set and waiting for him.

The session went on and it was no longer Sweeney against the whole Raider team. It was Sweeney against Angel Toland and the others were so many bystanders, willing to let them fight it out alone. That was all Sweeney asked. The pair of them went at it tooth and nail.

Along the boards, Sweeney pried the disc loose from Happy Holliday. Angel Toland came up out of nowhere, crowding and throwing his bulk against Sweeney. The two of them crashed heavily. Angel's stick lashed out viciously. But it didn't strike. A stocky figure hammered the stick out of Angel's hand with split-second timing.

"No you don't, Angel," Happy Holliday said levelly. "This is one time your jinx doesn't work. You asked for a scrap and you're getting more than you can swallow."

Angel's eyes were hot coals in his face. "Keep outa this, Hap. After Thursday you might find yourself out of it for good."

"Mebbe so," Happy said tightly, "but I can't say I'll be sorry."

Happy wheeled and skated away, Sweeney following.

"That one was on the house," Sweeney said. "A stick in time really saved nine that trip. Thanks, pard."

The defenseman shook his head. "The trouble with you big guys is you got no brains. You don't look dumb, bushy, but you must be to tangle with that guy on the ice. You can't win, sucker. Listen to me."

"I've got a hunch I can," Sweeney remarked quietly. "So I'll find out about that myself."

Sweeney didn't get any the worse of the going in the next couple of minutes. He battled his way into the clear down center ice on a solo attempt. He bulleted in on the cage to sink the counter. Angel Toland emerged from the mid-ice fracas, scouting the puck toward the boards. Sweeney skated in at an angle.

Angel suddenly passed the disc, rammed into Sweeney and bowled him off his feet. He really handed Sweeney the business in the mixup that followed. Sweeney picked

himself off the ice. He was groggy and the pain around his ribs was becoming violent. He felt as if Angel had busted a couple of them. Rock stepped into the breach, said:

"That's all. Let's call it quits."

THERE was a visible strain in Rock's voice that could easily be detected. Come Thursday night, the club would have a new owner or be orphans without a franchise.

Sweeney clumped slowly toward the ramp, and Connie Leonard's voice caused him to notice her presence for the first time. "Some show, pal," she said. "They should have charged admission to see it. Terrific is the word. You ought to feel mauled after that one."

"I hope it was bloody enough for you," Sweeney said evenly. "I'm sorry there won't be a repeat performance."

"Don't worry about that," Connie Leonard said. "I never miss a game. I think I'll even come to the practice if they're all going to be like this one. You'll let me know in advance, won't you, Mister Sweeney?"

There was a sort of naive sarcasm in Connie Leonard's voice. It burned Sweeney up the way she took things for granted. She apparently claimed to be a hockey sport. Well, he'd see how far her interest in hockey went. Sweeney said:

"Yeah, I can let you know more than that. You come and go around here as you please. I guess you can do a lot of things on five million bucks. You could even buy into the Raiders if you wanted to. Of course, you'd be doing a great guy a favor. But you might lose money and that would be out of the question."

"I didn't know the Raiders were for sale," Connie Leonard said. "It's too bad about Rock if he's having tough sledding. I always ask him for a season pass and he's never refused. He's a very nice man."

Sweeney sighed. Here was a gal worth more than a cool five million and getting into the hockey games free. Little wonder Rock was busted. Sweeney was about to tell the gal that when her society lawyer friend, Barry Pelham, said:

"You can't be serious about wanting Miss Leonard to back the Raiders. I've never heard of such a foolish proposition."

"That's right," Sweeney said. "It is a lousy proposition. It means putting your dough on the underdog and then some. I'm sorry that it occurred to me that Miss Leonard might be interested."

Sweeney shrugged, moved toward the ramp. He didn't notice Angel Toland duck in a few seconds ahead of him.

In the dressing room it was quiet and somber. The few scattered comments that were spoken came in low, almost whispered syllables.

Sweeney showered, dressed slowly, conscious of the darts of pain that kept shooting through the red, raw patch that marked his ribs. Sitting on the bench, he heard Angel Toland's loud, gruff voice echo through the room.

"Rock is okay as guys go," Angel said. "But you can't run a team on sentiment. We gotta look out for ourselves. What we ought to do is get together and ask Rock to sell for our protection and his own sake. I happen to know that there's a guy willing to buy the team. But Rock won't sell because he's sore at the guy."

"He figures that if he sold, there'd be nothing left for him after he got through paying off what he owes. So he intends to stick everybody and walk out with dough in his pockets. The franchise goes back to the league. That means either the team is finished or the league runs it. Won't that be nice stuff?"

The room was frozen into silence for a moment. Sweeney had to admit that Angel had put across his point. Angel had talked in dollars and cents and that was the thing closest to the hearts of the Raiders. But Angel hadn't told them what was up his sleeve.

The reaction came. The room was suddenly full of talk and jabber. Happy Holliday opened his trap and the din quieted.

"Since when have you started giving a damn about us, Toland?" Happy said bluntly. "You've been getting your dough right along. You worked the squeeze on Rock and wouldn't play unless he shelled out. Yeah, and you get twice the dough

any of us get. Nobody here wants to listen to you."

"I'm no dope," Angel snapped back. "I was smart enough to get mine, but you guys are outa luck. But it's not too late to smarten up and get what's coming to you—plus. Put the pressure on Rock to sell the club. Then collect the gravy."

Happy Holliday was wrong about them not wanting to listen to Angel. Happy started to blurt out a retort but Nails Hearne cut him short.

"Wait a minute, Happy," Nails said. "It isn't asking Rock too much to sell instead of forfeiting the franchise. All of us got a future and families to think about."

Sweeney stood up. "You guys will excuse me. I don't like the smell around here, and it isn't the liniment, either."

"Shut up, rook," Angel Toland growled. "You got no mouth around here. That door you go out swings one way for you."

A DOOR that led from Rock Gurnsey's office opened. Rock walked to the middle of the room. His jaw was set, his glance direct. But his face was white and taut. He spoke and his voice shook a little.

"The Raiders will be sold," he said. "You won't have to put any pressure on me. I give you my word—if that means anything to you—that I'll accept the first offer I receive."

He turned, walked out, and Sweeney felt a lump thicken in his throat. He had never seen such a hurt, stricken look in a man's face as he had seen in Rock's. Sweeney wanted to clear out. He wanted to get the taste of the double-cross the Raiders had dealt Rock out of his mouth.

Sweeney went outside, and he wondered how it would be taking orders from Bo Madden and Angel. Across the street from the hockey rink, Sweeney stepped into a coffee pot restaurant. He was sitting there, mulling the whole nasty situation over in his mind and sipping his coffee when Buzzy Barnes came in, slid up on the stool next to Sweeney.

"They won't get away with it," Buzzy said grimly. "Rock will keep the team. Just you wait and see."

"Who won't get away with what, Buzzy?"

"Toland and Bo Madden and the others," Buzzy said. "They only think they've got Rock sewed up. But you saved the day for him."

Sweeney was flatly puzzled. "How do you figure that, palsy?"

Buzzy shook his head, laughed a little. "Never mind. But I got good eyes and I hear good. It's just being in the right places at the right time that counts."

Sweeney saw that he was wasting his time trying to draw the guy out. Buzzy was on the slappy side anyway, and what he said couldn't be taken seriously.

"I hope you're right," Sweeney said. "But it's a tough situation to crack." A sudden thought came to Sweeney. He looked at Buzzy, then: "You don't care much for Toland, huh, Buzzy?"

The hard, cold light that glittered in Buzzy's eyes was its own answer. "Toland did this to me," he said, tapping his forefinger against his head. "There used to be cobwebs in my head all the time. But Rock looks after me good. I'm getting better. But I've got no chance against Toland—now. But I can wait. You got the stuff to push Toland outa the picture. So had a couple of other guys. But Toland put his jinx on them just like he did on me."

"Tell me," Sweeney said, "how come Toland acts the way he does?"

Again Buzzy shook his head, shifted to another tack. "You wanna get those ribs looked after," he said in his halting voice. "I think you cracked a couple of them."

Sweeney's brows shot up. A question poised on his lips, but Buzzy's grin wiped it away. Sweeney was convinced that Buzzy did get around. Buzzy wasn't as looney as he was generally thought to be.

The following evening the news broke. Sweeney picked up a late edition, turned to the sports pages and the headlines hit him in the face. They read:

Connie Leonard Buys Raiders. Society Heiress Startles Park Avenue and Hockey World. Rock Gurnsey Retained in Managerial Role. Raiders Make Debut under New Setup Against Bears Tomorrow Night.

Sweeney took a deep breath. What had caused Connie Leonard to buy the Raiders he couldn't figure out. But she had and it meant a new lease on life to Rock Gurnsey. The team had been snatched away from Angel and Bo Madden just as they were about to unload their trump card.

The next morning, Sweeney dropped in on Rock at his office. He expected to find the old vet beaming and happy at the sudden twist of good fortune. But Rock did not appear overly elated.

"I told them I'd accept the first offer I got," Rock said. "Connie Leonard was waiting for me when I got back to my office. A half hour later Bo Madden called me. He was too late. I had already agreed to sell to Miss Leonard."

"You're in the clear now," Sweeney said. "Maybe the team can find its legs and get going."

"I'm not so sure about that," Rock said dubiously. "I don't know how Angel is going to take this. He's bigger than the team. He can do most anything he wants and get away with it."

Sam Jenkins looked up from a sheaf of papers on his desk.

"This is a great break for all of us, Sweeney," he said. "You certainly put it across."

"Put what across?"

Jenkins laughed. "Don't be modest, boy. We're all aware that Miss Leonard wouldn't have bought the team if it hadn't been for you. I could make myself more clear by saying that she has a special interest in you. Keep up the good work, Sweeney."

"That's a good gag, Jenkins," Sweeney said, "but not so funny. I'm a hockey player, not a gal chaser. Don't get any silly ideas in your head."

Sweeney was confused. Jenkins' attitude toward him had become quite sugar-coated. The man had actually shown genuine gladness that Rock still bossed the Raiders. Sweeney had tabbed Jenkins as one of the paws that was clawing at Rock's throat. Now Sweeney wasn't so certain. Yet Sweeney sniffed something behind Jenkins' words concerning him and Connie Leonard.

CHAPTER III

THAT night Sweeney came through the dasher door and the thousands stood up in their seats and let out a burst of noise. They all wanted to get a look-see at the rookie who was defying the jinx that surrounded Angel Toland's wing-mates. It was a big crowd, the biggest of the season.

They had turned out partly because they were curious about how Sweeney would fare against the jinx and partly because of the publicity that had attended Connie Leonard's purchase of the team. Shrouded behind that picture was the game itself. It was a game that definitely could make or break the Raiders. Only a winning performance could bring the mob back again besides lifting the Raiders out of their doldrums.

Sweeney was cool and collected as he fired his warm-up shots at Ping Rucker, the goalkeeper. He glanced at Angel Toland and the jinxman had a sulking grin on his lips. Happy Holliday skated up alongside of Sweeney.

"Looka the mob," Happy said, awed. "Everybody in town is here. When the club was broke and gonna lose its franchise nobody came around. Now that we are millionaires, the joint is laced tight. Yeah, and take a gander at what's sitting up front in back of the bench. Gimme a gal like that and—five million. Boy, is she giving you the eye!"

Sweeney burned but said nothing. He figured it better to let the wisecracks fly over his ear. He took a few pot shots at the net and looked up to see Rock giving him the finger from the bench. Sweeney went over to him.

"The new owner insists on talking to you," Rock said, an edge to his voice. "Go see what she wants."

Sweeney grudgingly clumped to the rink-side seat that Connie Leonard and her party occupied. Connie's smile belied the frozen glint in her eyes.

"I hope you do well, Mister Sweeney," she said, emphasizing the "mister." "I've told everyone what a wonderful hockey player you are. Don't let me down"

—she paused—“or you might be needing a pass to get into the games.”

“Thanks,” Sweeney said. “You’re quite an inspiration.”

Sweeney rejoined his teammates. A few minutes later the Bears and Raiders lined up for the face-off. The teams broke in a fierce scramble for the puck like horses breaking from the barrier. The Bears were a big, bruising team and hit plenty hard. They needed this game to prevent the second place Hawks from stealing a march on them.

The going was rough and hard. Sweeney dove into the smear of green and purple-shirted icers. Quickly he was bounced to the ice. He winced under the sharp, stabbing pain that exploded from his ribs.

The ribs were fractured all right. Angel had seen to that during the practice scrimmage. A doctor had confirmed the fact. So Sweeney was in the game, his side swaddled with bandages. Sweeney knew that he couldn’t get involved in too many of those jam-sessions or his stay in the game would be a brief and unhappy one.

On all fours, Sweeney slapped the rubber to Nails Hearne. The centerman lost it and the Bears came on, swiftly organizing and throwing three men into the assault. Happy Holliday walloped the green-shirt, hoisting him and tearing him loose from the rubber. Lorne Monnet grabbed the biscuit, passed to Sweeney.

SWEENEY took it down and it was a regular dog-fight getting the disc into enemy territory. The Bears checked him hard along the boards, and Nails Hearne skated in and the pair of them blasted loose, still in possession of the rubber.

Then Angel Toland, the super-star of the show, taking his cue like an actor, called for the puck and got it. He tried to crash in on the Bear net-minder. The shot was blocked. Angel picked up the rebound. Sweeney swept in, looked for a pass and skated across the face of the cage empty-handed. Angel fired away himself, missed.

That was the pattern. Technically, everybody worked but Angel. He confined his play to shooting and the more sensa-

tional solo stuff. Angel was an old hand and he knew how to draw the “holler” out of the crowd’s lungs. Besides, wasn’t he the jinxman? Sweeney found himself practically ignored inside the blue line.

Angel’s thrusts at the enemy wicket got the cheers but no red-light payoff. The Bear front line formed, steamed down the powdered blue surface. Sticks flew and steel flashed ominously. Hemmed in by a horde of green shirts, Happy Holliday tried to dig the puck out. Sweeney tore in to help, but got slammed against the boards. He was up and ready, but the splintering agony in his side left him gasping for breath.

In the Raider nets, Ping Rucker went to his knees time and again, staving off a flurry of scorching dark bullets that the Bears hammered at him. There was a melee twenty feet out from the Raider cage.

Sweeney stood in his tracks, immobile and almost paralyzed with pain. Already the jinx legend that was associated with Angel Toland’s wing-mate was fastening its ugly claws into Sweeney. A Bear winger flew past him, blazing the puck into the red-light zone and Sweeney was helpless to stop him. The blast connected and the blinking shine of the red light made it official. Happy Holliday looked at Sweeney, eyed him curiously.

“The spectators are all up in the stands, sweetheart,” Happy said sardonically. “Shake the sand outa your boots.”

Play followed the same formula during the remainder of the first period. Sweeney tried to adapt his own game to the Raider system that glorified Angel Toland. It wasn’t working out. The onrushing Bears swarmed all over the rink, banging home another tally.

Angel Toland finally drilled home a score. Nevertheless, it was apparent to Sweeney that Toland’s insistence on being the big “I Am” of the Raiders was sapping the team of its real striking power. Rock sent on a new front line and the respite gave Sweeney a breathing spell to soften the pain in his side and get his bearings. It was a different Wild Bill Sweeney who returned to the ice in the second period. Happy Holliday smashed a

Bear sortie in front of the cage and the puck slid loose. Sweeney whirled into motion, snagged the rubber. He hurtled forward, swerving past a Bear winger and went sizzling down the boards.

There he flashed, Wild Bill Sweeney on the loose. The Bear backliners braced themselves. Then out of nowhere, Happy Holliday came whizzing and lunging into the breach. He punched a hole in the defense and Sweeney rode through. He side-swiped one man, tipping him off balance and bore in on the rival net tender. Sweeney threw a feint, tricked the goalkeep to his knees, and lifted a dark bullet into the unguarded corner of the net.

That play pulled a roar right out of the crowd's teeth. The noise broke and fell upon Sweeney in a wave of acclaim. It swept Sweeney right into their hearts and started Angel Toland on his trip out the back door. This guy Sweeney was turning on the heat, defying the jinx.

Two minutes later Sweeney was twisting and spinning and sprinkling ice shavings in the faces of the Bears. He ripped past the blue line. Angel Toland lurched in at an angle, his stick poised for a pass. But Sweeney saw that Angel would have to get off a miracle shot to score. Sweeney went in alone, pulling his blast as he skated away from the cage. The puck spanged into the net and Sweeney had done it again.

HE COULDN'T hold that breathtaking pace. Not with double-distilled torture hammering at his sides. Sweeney avoided contact as much as possible, picking his spots and spurting when he saw his opening. The Raiders picked up the rhythm of his flashing skates and surged to the attack, taking up the slack when Sweeney was forced to level off the pace.

The Bears, trailing, 3-2, tightened the pressure. On a four-man rush, they opened up the throttle in a desperate attempt to stem the tide.

Action flared and the dynamite hit and exploded around the Raider cage. In the wild, swirling fracas, Sweeney was caught and drawn into it. Something ripped at his legs, spilled him on his back. He got a glimpse of Angel Toland's scowling

face and knew what was coming and was helpless to protect himself. Then Sweeney saw Happy Holliday move in, place himself in front of Angel Toland.

The ref's whistle signaled a face-off. Words were exchanged between Happy and Angel. Sweeney was shaken by the blow that had floored him. The only thing that had prevented Angel from giving him the works was Happy. Sweeney had a hunch that it was no coincidence that Happy was on the spot at that moment.

The game rose toward a climax, in the last quarter. Sweeney held himself in tow, biding his time to cut loose again. The crowd was roaring his name. He had shoved the mighty Angel into the back-ground, stolen his thunder. The Bears kept a wary eye on Sweeney, badgering him and checking him close and hard. But Sweeney knew the tricks and he employed them to avoid unnecessary contact that might completely shatter his ribs. He used daring, flashing speed and swerving, brilliant tactics to outmaneuver the Bear backliners.

In the waning minutes of the game the Bears threw five forwards on the ice in an all-out attack. The Raiders went into a defensive formation, trying to make their one-goal margin stand up. That was when Sweeney lapped up a rebound. He shook off an enemy icer, burst into the clear, pulling Nails Hearne with him.

The Bears were caught flat-footed. They didn't expect the Raiders to unloosen an offensive bolt. They didn't know Sweeney. He zoomed down center ice, swooped in on the Bear net-minder. He faked a shot, passed to Nails Hearne slanting in from the opposite side.

Nails' bullet-drive tagged the red-light. Sweeney had deliberately passed up his chance to notch three goals and turn the hat trick. It was a nice piece of teamwork. Nails shook his head at Sweeney.

"It shouldn't happen to me," he said. "Maybe you're dumb like a fox. I dunno. But this game ain't going to end when the gun goes off. It's gotta be you or Angel. There's not room on the ice for two guys with the same style. It's happened before."

Time ran out a minute later. The

crowd's cheers poured down on Sweeney, but his teammates only stared at him. Their stares said enough. They had seen him dim Angel Toland's start and their glances were a warning that Angel would yet have the last word.

A half hour later Sweeney stepped outside the arena. A tall thin-lipped man standing near the curb threw away a cigarette that dangled from the corner of his mouth. He strolled over to Sweeney.

"A nice game," he said. "A very nice game."

Sweeney nodded his thanks, kept walking. But there was something in the man's voice that caused Sweeney to look at him twice. He didn't have to look far because the man was matching his footsteps alongside of him. Sweeney said:

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Not a thing," the man said, a slow grin growing on his lips. "You were much better than I expected. You beat the Bears tonight, and you're the guy who beat me outa taking the Raiders off Rock's hands. That's two points for you. But I'm not sore. The old percentage works both ways. I'll come in for mine later."

Sweeney needed only one guess to know who the stranger was.

"You're Bo Madden," Sweeney said quietly. "You and me don't walk in the same direction. Maybe one of us ought to cross the street."

Bo Madden laughed, amused. "You're still a busher, Sweeney, or you wouldn't talk that way. But we'll let it pass this time because you've done me a favor. I guess I can say you've been lucky for me. So I'm going to tip you off to something. That jinx that's been haunting the Raider forwards won't touch you."

Sweeney stopped, faced Bo Madden. "You talk in riddles, Madden. Let's have it straight."

Bo Madden shrugged, walked a few steps ahead and pulled open the door of a cab. Stepping in, he looked at Sweeney over his shoulder and Sweeney saw the satisfied grin on his lips.

Sweeney was at a loss to understand what it was all about. What favor had he done Bo Madden that Madden should want to assure him that the wing-jinx

on the Raiders was a dead thing now? He had suspected all along that Madden and Angel were a combination. Beyond that, Sweeney was completely in the dark.

IT WAS as though Bo Madden had spoken a magic word when he said that the jinx wouldn't trip Sweeney. Angel Toland backed into the shadows and had nothing more than a scowl for Sweeney. Somehow Sweeney got the impression that Angel was straining at the leash but that a stronger hand than his was restraining him. It could only be Bo Madden's hand. Why, Sweeney didn't know.

Sweeney continued to lead the Raiders out of the darkness of last place and into third place in the team standings. The Raiders ripped off four straight verdicts. In each of them Sweeney accounted for crucial goals.

It was a bright spark that Sweeney had brought to the Raiders. His flashy, cyclonic style had the Raiders playing to full houses. It was hipper-dipper stuff on ice and the fans loved it. If the Raiders noticed that Sweeney was avoiding reckless contacts and steering clear of the rough stuff, they said nothing. Even as it was, Sweeney's ribs were taking a terrific battering and getting no chance to mend.

It remained for Lew Harrigan, the columnist Sweeney had encountered the day he had reported to the Raiders, to hint that he was a "cutie" on skates. While the other writers piled their best adjectives on Sweeney, the columnist confined himself to a wait-and-see attitude. Between the lines, he brought out that Sweeney's wild-hare tactics might be due to a case of the jitters about the jinx.

The Raider winning streak went on. But it did not brighten Rock Gurnsey's face. Sweeney noticed the worried frown that Rock wore and couldn't figure it out. Then, too, Rock seemed to be losing weight and there was a noticeable sag in his shoulders. Sweeney tried to draw out of Rock what was on his mind, but Rock would give him that tired smile and keep his lip buttoned.

Sweeney suspected that the reason behind it all was Connie Leonard. The girl

was giving Rock plenty of headaches. She insisted on entertaining the team with parties in her penthouse apartment. Rock on one occasion threw up his hands in disgust when she bought tickets to the opera for the entire team. It all added up to good newspaper copy and Connie was forever getting her picture in the paper. There was nothing Rock could do but grin and bear it.

CHAPTER IV

IT WAS two days before the Raiders hit the road that Alice slid the white envelope from under the pillow where she was propped up on the bed. Alice was blond and pretty and the soft smile on her face never let you think that there wasn't one in her heart, too. But Sweeney knew the pain, the suffering her crippled legs had caused her to endure. But the legs were finally responding to treatment. Alice was gradually being able to walk a little. Alice was smiling now. She pulled three greenbacks out of the envelope.

"And each one is a thousand-dollar bill," she said proudly. "It's no use trying to keep the secret."

Sweeney's mouth flew open. "Three grand!" he exclaimed. "Where'd it all come from?"

"It's a bonus for the way you've been playing," Alice said. "Mr. Jenkins brought it over the other night. He said the club was going to give it to you at the end of the season anyway. He handles the finances of the club and he ought to know. He said the Raiders could easily afford to give it since Miss Leonard is the owner. The only thing is, I wasn't supposed to tell you about it unless a real emergency came up. And those new treatments. They're awfully expensive."

Sweeney shook his head firmly. "Let's not go over that again, Alice. Those treatments are doing a world of good." He paused then: "Jenkins came over here?"

"Of course. I thought you must have told him about—about me. There's nothing wrong, is there, Bill?"

"Not a thing," Sweeney said. "Jenkins, of course, knew our address from the office records."

Sweeney was worried. The only person who knew about him and Alice was Rock. Of course Rock might have told Jenkins about things. Even so, it was too much like finding three grand on the street. Sweeney wasn't too certain that there wasn't a string attached to the dough.

Rock was sitting at his desk the next morning when Sweeney swung open the door of his office. At the other desk in the room was Sam Jenkins. The third party present was Buzzy Barnes. Buzzy was making himself useful dusting the cabinets and in no great hurry.

"It looks like the new owner is throwing her dough around," Sweeney said. "That three grand dropped out of a clear sky into my lap."

Rock gave Sweeney a quizzical stare. "What three grand?"

"The three grand bonus Jenkins gave Alice," Sweeney retorted. "Maybe I've been filling that wing job okay. But not that much worth. If this is 'sympathy' dough, Rock, you know how I feel about that."

Jenkins looked up from his desk, cleared his throat. "Miss Leonard wanted you to have that money," he said. "She intends to make it a policy to inspire the players with regular bonuses. I see nothing unusual that I should have delivered the money. I do handle the business end of things around here, you know."

The business manager went back to fiddling with some papers. But Rock's face was flushed and his eyes snapping. He picked up the telephone receiver.

"We'll find out about Miss Leonard's policies," he said, looking directly at Jenkins.

A look of surprise etched over Jenkins' face. "Well," he said, hemming and hawing a bit, "this bonus idea is still in the formative stage. Miss Leonard mentioned it and I took it upon myself to try it."

Rock put down the receiver. He swung toward Jenkins, the lines tightening around his mouth.

"You're a liar and a chiseler, Jenkins," Rock said evenly. "You tried to go whole hog and you've been tipping your hand right along. Connie Leonard's lawyer

mentioned that owning the Raiders had become a very expensive proposition. That's when I began to get smart. The club's been drawing big crowds and we haven't been making expenses according to your books."

"This is all a dreadful mistake," Jenkins said. "The strain of the whole thing must be catching up with you, Rock."

ROCK leaned forward, laughed shakily, "No, I'm calling my shots and I'm not making any mistakes. I've snooped around and had things checked. What I've suspected is true. You and Bo Madden and Angel are all in the same clique. The three of you saw a good thing when Connie Leonard took over the Raiders. She had the dough and you snatched the purse strings. The three of you have been dipping both hands into that dough, cleaning up and using the club as a cover-up for your robbery."

Jenkins dropped the pretense. The incredulous expression faded from his face.

"You can't prove anything Gurnsey," he said. "You'll never be able to make that stuff stand up. If you try, you're finished. You're the sucker in this deal, Gurnsey."

Rock laughed shortly. "I'll prove it, every word of it. I'll do it at the party tonight. It's going to be some party, Jenkins. You want to be sure and be there. I'm going to break this thing wide open."

"I'll take a chance on that," Jenkins said.

Rock reached into his inner coat pocket, pulled out a packet of papers.

"This," he said, laying his finger against the papers, "will turn the trick. It's all the evidence I need. A whole set of figures and the dope on you and Bo Madden and Angel. It's the works, Jenkins. I've had them checked and double-checked. There's going to be a showdown. Maybe it'll cost me my skin, but there'll be a few other pelts to hang up alongside of mine."

Jenkins paled around the gills. But his eyes, small and hard behind his specs, glittered ominously.

"You wouldn't dare, Rock," he said. "You wouldn't dare."

Rock laughed scoffingly, turned to Sweeney. "Bring that three grand with you tonight. I don't know what made them so generous in this case. But it won't be long till we get the answers."

It was on the eve of the Raiders' departure into the hinterlands and the party was in full swing. In Connie Leonard's skytop penthouse, overlooking Park Avenue, glasses tinkled and music filled the spacious rooms. It was a strange crowd that mingled and toasted to the Raiders. There were debutantes and newspapermen and stick-scarred pucksters. It was a party that could only happen where Connie Leonard was concerned.

Sweeney's glance swept the room. The big show was Connie Leonard. The gal was certainly out to get herself a load of publicity. Trailing her like a pet puppy was her lawyer friend, Barry Pelham. Sweeney spotted Sam Jenkins. The man seemed confident, not a bit upset about Rock's charges.

Sweeney glanced at his timepiece. The hour was moving on and Rock hadn't put in an appearance. Sweeney felt a strange premonition settling in his bones. Somebody tapped him on the shoulder and Sweeney about-faced to confront Barry Pelham.

"Where's Rock?" Pelham asked. "There's several questions I'd like to put to him. I've also got a few for you to answer. But I'm not going to give you and Rock a chance to get your signals fixed. We'll wait for him."

"You don't need to worry about that," Sweeney said. "He'll be here. We've got both barrels filled with the answers. So you can start pulling the trigger any time you want."

Pelham smiled cynically. "I seriously doubt that. However, we'll soon find out."

Pelham turned and walked away. Sweeney was standing there when Happy Holliday sidled up to him.

"Your friend Buzzy is on the wire," Happy said. "If it was anybody but Buzzy, I'd swear he'd been milking the beer-faucet. You wanna talk to him?"

Sweeney made tracks for the telephone. At that moment he saw the door open and newshound Lew Harrigan come

into the room. Harrigan's face was grave and he whispered something into Sam Jenkins' ear. Sweeney went into another room, picked up the telephone receiver. He listened to Buzzy Barnes' voice on the other end of the wire and his face suddenly went white and his throat dry.

"I'll be right over, Buzzy," he said, his voice shaking. "But keep what you know under your hat."

THE music had stopped in the other room when Sweeney stepped back into the scene. Sweeney looked at Harrigan and the guests and he knew that the newspaperman had already told them the news. Sweeney strode over to Harrigan.

"You were with Rock when that car hit him," Sweeney said tightly. "It was no accident, Harrigan."

Sweeney's words were a bombshell. The silence fell thick and deep.

"You're crazy," Harrigan said calmly. "I was walking with Rock and he stepped off the curb too soon and got smashed. Maybe Rock did it on purpose. I dunno. He's been acting kinda funny lately. Maybe you know why."

Barry Pelham looked down his blue nose at Sweeney. "I've got all the answers I want, Sweeney. You'll be hearing more about this."

Sweeney stood there, anguish and anger burning inside of him. He looked past Pelham and into the background where a gloating smile played on Sam Jenkins' lips. He looked at Angel Toland, then back again at Lew Harrigan. They were all in on the frame and had crossed Rock from every angle. Sweeney's anger rioted inside of him. His fists clenched at his sides, he strode up to Jenkins.

Then the riot started. Angel Toland rushed at Sweeney and Sweeney met him with a crackling left. He boomed over the right. Angel plunged forward, throwing his weight against Sweeney and exploding his knuckles in Sweeney's face. Sweeney went down. He jumped to his feet and a couple of guys grabbed him. They had a wildcat on their hands. They finally managed to drag him into another room.

A moment later Connie Leonard came in and her lips were tight and her eyes

shone sharply on Sweeney. At her side was Barry Pelham, a smug expression on his face.

"You've tried to make a fool out of me," she said fiercely. "That's been your game from the beginning. But Barry's kept tabs on you. I know about the scheme you and Rock had up your sleeves. Now it's my turn to do a little punching." She paused, laughed coolly. She added: "I'm making Angel Toland the new manager of the team. You'll like playing for Angel, won't you, Mister Sweeney? There will be more later."

There was no adequate explanation that Sweeney could put forth without Rock's assistance. Jenkins and the others in the double-crossing combination had seen to it that Rock would never arrive that night and ruin their racket. Jenkins had beat Rock to the punch, spilled his lies and pointed the finger of guilt at Rock and Sweeney. Pelham had apparently been innocently taken in and given a good city slicking. Connie herself was dead-set in her attitude and filled with visions of revenge. Sweeney said:

"You haven't heard all the answers yet. You haven't begun to hear them. But right now, all I give a damn about is Rock."

"Rock is dead," Pelham said. "I understand the car that hit him killed him."

"That was the plan," Sweeney said bitterly. "But when they picked Rock up, he was unconscious but not dead."

Down on the street a minute later, a cab jerked forward and Sweeney pulled open the door and stepped inside. He started to name the hospital Buzzy had given him over the phone. Then he felt something hard pressing into his side. Sweeney's glance went to the front seat where Bo Madden sat with the driver. Occupying the back seat were a couple of Madden's hand-picked thugs.

"Make yourself comfortable," Bo Madden said sardonically. "We're willing to go out of our way to drop you off at the hospital. But first we mean to relieve you of the three grand you're carrying around. Now wouldn't it look lousy, a hockey player having that kind of dough on him? Why, if somebody found out,

they might think you were in on the same racket with Rock."

THE man holding the gun reached out, jerked Sweeney into the seat. Sweeney tore one arm loose, lunged toward Bo Madden. One of the thugs slapped Sweeney back into the seat. Bo Madden stood up, jabbed his fist hard into Sweeney's sore side. Sweeney winced and Bo Madden grunted out a laugh.

"Hurts, doesn't it?" Madden said flauntingly. "Okay, guys, take it away from him. I think he'll behave now. Either he does or he gets to that hospital a bit different than he figures."

Heavy fingers rifled through Sweeney's wallet, came up with the three grand Jenkins had given to Alice. Rock had asked him to bring it around as evidence. Bo Madden put a flame to a cigarette, half twisted in his seat.

"Now we can talk," he said.

"This is another time I've been lucky for you, huh, Madden?" Sweeney said bitterly. "You're a regular boy scout always out to do a good turn—for yourself."

"It's the percentage working," Madden said. "I play it and make it work my way. You gotta be smart to do that. The gal buys the Raiders mostly on account of you. So that's fine with me. I'm getting more dough out of it that way than if I owned the club."

It was now clear enough to Sweeney what Madden had meant when he said that Sweeney had done him a favor. But his reasoning about Connie Leonard's buying the Raiders because of Sweeney seemed out of line. Sweeney began to understand why Jenkins had so generously planted the three grand on him. It was a chance to tighten the net around him, involve him as Rock's stooge and made him a "figure" in Jenkins' crooked bookkeeping.

There were probably other reasons, too, that would make their appearance when the full tide came in. But the big obstacle in Madden's path had been Rock. Once he had discovered what was going on, the die had been cast to get rid of him.

"You tried to do away with Rock,"

Sweeney said tightly. "He had the goods on you and you gave him a one-way ride. But he isn't finished yet, Madden. He'll pull through this."

A low, amused laugh came out of Bo Madden's throat. "Accidents happen," he said. "Rock shoulda been more careful when he was crossing the street. But even if he isn't a dead duck, he'll wish he was when this thing is over. Those little papers he had in his pocket. They aren't there now. Rock can't prove a thing. He's had some big deposits made in his name. He's signed a lot of stuff without going into details. It was nice the way he trusted Jenkins. I don't think we have to worry about him any more."

"Maybe not," Sweeney said. "But the girl knows what's been going on and so does her lawyer friend. They'll turn the cards over."

Bo Madden shrugged. "You gotta know the angles to play the percentage. Her boy friend, Pelham, has been jealous of you. He got the idea that his gal was falling for you. He was right, too. Pelham couldn't let that happen. He wants to be the knight in shining buckles because he's making some pretty bad real estate investments with her dough. Real estate is Pelham's hobby. We look into those things, Sweeney. So Pelham has to cover up for himself. Putting the finger on you will be killing two birds with one stone."

Sweeney saw a chance to draw Bo Madden out, get all the angles. The guy was getting a terrific kick, boasting and slapping himself on the back for his "percentage" method.

"You can pull that stuff on Pelham," Sweeney said. "But the girl will smarten up on things. Then watch the fireworks."

A grin shadowed Bo Madden's lips. "If she gets any bright ideas, she'll regret them. But she won't because she is too burned up over the double-crossing she believes you and Rock handed her. Besides, she'll listen to Pelham. There's plenty more dough in this setup. When old Bo-Bo thinks it's time, he'll step in and grab the club practically as a present."

"You got all the answers," Sweeney said. "You're the original squeeze-play

kid. The trouble is you've got too many cards stuffed up your sleeve, Madden. One of these days a card is going to fall on the table face up. I hope I'm around when that happens."

The cab wheeled to within a block of Sweeney's destination. There, Sweeney was half tumbled out of the cab.

"I'll remember to send Rock flowers," Madden jeered. "Tough it had to happen that way."

SWEENEY walked one block straight ahead and turned into the hospital entrance. The lobby was crawling with newspapermen and people anxious to know about Rock's condition. Sweeney wanted to go up and see Rock. The girl at the information booth said:

"I'm sorry. They're operating on Mr. Gurnsey. It'll be a couple days before you can see him."

The sweat dampened on Sweeney's forehead. He sat down and began squirming with the others. The elevator came down and three men stepped out of it. Buzzy Barnes was in the middle and on each side of him a husky gent gripped his arm.

"I tell you a tea kettle hit him," Buzzy was exhorting. "It hit Rock and kept going. I seen it with my own eyes. So did Harrigan, but he won't admit it was a tea kettle."

"Yeah, yeah," the gent on Buzzy's right snapped impatiently. "So it was a tea kettle, so what?"

Buzzy spotted Sweeney and tried to force his way toward him. But the strong-armed guys yanked him back into line. Sweeney stepped in front of them.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Take a look for yourself," the husky said. "The guy's wacky." He flashed a badge. "This is no place for him to make noise. Okay, fella, move. You're in the way."

Sweeney watched them whisk Buzzy out onto the street. He stood there, staring and befuddled. Buzzy had been his one big hope of pinning Bo Madden in his own dirt. He had leaned on that hope since talking with Buzzy on the telephone. But apparently, Buzzy's battered mind

had slipped a couple of notches in the excitement. Gone was the last shred of hope. Behind Sweeney a newspaperman said:

"Too bad about Buzzy. Rock's been a great guy to him since he got busted up. The shock must have done things to him."

A lone reporter was yawning in the lobby when Sweeney turned an anxious, inquiring glance at the girl in the information booth. Again she shook her head negatively. There was no definite word on Rock's condition. Sweeney had learned what details there were from the reporters. A hit-and-run driver had banged Rock at a lonely cross-section of the city. Buzzy and Lew Harrigan had been with Rock at the time. The driver's mistake was in fleeing from the scene. Rock himself had stepped into the path of the car against the light. That was Harrigan's story. . . . Beside Sweeney a voice said:

"There's a train to catch, pal. I think you ought to be on it. I wouldn't give Angel a chance to throw any more salt over his shoulder."

"The hell with Angel," Sweeney said hotly. "He'll have plenty of chance to slap his spades at me."

CHAPTER V

THERE was a chunk of ice the size of a rock that had supplanted Sweeney's heart when the Raiders went into action against the Hawks two nights later. He could think of nothing but Rock and of the vicious movements of the hand that had struck him down. And now that hand was pointed at Sweeney. Sweeney had no way of knowing that in this off-guard moment the jinx hovered over him, ready to strike and complete its circle.

It was evident from the first clash of sticks that the drive and zip had gone out of Sweeney's game. Sweeney picked up a loose puck that an up-ended Hawk forward surrendered. He laid a pass down the right alley to Nails Hearne racing for the blue line. It was wide and wild, but the centerman went diving headlong for it.

A Hawk icer tried to make the interception. He had it and lost it to Happy Holliday. Happy whirled in on the goal.

Sweeney swung into position and it was a two-man rush.

The Raider defenseman expertly feinted the goalkeeper. He snapped the rubber to Sweeney. Sweeney fumbled the pass. Then the goalie pulled a page out of the book. He darted out on the ice, slapped the puck away from Sweeney. That was a break for the Hawks and they swiftly cashed in on it.

They found a hole down the right lane and the parade went pouring through. It was Sweeney's slot they were bombarding. Behind him Happy threw body checks and hoists all over the ice. But a couple of Hawks finally flattened Happy and the red light smiled on their effort.

That was typical of Sweeney's play during the first period. The Hawks skated rings around him, scrambling his defensive maneuvers and kicking the fuse out of his stick-handling thrusts. He was fitting and skidding over the ice, avoiding bruising contacts and almost instinctively protecting his battered side. He saw the glint that jumped in Happy's eyes and let Angel Toland's hard sarcasm bite into him without a retort. Sweeney was heading for the respite period when he first heard the check-shy cry that Lew Harrigan had long ago suggested in his column.

"Hey, check-shy," a leather-lunged fan bellowed. "Never mind the figure-skating stuff. Let's have the dynamite."

There was more of the stuff, but Sweeney didn't bat an eye. He went into the locker room and Angel Toland clumped in a moment later. His mouth was a bitter slash in his face.

"They've finally got you labeled," Angel snarled. "You're check-shy, Sweeney," Angel laughed harshly. "It's on your mind, isn't it? The jinx, I mean. But it's only the beginning. From here on the wraps are off."

Out on the ice again, Happy Holliday stared at Sweeney, puzzled.

"Maybe it's what happened to Rock that's got you down, I dunno. But you've been playing that catch-me-and-kiss-me game a long time. It can't be that you're afraid of that jinx stuff. I've seen you

slug it out with Angel once before. I don't get it, pal."

That was the boiling point. The sparks flew and bit old wounds inside of Sweeney, and fired his wall of restraint. Check-shy? The thought was intoxicating. It was hot liquid burning and pouring through Sweeney's veins. He suddenly wanted an outlet to forget the awful ache in his heart. He wanted to rip and crash and drown out those hurts.

"Jinx?" he snorted. "Okay, I'll show you what I think of Angel and his jinx. Let the ref blow that whistle."

The second period was five minutes old when it happened. The fans were standing, roaring and witnessing the antics of a one-man riot squad. There was Sweeney, plunging into the fray, unloading the dynamite and defying the Hawk backliners.

Twice he smashed and blitzed the enemy out of his patch to make battering assaults on the goal. Once he scored. The Hawks socked into him, hammered and managed to turn his thrusts aside. But they could only check Sweeney, not stop him. Sweeney was going all-out to the point of recklessness. He did not notice Angel Toland weaving in and out of the various formations, a dark and sanguine look shadowing his face. Angel was a falcon, watching and waiting to swoop down on his prey.

SWEENEY saw none of that. The Hawk forwards stormed down the boards. Sweeney streaked toward the puck-rager. He fought him, tried to poke-check the rubber away. Other Hawks piled into the scrimmage. The Raiders came and there was a tangle of shirts and a regular Donnybrook melee.

The sticks started to fly and cold steel flashed its ominous message. From behind, Sweeney felt his legs taken from under him. He swiveled his head, got a glimpse of Angel Toland. It was then that Sweeney felt the blade of Angel's stick lash into his scalp. The ref's whistle shrilled. There was a pile-up and a ten-ton weight seemed to bury into Sweeney's ribs.

Lights kept flaring around Sweeney.

He thought they were all in his head but they weren't. The lights were flashlight bulbs popping. They had flashed all during the game, getting "action" shots for the next day's papers. It was a cockeyed, whirling picture that was set in motion before Sweeney. There were the players, the ref, the brawl and now a guy in a sweatshirt coming onto the ice. The guy was Buzzy Barnes. But how could it be Buzzy? Hadn't Buzzy gone completely berserk the night that Rock had been waylaid?

The scene snapped off there. The blood was sloshing down Sweeney's face. The crowd sat tense, silent. Then a shrill voice from the gallery broke into the stillness.

"It's the jinx again. It's caught up with Sweeney like it did the others."

A buzz rumbled through the arena. Sweeney felt gentle hands reaching down to pick him up. He pushed them away, staggered to his feet. A slow, drawing voice that could only belong to Buzzy Barnes trickled through his befogged senses.

"I tried to stop it but I was too late. But Angel will never ruin another guy. He's jinxed himself this time. He'll find that out."

Sweeney somehow managed to make it into the dressing room on his own steam. Behind him he could hear the cheers spurring on the players tangling on the ice. Sweeney slumped down on a bench and somebody fed him a whiff of smelling salts. He sat there and the cobwebs began to clear in his brain. But the ache in his side was beginning to thaw out, send hot licks of pain through his body. The doc went to work on the scalp wound. When the doc had finished, Sweeney became conscious of Buzzy's hand squeezing his arm. Buzzy relaxed the pressure.

Sweeney looked at Buzzy and Buzzy's eyes were no longer hazy and glinted. They were bright and clear. Sweeney sensed something. He couldn't begin to make heads or tails out of the situation.

"This is no time to solve mysteries," Sweeney said. "What's the lowdown, Buzzy? I thought you were—"

"In the bughouse or something," Buzzy finished for him. "If Angel Toland had

his way I might have been. But Rock looked after me. I'm okay now. Have been for quite a while."

"But what about the other night in the hospital?" Sweeney asked, puzzled.

Buzzy laughed. "Just whack enough to get the license number of the car that hit Rock. But I had to put on a good act for Bo Madden's stooges. They'd have finished me off if they figured I was telling things to the D. A. Besides, I didn't want to tip the D. A.'s hand. It was a good act, huh? I had a lotta practice."

Sweeney took another whiff at the smelling salts. "Tell me more about Bo Madden. I'm interested."

"The last I heard, him and Jenkins and Pelham were squirming in the D. A.'s office," Buzzy said. "Each one of them was trying to pin the rap on the other."

At this point Lew Harrigan came into the room. "We've caught up with Angel Toland this time," he said. "The boys got plenty of nice pictures of him giving Sweeney the business."

"So you found a loophole and you're crawling through it, Harrigan," Sweeney said evenly. "They've got Bo Madden pinned down and you're out to save your own skin. It's that easy, huh?"

HARRIGAN grinned a little. "A reporter sometimes has got to live with the wolves to get the real lowdown. Well, I had a hunch about Angel Toland and this jinx business. But to get at Angel, you had to get at the guy behind him—Bo Madden. That guy has Angel sewed up in knots. He either worked with Madden—or else."

Sweeney sucked in his breath. "Tough, Angel had to get in that kind of a hole to Madden."

"Don't feel sorry for the guy," Harrigan said. "Angel has his own reasons for keeping that jinx alive. He collected from Madden. But the real gravy was in the mail when Madden got control of the Raiders. But for that to happen, the Raiders had to lose dough and games. Besides, Angel couldn't stand to see anybody steal his stuff. It did something to him. He was on top and beginning to slip and the guy was desperate."

Sweeney asked the questions and Harrigan gave the answers. The police had been very interested in Bo Madden's activities for some time. They hadn't wasted a minute, once Rock had been marked for murder. In jig-time, they had pulled in the thug who had been at the wheel of the car that had hit Rock.

The doctor stretched Sweeney out on the rubbing board. He began strapping his ribs. Buzzy looking on, said:

"Bo Madden put plenty of 'smart' dough on the line that the Raiders wouldn't make the play-offs. This is the game that's supposed to start us on the skids. Angel is doing the masterminding and it's a cinch we won't cop this one. Even with the lid blowing off this thing, the Raiders still won't make the grade. The damage has already been done."

There was a silence. The Doc finished taping Sweeney's ribs. Sweeney lay there, the thought of the jinx was a germ irritating his insides. He hadn't really licked the thing. Instead, he had been a victim. He thought of the sag that a defeat would put in the Raider morale. It would be even worse when the whole messy business hit clean air. Then the doc was saying:

"I'm going to get you out of here. I'll have an ambulance take you to the hospital."

The doc disappeared to put in the call for the ambulance. He returned a couple of minutes later and Sweeney had vacated the rubbing board. The doc bewilderedly looked at Buzzy and Harrigan. Both of them had sly grins on their faces.

"He's gone," Buzzy said. "Listen to that noise out there. Ain't it wonderful? Sweeney's back out there playing."

"Why, the man will be lucky to last five minutes," the doc said.

"That's all that's necessary, doc," Buzzy said. "There's only three minutes left to play."

The 3-1 headway the Hawks had gained was in jeopardy. The pressure was on and it was Sweeney who put it on the Hawks. Less than a minute on the ice and the guy was a flying nightmare on skates to the Hawks. Already he had

flipped in one goal to narrow the margin that stood between the teams to a single counter. The Hawks went into a strictly defensive formation, prowling and protecting the danger zone. The mob's noise shook the rafters.

Another Raider rush evolved at mid-ice, swept down the ice. It uncoiled and Sweeney went over the blue line. The backliners came up to pinch him in his tracks. They threw a ring of steel around him.

Happy Holliday busted into one of them and that gave Sweeney his opening. He shifted his weight, swerved and the ice splinters flew from his skates. It was a tricky, split-second maneuver that drew a body check from the backliner. It didn't connect. A rival winger swooped in at an angle, apparently willing to take a penalty to stop Sweeney.

The urge to blast past this Hawk, to meet dynamite with dynamite, was in Sweeney's soul. But there was that throbbing, terrible ache in his sides and his brain urged caution. Nails Hearne bore down the opposite lane. Sweeney passed the ammunition. Nails zoomed in on the Hawk net-tender. He fired the puck. The red light went on. The score was deadlocked, three-all.

Sweeney had come back. The man the jinx had put the whammy on earlier in the game was now fighting it and licking it. The teams faced off. Sweeney skated close to Angel Toland. A shocked, almost incredible stare had replaced the smirk on his lips. And Sweeney knew that he had licked Angel and his jinx.

THE Hawks stiffened, fought back fiercely. They were a game, hard-driving outfit. They fought fury with a renewed fury of their own. The seconds were running out. It looked like an overtime period was in the books. Angel Toland was the crimp in the Raider attack. The guy was in a fog, jammed and throwing sand in the gears. Sweeney could sense that something was amiss. The whole Raider bench was clamoring, hollering for Angel to get out of the game. Buzzy Barnes yelled something over the dasher

board at Happy Holliday. A moment later, Happy skated over to Angel. There were a few words exchanged. Angel went off the ice.

It was then that the attack really jelled. The drive and lift and relentlessness of the ocean tide was in the Raider charges. The Hawks finally salvaged the

He worked his way into the clear, slanted down the boards and over the blue line. The goalie poised to hurl back the threat. No tricky stuff this time. Sweeney blasted. It was a whistling dark bullet that slashed past the Hawk goalie.



puck out of a scramble. They were turned back at the goal. Sweeney picked up a rebound. He started down the ice. He stick-handled, ghosted his way through the enemy that rode up to batter him down.

Raiders 4, Hawks 3. That was how it ended.

The Raiders piled into their dressing room. In no time the room was bulging. Buzzy and Lew Harrigan and other newshounds and even some fans were in there. Angel Toland was almost dressed when the team came in. Angel was in a hurry.

So was the copper who stood beside him. The door closed behind them and a pin could have been heard dropping.

Then the shouting and hollering began. The doc made a grab for Sweeney, threatened to put him in a strait-jacket. But Sweeney was perched upon the shoulders of his teammates. His ribs were giving him hell, but it was a pleasant kind of hell in spite of the pain.

"You passed the feed bucket to Harrigan," one reporter complained. "The guy scooped us all over town."

"He scooped me, too," Sweeney said, grinning.

"Well, here's one scoop that he didn't get first," the reporter said, laughing good-naturedly. "Rock Gurnsey is going to be okay. And he gets the Raiders back. That came over the wire a little while ago. I guess Connie Leonard didn't like some of her publicity releases. The way the Raiders are rolling, Rock won't have any trouble digging up dough. The fans dig plenty of that up to watch the Raiders."

The room echoed with resounding cheers. The doc pleaded, tried again to snatch Sweeney away from his teammates. They finally put him down on the board. The room was almost cleared when Harrigan brought up Connie Leonard's name.

"She's a publicity hound," Harrigan said. "She had a mania for the stuff, but maybe she's cured now. She bought the Raiders partly because she figured it was a good way to keep herself in the limelight. The other reason was you. The gal is spoiled and pampered. She thought twenty million could get her anything she wanted. But you took a sock at her pride. It made her sore and sent her out for revenge. Connie knew about Alice, too. I know that. But that didn't make any difference."

Sweeney smiled faintly. It was going to take a while before he could don the hockey gear again. But he'd be around for the playoffs. So would Rock. That was going to be a tough combination to beat.

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Bench Warmer's Grid Grudge



By M. M. Tinney

Chick Haley had what it takes to make the varsity. He had everything plus—but it was the plus that made him, instead of an addition to his team, a minus on the scoreboard.

CHICK HALEY climbed out of his football gear and piled it in a heap on the bench. He sat down beside it, glanced at the clean, unsoiled blue-and-gold striped jersey and began figuring how much of a laundry bill he had saved Bluefield College. This made it

three Saturdays in a row of bench duty for Chick, and the pants were beginning to pick up a shine. But Chick didn't mind that too much. Bluefield had copped another ball game and Chick was a team man and he was satisfied.

The locker-room noise hammered into Chick's ears. It was the old familiar victory aftermath. Chick Haley was not a guy to sit in a corner and not make some noise himself. He was a varsity squad member, and the team had won and he had a right to celebrate. Team spirit certainly reached a boiling point in Chick. He stood up, let loose with a resounding bellow.

"Wow-eee! We win another!! We're rolling now. Let's shake up the old town tonight, guys."

Chick went into a war-jig, going into the showers. He pummeled his teammates on the back and warmed their souls with compliments. They liked Chick, his teammates did. Win or lose, Chick was a team man. They grinned back at him, muttered their thanks.

In the shower room, Chick spotted Moose Bradley. Moose was a rangy, long-legged guy. He was a sophomore and chesty and a plenty good wingman. Good enough to keep Chick's leg tied to the bench.

"Good going, Moose," Chick enthused. "Atta way to pull in those passes. We wouldn't have taken 'em if you hadn't grabbed that touchdown heave in the last two minutes."

A thin grin curled Moose Bradley's lips. He brought his hand down hard on Chick's shoulder.

"Great going yourself," he said, giving the wink to a couple of teammates. "Boy, it's bad when the coach keeps his own son on the bench. If I couldn't get into the game with that kind of drag, I'd turn in my suit."

Moose thought that was funny and laughed. That was Moose's idea of a sense of humor. Moose was a sophomore and he had made the first string and Chick could pardon his letting off a little steam. Nevertheless, the steady flow of wise-cracks was beginning to get under Chick's skin. He shrugged off the feeling.

"That's all right, Moose," Chick said. "I'll make the headlines yet. Maybe I'll fall off the bench or something and give the team a break. But if it helps the team win, that's okay by me. Piling up the wins is what counts in my book."

A heavy-set man's voice coming from the entrance of the shower room caused Chick to look that way. The man was Chick's father and Bluefield coach, Steve Haley. Chick thought the voice sounded a bit severe.

"I'll be in my office, Chick. I want to see you there before you leave."

Twenty minutes later Chick strolled into Coach Haley's office. He wondered why the SOS call. His father, frowning from beneath his shaggy brows, said:

"Chick, this is your third and last season on the squad. You've hardly lived up to my expectations. I'm beginning to think that you'd make a better cheer leader than a football player."

"I was beat out for the end position by a better man," Chick admitted frankly. "I figured I'd make the grade this season, too. But Moose came along. Before him there was somebody else. The team keeps on winning so it isn't so tough sittin' 'em out."

"More team spirit," Coach Haley grunted. "Yeah, you think you've got plenty of that. But I've got third stringers that have got more than you have. Give them a chance and they pour more than they've really got into the game. But you've got stuff they haven't, yet you're sitting on the bench with a grin on your kisser. What kind of team spirit is that?"

"Maybe you overestimate me," Chick said. "I'm doing my best. I'll never let the team down. But you've got to admit that Moose Bradley is one big load of end-man."

"Sure," Coach Haley agreed. "So were the other guys who set you in the back-seat. It isn't that you aren't trying. I'll tell you what your trouble is. You're a nice guy and everybody is your pal. You're the personality kid of the campus. I'll bet you hold more student offices than you can shake a stick at. That's okay. Maybe I should be proud. But I'd rather you

were less popular and more football player."

Coach Haley's verbal blitzkrieg set Chick back on his heels. He stood there, dumbfounded.

"I can't step on my personality," he said, finding voice. "I don't know what to do."

"Of course you wouldn't," Haley snapped. "You're too nice a guy. You wouldn't know how to get tough. Not even when Moose Bradley sticks pins in you. Why, when you're fighting for a position the idea is to make the other fellow your enemy. In the game, the rival team is the enemy. That puts the steam in a guy and gets his dander up. But with you, the rival players are your friends. Everybody is your pal. I never thought my own son would grow up to be a soft-soaping, baby-kisser."

CHICK caught the drift. His old man was trying to heat him up, get him fighting mad. He simply didn't realize that Chick didn't have that sort of temperament. But Chick was willing to try anything that might improve his grid-iron play. The thing that meant most to him—a varsity job—had been denied him. He stood willing to go even further than his dad had suggested. If having enemies could turn the trick, Chick meant to have them.

"Okay," Chick said. "From now on everybody is my enemy. I'll make 'em. You count 'em."

"You haven't got the nerve," Haley said flatly. "Maybe I should say the guts."

Chick's campaign to influence people to be his enemies started the moment he walked outside the locker room. There he ran into Art Elliot, Bluefield's varsity tackle.

"Hullo, ugly," Chick said. "Wow, did you play stinko in there today. Lucky for you the other team had a dumb quarterback. They could have scored six touchdowns through your side of the line."

The big tackle looked at Chick, puzzled. Then he nodded.

"And you ain't kidding," Elliot said seriously. "I was mousetrapped till I felt

like one. Those guys really did a job on me. They rubbed my kisser in the dirt all afternoon. Ain't it something awful to look at?"

Chick rubbed his chin till it hurt. He began to wonder what he had to do to make an enemy. Well, maybe Elliot had been mousetrapped all afternoon. So what?

Chick strolled along the street, his mind plunged on the urgent problem of making enemies. Suddenly his face broke out in a grin. The lightning had struck Chick's brain. A plan that would make him the number-one campus enemy swiftly unfolded, outlined itself in Chick's mind.

It was three days later when the various campus fraternities held a climax rally to elect their candidates to the Bluefield Student Council. Established tradition at Bluefield proved that the fraternity gaining control of the Student Council also became the most powerful organization on the campus. Also, to them went the greatest number of pledges.

So it was that Chick, president of the Beta Kappa, the controlling faction, had the honor of the last word. Chick stood on the rostrum of the jam-packed auditorium. The students had been promised everything from heaven up. Chick gave them the old dramatic pause.

"Suckers," Chick started, "a vote for the Beta Kappas is one you'll regret. It means that we'll run things to benefit ourselves. It means we will do everything—but mostly everybody. We promise nothing and offer less. Furthermore, suckers—those of you who pledge the Beta Kappa will have to shell out for a new heating plant. Once we get our hooks in you, look out."

For ten minutes, Chick went on at length. He smeared, scrambled and buttered the grease slide for his fraternity brothers. When he finished, silence reigned. Then came the reaction. A sweeping, rumbling thunderclap of applause and cheers, that shook the rafters. The sweat beaded on Chick's forehead. He stood there, frozen in his boots. Then Art Elliot and the other Beta Kappas were rushing onto the platform. They pumped

his hand, slapped Chick on the shoulders. "We're in," Art Elliot shouted. "You did it, palsy. We'll sweep the slate. It'll be a landslide."

"But look what I told them. . . ."

"Stop it," Elliot cut in, "Those other guys filled their ears with promises and lies and monkey business. But you were smart. You went up there and told the bitter truth. No phony promises. These are times when people want to know the real lowdown and you gave it to them."

Chick shook his head ruefully. He was licked. There was no use trying any more. He simply couldn't find a real bona fide enemy. The whole scheme had worked in reverse. He was more popular than ever. He might as well concede defeat to his dad, Coach Haley.

IT WAS Saturday, the day Middleton brought their powerhouse machine to Bluefield to renew a traditional rivalry. And thereby hung the success of the season for both elevens. In the dressing room Chick was his old bright and cheery self. He had quit trying to track down enemies. He went over to Art Elliot, lifted an encouraging hand to his back.

"Let's see you go in there the way you did last week, Art," Chick chortled. "You were the best on the field."

The tackle's head jerked up. "What do you mean the best? I was mousetrapped all over the place. You said so yourself."

"Forget what I said," Chick said. "That was last Saturday. I was trying to work up a grudge against the world team."

Moose Bradley sidled up beside Chick. "Get a load of that," he bit out. "That proves what I've been saying. Chick really meant those things he said about the Beta Kappa. He tried to sell us out. Go ahead and ask him if that isn't the truth. He's sore at the whole team because I beat him out of his job."

"What about it?" Elliot asked tersely.

"He's right and he's wrong," Chick said. "I'll admit I was out to make enemies. But I can explain—"

"You don't have to," Elliot cut in fiercely. "I'll tell you one thing, brother. You've got enemies now—a whole room full of

them. Just to show that I'm not fooling—catch this."

Art Elliot's big fist whipped out. It brushed past Chick's jaw. Something began to burn in Chick that had never burned before. He leaped forward swinging at both Moose and Elliot. Half the team leaped on Chick and Chick was trying to slug it out with all of them. The fracas came to an abrupt finish when Coach Haley entered the room.

"Save it, Chick," he said tartly. "Save it for the bench."

Out on the greensward minutes later the battle got underway. The green-shirted Middleton man sent the kick-off booming down to the goal line. Al Jenkins picked it out of the air, running it back to the fifteen-yard stripe. Bluefield tested the forward wall and the attempt yielded nothing.

The teams rocked and socked into each other during the first period. Neither outfit could get a sustained drive underway. It was power football. The gains were short and the hard-charging linemen permitted no breakaway runs. Middleton showed first signs of offensive strength. They'd been pounding, pounding at the tackle slot, trying to force Moose Bradley wide and spring the ball-carrier through the gap.

On the bench, Chick squirmed and fidgeted. The locker-room episode had him still sizzling. He looked out there and saw what was happening. The green shirts were pounding Moose Bradley hard. They were shooting for a loophole, trying to force Moose into making that single mistake. And since Moose was a not too experienced sophomore, there existed the possibility that he'd make it. He was beginning to show his greenness, too. Middleton was a lot different from the other teams that Moose had run into. Their battering attack was throwing a double burden on Art Elliot's shoulders.

On a buck-lateral, a Middleton back swung wide of tackle. This time Elliot was spilled out of the play. The wingback scampered past the scrimmage line. He had no trouble with Moose because Moose was caught flatfooted and sucked

out of the play. The green shirt picked up his interference and went forty yards down the field to score. The attempted place-kick sailed wide of the bar.

The minutes of the quarter were ebbing away when Coach Haley stared down the bench at Chick. Haley didn't say a word. He jerked a finger at Chick, handed him his card.

Middleton punched their way down to the Bluefield's seven yard line. It looked like the end of Bluefield's slim chance of pulling the game out of the fire. Chick crouched at the left end position, his legs coiled springs under him. It was a new feeling, a new experience for Chick. Something inside of him was stirring. The enemy was in front of him and even his own teammates were his enemies. That was okay with Chick.

The ball snapped back. The leather-lugger reached Chick, sliding inside of tackle. But there was Chick, slashing and bringing him down behind the line. Middleton slammed a power smash at tackle. Again Chick moved into the fury of the play, driving the runner hard to the turf.

It was third down and fifteen to go. Middleton lined up and Chick sensed what was coming. The play unfolded and it was the same buck-lateral that had fooled Moose Bradley. But Chick was ready for it. He drifted a few steps. The blockers came and Chick smashed headlong into them. Art Elliot slapped the stopper on the Middleton back. Middleton used up their fourth down, passing into the end zone. This time Chick faded, leaped high to bat it down.

He was a wildcat. Through the third and into the fourth period there was no semblance of a grin on Chick's face. His uniform was dirty and sweat-soaked. He

teamed with Art Elliot, opened a gap in the enemy forward wall and Al Jenkins raced through for twenty yards. Again, Jenkins ripped off another hunk of yardage through the same slot. When the Middleton linemen stopped Jenkins, he faded and fired a short, bulletlike heave to Chick.

The minutes were ticking away and the shadows falling across the field. Al Jenkins took the ball from center. He faded back to the Middleton thirty-five. He chucked the pigskin. Two green-shirted players raced at angles to cover Chick. Chick outfooted one of them, outreached the other. In the deep corner of the end zone he snatched the pigskin, pulled it to him. Touchdown! Al Jenkins booted a placement. It was good. Score: Bluefield 7, Middleton 6. That was the final score.

Chick stalked into the locker room. There was still some fight and fury in him. There was some left for Moose Bradley and Art Elliot. Chick strode over to Moose, jutted his jaw.

"Okay, fella, get 'em up."

Moose's reply was a grin that slid over his face. Then Coach Haley stepped in front of Chick.

"Getting you heated up was tough enough, Chick," he said, "Let's not have any trouble cooling you off. But maybe when you get an earful of what's coming at you, you'll cool off yourself. Moose and Art and the rest of the squad knew about your trying to make enemies. I told them. So we schemed on you before the game. So you're really among friends."

A moment later it felt strange having the others pummel Chick on the back and tell him what a great guy he was. Chick had a different angle on team spirit, too. He'd be trying team spirit on the Japs soon. He'd find plenty of enemies there.



Basket Larceny



By David X. Manners

Though Willie Phelan had his hoopster job stolen from under him, it took more than an underhanded pass to make him resort to cross-court crookedness.

BOUNCE" BENDER was tall and curly-haired. He dribbled as if he'd been born with a ball in his hand. His basket wizardry was breathtaking.

On the bench sat Willie Phelan, pride

glowing on his face as he watched the game. His eyes dwelt admiringly on Bounce Bender.

"A great guy," murmured Willie. "Never a better one than Bounce."

Willie Phelan was a scrappy little bas-

kethall player. He'd been well known even in college, and his four years of pro competition since hadn't let his reputation lag. Now on the bench with a trick knee, he was glad this was the last game he'd be sitting out. The knee was better. Bounce Bender had been swell to step in for him up until now.

Willie grinned as Bounce dropped in another one for the Jewelers. The pro-league fight was a tough one. If the Jewelers came through, their long-ailing chief planned to quit, and Willie hoped to succeed him as coach. That was why Willie had taken it upon himself to find a crackerjack substitute when his knee went bad. Bounce was an old school chum.

Bounce scuttled a long one from mid-floor, and the final gun cracked on a 38-22 score. The smooth-rolling Jewelers had slicked another game!

Willie got up, swarmed with the rest of the team toward the gym exit. He was heading for the locker stairs when he saw Dinter.

Dinter stopped Willie, took him aside. Dinter was the Jeweler owner. Willie's only hitch to stepping in as coach after winning the championship was Dinter's opposition. Dinter believed a basketball player was a little less than a human being.

Dinter drew out a paper from his thin wallet. "I got something to tell you, Phelan," he said. "We're letting you go. Dropping you from the roster."

Dinter's lips worked briskly around the stogie in his mouth. He held forth a check. He did not smile, but his eyes held a calculating delight.

"Bounce Bender has decided to stick. We needed a point-getter. That fills our roster nicely. I'm sure you won't have trouble getting something else, Phelan."

Willie felt the floor tilt under him. "Wait a minute," he choked, uncomprehendingly. "I got Bounce this job. He's not the kind of guy who'd jerk a seat out from under—"

But there was a surging crowd of departing fans in the gym corridor, and Dinter was already being swirled away in it.

Willie caught at his lower lip and let out a breath. Numbly, he went on down the stairs into the locker room, rubbing trembling fingers through his short-cut hair. Bounce was just skinning out of his jersey. The other players, in various stages of undress, stopped and looked ill at ease.

Moe Meyers, a guard, said, "We're sorry as hell, Willie—"

Bounce threw aside his shirt, stepped toward Willie. "Look," he said. "When I took this on, Willie, I didn't know it would mean they were letting you go."

"So what are you going to do about it?" Willie asked.

Bounce shrugged. "What can I do? I talked to Dinter. He says if I don't take it, they'll get somebody else in your place anyway. And I got my name on a contract."

"You mean you're going to stay on?" Willie choked.

Bounce said, "I got others to think about too. Family responsibilities. You understand, don't you, Willie?"

Willie stared at Bounce Bender. At his disarming smile and boyishly curly hair. If he hadn't heard it himself, he wouldn't have believed it. Why, he and Bounce had played college basketball together! They'd been frat brothers at Northern, shared dorm rooms and double-dated.

Bounce said, "You should know in this game they pay off on what you show."

Willie turned away. "Friendship, I thought, was something pretty," he said.

"Sure, I know in this game it's the devil take the hindmost. But it goes pretty deep when it's your own pal who cuts your throat."

Bitter disappointment blurred Willie's eyes as he found his way to his locker.

DESPITE the fact that pro basketball was pretty much shot on account of the war, only two days elapsed before Willie got on with the Oilers. The personnel chief said, "You have to work at a job here. I'll get you some light desk job at the refinery. We don't pay out a lot of cash like the Jewelers."

"I'll make you a player," Willie promised. "All I want is a chance to get in

there and play against the Jewelers. I want to show up that team for a bunch of roundheels."

"I wish you luck," said the personnel man with a wistful smile. "But I guess you know the Oilers are usually sitting near the bottom of the league."

Willie didn't care so much about that. When he got in there against the Jewelers, it wasn't going to be the Oilers vs. Jewelers. It was going to be Willie Phelan vs. Bounce Bender.

One of the refinery bosses, a hulking giant known as Easy Mike, was coach of the Oilers. When Willie went through his first practice session with the team the next evening at the refinery gym, he decided the coach's name should be Sloppy Mike.

Play swept from one end of the floor to the other. Signals were vague. Passes were long, frequently missed, followed by a mad scramble for the ball. Willie winced. And they called this a pro team!

One of the guards on the scrubs, a redheaded kid, continually let Willie break away for shots.

"Look, Red," Willie said, when he got a chance. Maybe he could show them a few things to help them out of this mess. "As soon as a man gets into scoring territory, it's up to a guard to get close enough to prevent or hinder a shot or pass. You're playing too far away. If the offensive man is a good shot, get close enough to block the shot. If he's a poor shot, get just close enough to hinder him, but let him shoot. So you get a chance to recover the ball."

Later, a foul was called. A big blond boy named Gramatky took his free throws. He missed them both.

"Mind my giving you a pointer?" Willie asked. He took the ball from the fellow. "You were too tight on those shots, I think. Relax before you shoot. Next time, try looking at the floor, and bounce the ball a couple times. See how it helps." Willie demonstrated.

"Wait a minute!" bellowed Easy Mike, who up till now had been sitting idly on the sidelines. He shoved his big bulk forward on the boards. "Who's running this outfit, Phelan? Me or you? You're

on the Oilers now, not the Jewelers. Ellia coming in for you."

The brawny coach waved a new player in.

Willie took it grimly. He'd been wrong in sticking his nose in, he knew. Anyway, it was hopeless. This team wasn't going anywhere. The Jewelers would mop up the court with them. He might as well quit it all and try again for a Navy commission, as he futilely had once before. A commission would allow him enough pay to support his folks.

A hand on Willie's arm stopped him as he trailed off the floor at dismissal. He turned to look into Gramatky's eager face.

"Coach's gone," the blond husky said. "What was that you were goin' to show me about foul shootin'?"

Some of the other boys who were still hanging around, came up. Willie thought for a moment, hesitated.

"What the hell!" urged a thin chap Willie had heard called McCrae. "Our time is our own now. We know you taught the Jewelers plenty. We'd like to pick some things up too."

Willie showed them. In the next two weeks he added many more spare moments. The kids were so eager and willing, it made Willie feel warm. But the break had to come.

It came the next Friday night. The Oilers were playing the Acme Insurance five. In the last minutes of play, the Oilers led 34-32. The lead had changed hands a dozen times in the contest.

"Freeze the ball!" Easy Mike ordered from the bench.

"Freeze it?" Willie gasped. He knew Mike's idea: The Acmes couldn't score as long as the Oilers were in possession of the ball. But with the uncertain passing of his mates—what a terrific risk!

WILLIE did the closest thing to freezing the ball that he knew. He called for something he'd shown the boys on his own. A figure-eight play. The stall attack employed three men weaving in a figure eight. It created screens near the center line while Kelso and McCrae,

the two forwards, looked for openings to break for the basket.

By thus spreading the defense, Willie cracked through and ran the score up to forty points before the final gun. But he knew he was through even before he met Mike, steaming, at the sidelines. He knew it even before Mike bellowed it, "You're fired, Phelan! Now get the hell out of here!"

"Okay," Willie said calmly. "Okay."

But inside him he felt all hollow and empty. He'd lost another job. And he was the support of his mother and dad. He'd soon have to think about earning cats instead of getting in there against the Jewelers just for satisfaction.

Willie was low when he reported to the plant late the next morning for his severance pay. A well-groomed man came out of an office to meet him. The man wore a flower in his lapel and had a general air of dignity.

"I'm Sam Finney," he announced. "I own this refinery—and so naturally I own the Oilers too."

"Yes" said Willie, so lost in his own misery he hardly heard what was being said.

"I want you to be coach of the Oilers," Finney went on, blandly. "Mike is out as coach. I talked to the boys and they say you know the game. We don't pay much. But if you take over, I'll see what can be done about promoting you on the job. Maybe sometime we may even get some new players. But I won't promise anything."

Willie felt as if the floor had just been yanked from under him. He didn't know if the Oilers were worth a damn. But the day was coming when the Oilers would be in there against the Jewelers—and Bounce Bender. The kids were green—but maybe they were real material. It was a chance. . . .

"You've got yourself a coach," Willie said.

Willie called the boys together in the warehouse gym that night.

"I want you to forget everything you know," he said. "We're gonna revamp our attack and defense. We're gonna learn shooting fundamentals and ball-handling.

There are eight basic passes. We're gonna know and use 'em all. We're gonna shine like no other team in the league. If any of you got any ideas, let's hear 'em. The old days are gone—every man's got a voice on this team."

Willie began stiff drills. He grounded them in timed passing and cutting. He patiently illustrated footwork—stop-turns, reverse-turns, and pivots. As a conditioner and for practice in handling short passes while on the move, he inaugurated use of the Wisconsin Criss-Cross drill. His man-to-man switching defense began to sparkle.

Meanwhile, Willie kept his eye on the newspapers, watching the progress of the Jewelers. The Jewelers were still toppling opposition. Bounce Bender had yet to be stopped.

There was a nice crowd on hand when the Oilers travelled to play the Rollins Furniture quintet the following Wednesday at the Armory. This was a test, Willie knew. He'd know if the Oilers could ever make the grade. The Rollins outfit featured the shooting of lanky Sheldon Vorse, their pivot man, and it had put them second in the league standing.

But Willie soon found the Oilers' style of play was one requiring a lot of drill, and the Furniture hustlers were hot. The hustlers were out front 40-31 when the final cartridge barked. Willie was sorely disappointed. But he was ready for the work that was ahead. He had to see it through.

THEN the next day, Willie got something more to worry about. He'd had his fingers on the pulse of some college openings. This was definitely Frederichs' last year at State Teachers. Willie had put out a feeler for the post, and now he learned that Bounce was angling for it too!

Willie was mournful. "As if I don't already have a reason for making soup and gravy out of his bunch!" he muttered. "When we play the Jewelers, State is almost sure to have a scout in the stands. It won't be only me they'll be looking at—but my team. If we're both phooey . . ."

Willie got permission at the refinery to go in the office and look over the personnel records. He needed real speed on the Oilers if they were to try any fast-break type of play, if they were to win games, but he didn't have speed. He dug up, through the records, Teddy Bright—a kid who'd been a whiz of a player in prep school. He found a dead-eye shot in a mechanic named Ogelsby.

The next game they played Midwest A.C. Ripping off an attack that really got under way, they stunned the noisy adherents of the Midwest. Willie tolled fifteen points, and Kelso ran wild with nineteen. When the boys got back to the locker room, they were all hepped up. They hadn't known they could do it.

Even the press broke down and gave them a writeup. But Feets Kelso, it developed, had torn a back ligament in a sidelines scramble. The Oilers had a game two nights later—a return brush with the Acme Insurance five.

It proved a bang-up wild game, a thriller that the Oilers crawled through to win. But Willie was scared. The team wasn't near right without the gangling Kelso. And the game with the Jewelers was looming close.

Sam Finney burst into the dressing room when the Acme shebang was over. By his own admission, the refinery owner had never been so excited about an Oiler team. He smelled second or third place in the offing. That was practically a championship to the Oilers.

"Without Kelso?" Willie moaned morosely.

"Who knows?" the impeccable Finney declared. "I might even loosen up and buy you a player."

Willie shook his head. "What's the use!" he said. "Anyway, who could you get this late in the season who would do us any good?"

Willie was at his desk in the plant a couple days later when the office boy threw a letter marked *Personal* on his blotter. It was from State Teachers. It said:

We will have a representative down over the week-end of the 23rd to talk over contracts. The field has been narrowed down to

two. Frankly, you have the inside track because the other prospect is asking more money than we'd like to pay.

Our representative is eagerly looking forward to attending the Jeweler-Oiler game.

Willie thought, "So that's Bounce's tactics. When he decides to lower his ante, he'll make them think they're getting a classier article in him!"

Finney dropped in on Willie the next morning. He came in with a rush. He said, "You're gonna hop on me for what I did. It cost me something to wangle, but it will be worth it to me if the Oilers can finish even third in the league."

Finney's smooth face was flushed and he was all aquiver. "I got you one of the sharpest eyes in the game. I got him from the Jewelers—after I convinced them it wouldn't weaken them much at all since they had a swell sub in a fellow named Moscovicz. I sold 'em on the idea it wouldn't make a threat out of us anyway. And their man Dinter liked the price I put up."

Willie held his breath.

"I got Bounce Bender," Finney said. "Your old teammate. He's waiting downstairs."

Willie caught the edge of his desk to steady himself. "You're foolin'!" he gasped thickly. But he knew Finney was not fooling.

Downstairs, Bounce was waiting. His grin was reckless, taunting. "I'm glad to play with you, Willie. I hope you're not sore or anything."

Willie said dazedly, "Listen. We're out to win. Everything else is second to that. Report for practice at the warehouse at seven-fifteen tonight."

BUT all the glue and fire was out of Willie. Bounce had stolen a job out from under him once before? What was to stop him now from ruining this game and Willie's chanees with State Teachers? Bounce was out to get that job for himself!

And it looked exactly as if that was in the offing when Bounce took the floor with the Oilers against the Orioles. It was the last game before the big Jewelers set-to.

Willie took up his position at forward, conscious that Bounce was in there teaming with him. Gramatky, the big-muscled, blond behemoth was at pivot. McCrae and Bright were at guard.

The referee's whistle shrilled. The centers tensed. The ball went up. The Oriole jumper touched leather first. He tapped it to his right forward. But Willie had seen the move telegraphed and he was off like a shot. He looped in to knock the ball to Bounce.

Bounce took it and moved to the sideline, but he didn't return the ball to Willie until he was crowded.

Willie called, "Break fast! Break fast!" which was a signal that meant to try a Three-In-and-Two-Out formation.

He faked the ball to Bounce, but threw it to Bright. Gramatky moved down toward the free-throw lane for the play, and Bright bounce-passed to Bounce. It was time for the set to work. Bright moved in fast to take the leather—but Bounce did not give it to him. Instead, Bounce dribbled low, back toward the center line, turned before his guard could cover him and threw the ball at the basket without half looking.

The ball whooshed through without touching the rim.

The fans rocked with excitement. Willie signalled the referee. His whistle blared. The Oilers huddled.

Willie said, "What's the idea, Bounce? You heard the play called."

Bounce grinned faintly. "I got it in, didn't I? These boys play tight. I saw the set you called wouldn't work. Then I saw another opening."

Willie said, "Okay. Just remember next time there are five players on the team."

That was the only hint of what was coming that Bounce gave that night. The Oilers led by one point at the half. They went on to play careful, tight ball, not wasting their shots. Bounce was as careful as any of them.

Then, with only minutes left in the game, the Oriole attack went into high gear and the Oilers fell to pieces. The Orioles chalked up six points in less than two minutes, and led 28-25 at the gun. The game was over.

The Oilers were stunned. They looked at the referee, at the Oriole players. Then they began to troop dejectedly off the boards. Nobody said anything. Willie felt a tight ache in his throat.

Bounce looked darkly about at his teammates in the dressing room. No one made a move to unlace shoes.

"It was a bonehead style of play!" he suddenly exploded. "That's why we lost. You're all a bunch of boobs when you look at a basket. You won't shoot unless that's what it says in the book. Or unless it's what Willie told you."

Gramatky started up, headed for Bounce. Willie grabbed Gramatky's arm, dragged him back.

Little Ellis Jorgens popped in the breach. "So we lost one. So what? The Jewelers are still ahead of us. We can still knock those diamond-hawkers out of first spot and put ourselves in third."

Bounce sulked, but the others came to life.

"So we won't tie for second place!" Red Dennis had his best Irish grin. "We're still playin' better ball than anybody in the league!"

The period of let-down was over, but Willie was not too cheered. He was thinking of the Jewelers. The Oilers had played a pretty good game against an inferior Oriole team, and still they had lost. The one bright spot was that Bounce seemed to be clicking. If he could call that a bright spot, considering that Bounce wasn't cooperating and that he was out to snag the coaching spot at State.

The Jewelers game was the last of the pro season. The Jewelers were now a swaggering and puffed-up lot. They had bright plans of tipping over the Oilers and hemstitching the league championship.

A TALL, broad man with a flattened nose and a gold football dangling from his watch chain, introduced himself to Willie on the floor before the game. He shook hands. He was A. V. Ballard, athletic director of State Teachers.

Sam Finney, tears of emotion in his eyes, said, "Take this game, Willie. I know you can."

The little Oiler owner had been so swell, Willie could not help but feel that he wanted to squeeze this victory—if only for him. The second-place Rollins team had won the night before. That gave the Oilers a definite chance to knock the Jewelers off the top rung. But the Jewelers, Willie knew, had something to say about that.

The gym was a bedlam. Willie called for a last-second huddle. Bounce Bender was silent, drawn. Every Oiler was.

"Play just like we been playin'," Willie said, running anxious fingers through his short-cropped hair. "Teamwork. Fast, snappy play. Now let's go."

Gramatky faced off with Lank Smith, the leather poised between them. Lank was high as a tree, and kangaroos were in his shoes. He was a jumping giant with soft blue eyes.

Up went the ball, and Lank tapped it agilely to Moskowicz, Jeweler forward. The Oilers deployed quickly to the defense. The Jewelers cracked out a rapid-dribbling game.

They shuttled the ball in a lightning criss-cross. Red Dennis hounded Lank relentlessly as a pivot play was in the making. But Lank unscrewed with a hooker at the free-throw line, and in plunked the ball 2-0.

Willie called the play on the Oiler's ball. The Jewelers used a man-to-man "shifting" defense. The ball went to Bounce. But as Bounce moved in to take advantage of a screen by Willie, he found a Jeweler right on top of him to tie him up. The Jewelers took possession on the jump and Bounce scowled his disgust.

Willie saw Bounce glance up toward the stands where the State Teacher's scout was watching. A Jeweler guard moved in, made good an opening.

It was 4-0—Jewelers!

Bounce came into possession of the ball. Willie signalled the play, but instead of following it, Bounce went into a routine of his own. Spraddling out in a sudden stop, Bounce pulled a reverse-turn, eluding his guard. Bounce dribbled into open range. For a split-second he was unguarded, but in poor position. He hurried his shot—but the ball dropped through!

Willie eyed Bounce, but said nothing. In a few minutes more the Jewelers had rung up eleven points to give them fifteen. Bounce bagged two more baskets. But he was deliberately running counter to Oiler play!

Bounce tried one more wild shot, and missed. Willie went after him. "What's the idea? Don't you know we'll lose if you play this game by yourself?"

Bounce said, "We're not gonna win any other way. I'm out to save what part of this game I can—for me."

"I'll bench you."

"You can't bench me," Bounce declared. "I'm the hottest man on the team. Who'd you put in instead of me?"

Willie raised a hand to the referee, spoke a few words.

"Bender off," the referee called.

Bounce gave Willie a baleful look, swore under his breath. Little Ellis Jorgens came in. The stands jittered with new excitement, in wonder at the substitution.

Jorgens was small, but speedy. Willie shunted himself to pivot, and called the plays around himself. He relied on fast ball-handling and deception. He began to burn up the court. He sank a trio, and made good a free throw. Willie glanced over at the bench. Bounce was ready to explode.

The half ended with the Oilers within four points of the Jewelers, but Willie knew he couldn't go on this way. For the sake of team discipline, could he rob Bounce of his chance to show his stuff to the State Teachers' scout in the stands?

BOUNCE got to Willie on the way down to the dressing room. His fists were clenched. "So you're still sore about my having got your berth on the Jewelers! This is the way you take it out on me. You bench me so you can make yourself a star."

"Don't be crazy!"

"You can't keep me benched!" Bounce shouted. "The boss won't stand for it. If you think you can bench me just to get the inside track on the State job—"

Willie stared at Bounce, studied his tight face. One of the many things he'd

thought before, in trying to excuse Bounce, came to him. "You're married, aren't you, Bounce? Got a wife and a kid?"

"What in hell's that got to do with it?"

Willie was silent, "I don't want that State job." Willie said suddenly. "I'll turn it down if it's offered me. You can have it, if that's what you're after, Bounce. I don't give a damn about it. But I want to win this game. I want to win it for a man who was decent enough to put me in charge of his team. I want to win it for a bunch of fellows who plugged along with me from the word go, and who don't know what a real win is like. I'll put you back in there, Bounce. I'll feed you the ball. I'll give you all your damn glory!"

Bounce held silent for a moment. Then: "Nuts!" he said. "Nuts to you and all that stuff! If you put me in—it's because you got to."

But Bounce was smiling crookedly, a little self-consciously, as he said it. Willie saw sweat gleaming on his forehead.

The Oilers were full of spit and vinegar. They talked it up heatedly with Bounce back in the game. Time and time again Willie called Bounce's number, and now the plays were clicking. Bounce wasn't grandstanding. He was playing hard, fast, serious ball. He wasn't looking up to where the State Teachers' scout was sitting. He didn't have to.

Willie was spoon-feeding him the balls by which he eclipsed Willie Phelan's game!

Bounce more than matched every goal of lanky Lank Smith and Mosky Moscowicz. But the time was sifting short, and the Oilers still trailed by three points. Little fingers of fear began to clutch at Willie's heart.

The Jewelers had the ball. Lank eluded Red Dennis, and Jeweler machinery meshed. A Jeweler guard charged down the center, took a short underhand pass. There was a scramble, but out of the melee Lank emerged, pushing the sphere up toward the cash-box. It loafed on the rim.

Gramatky leaped in and batted the ball at Red as the ball dropped off. Bounce

took the pass from Red and charged down the sideline. He pulled up in the far corner, looking for a free man. He hesitated as two Jewelers charged him.

"Shoot!" Willie yelled.

The ball flipped up from Bounce's hands as if that cry had sprung it. It swished neatly through the eords.

Bounce grinned. Sweat pasted his shirt to his body. A point behind, and only minutes to play.

Then the Jewelers hurried through to catch the Oilers flatfooted, and tallied. The crowd was berserk! The Jewelers had their three points again!

A scramble under the Oiler's basket ate up valuable seconds. The Oilers shot and shot again, desperately hurrying their shots. Maddeningly, they rolled off the rim. Then Gramatky leaped up to push a wavering shot in!

Less than a minute to play. The Jewelers tried to stall, but Willie charged in to knock the ball into Oiler hands. The Oilers hurried, panicked. The Jewelers were desperate. They clung like leeches.

Bounce, dribbling fast, was suddenly clear. But he was at mid-floor. He hesitated. The chance for glory or defeat was with that ball. The time-keeper's gun was lifting. Then Bounce passed the ball to Willie, who'd cut for the basket!

Willie soared with the shot. The gun exploded. But the ball dropped through as thunder shook the gym.

At the locker room, Bounce said, "Willie, there's some tall guy with a broken nose who wants to see you. There's some others with him. He's probably got that State job contract."

Willie started to go. Bounce stopped him. "You put me in the game. You gave me the ball—and you didn't give a damn what. Willie, you make me feel like a heel. I loused you out of a job once."

Willie stared at him. "Nuts," he said. "Forget it."

Willie went out. When he came back several minutes later, he was carrying a legal-looking document in his hands.

"It looks like we sure enough played a smash-hit game tonight," Willie an-

nounced, and he could not hide the twinkle in his eyes as he looked at each of his players in turn.

"Le's go with a cheer for Willie," Bounce said. "That's a contract to coach State."

"No, not this one," said Willie quickly. "I turned that one down. That offer is still yours for the taking, Bounce. I meant what I said. This is a Navy commission I got here. There was an officer out there in the stands. It's something about basketball in the Navy, boys. As you all

might know, pro basketball is about washed up. The really big stuff ahead is with Uncle Sam!"

Bounce was quiet a moment. Then: "Yokahama, here I come!" he said.

Willie swelled proudly. "You coming along, Curly-top?" He hardly had to ask.

"Like an Oiler-guard does after his man!" Bounce smiled contentedly. "Them State farmers can wait!" The promise was echoed by half a dozen other voices.

Willie was smiling too. He knew then he really had himself a team.



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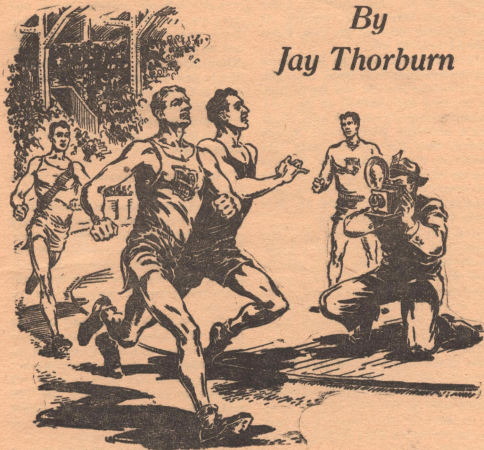
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Eddie Stuart had just enough drive in his legs to make him a . . .

Stooge for a Spike King

By
Jay Thorburn



THERE were two laps to go and there was still plenty of spring left in Eddie Stuart's legs. Eddie hit the turn wide and rolled into the straightaway, holding the third slot.

The boards itched under Eddie's flying feet. It was the "let-down" lap, that brief respite before the gun sent the runners winging into the payoff stretch. But Eddie felt strong and tireless. He wanted to turn on the heat, give the field the business and let them worry about catching him.

Eddie's footsteps started to pound a little harder, faster. The beat of his stride was going up. Eddie began closing the gap between him and the wide-shouldered runner in front of him. The crowd let out a howl. But it faded suddenly. Bat Nordell gave Eddie a quick glance over his shoulder. It was more than a glance. It was a demand that Eddie soften up his pace.

Eddie and Bat Nordell were Olyphant A. C. entries. Only because Bat had made that possible did Eddie sport the colors

of that swanky organization. Bat had picked him up, handed him over to Doc Hansen's coaching, and almost over night Eddie was up there running the mile in the big time. But Eddie was apparently not running it in a way that pleased Bat Nordell. Doc Hansen had told Eddie to lay back, to get some experience under his belt and forget about winning. At this advanced stage of the race, Eddie believed he could win.

The pack went into the backstretch and the crowd sat back, tense, expectant. In the number one slot was Marty Hudlin, his long legs gobbling up the yardage and setting a good, even pace. Marty was a notorious front-runner. Nobody doubted that Bat Nordell could take Marty any time he wanted to. Bat was kingpin of the milers. It was thrilling but certainly old stuff seeing him come shooting from behind to show his heels to the field in the homestretch.

Eddie felt shackled in third place. Doc Hansen had told him to look for a faster, harder pace. Apparently, Doc's calculations were off the beam. Steady, drumming feet beat in Eddie's ears. Eddie had an idea that they belonged to Chuck Oliver, the wing-footed Biltmore A. C. runner.

There was a good lap and a half to go when Chuck Oliver ripped past Eddie. The pace had suddenly become hot and board-scorching. Bat Nordell and Marty Hudlin were out in front running shoulder to shoulder. Eddie couldn't lay back any longer. He made his challenge, striking for the lead.

The gun banged and Eddie found himself in the rut. One lap to go. It would take plenty of fast stepping to catch Chuck Oliver and get back in the race. Chuck's sudden burst of speed had slapped a terrific handicap on Eddie. The pack flew into the first turn and Eddie kept feeding the legs more juice. It was then that the pangs began biting at Eddie's lungs.

He tore into the backstretch and the pursuit of the leaders seemed to be a hopeless one. At the front of the parade, Bat Nordell and Marty Hudlin were battling it out and leaving a terrific gap

between them and Eddie. But Eddie was game. His long, powerful strides cut deeper into the open space. But it was too late. Eddie realized that when he drove down the homestretch.

The fire in his lungs was a living thing now. It ran down his waist and put daggers in the heavy, dragging things that were his legs. But Eddie kept driving. There was still some kick in his finish and he caught and passed Chuck Oliver fifteen yards from the tape. In front of him he saw a figure wobble, strain forward and then drop back. That was Marty Hudlin. Eddie nosed up on Hudlin, tried to slam past him. But Hudlin had enough left to stagger over the finish in second place.

EDDIE had to swerve to his left to avoid smacking into Marty Hudlin because Hudlin's legs buckled under him. The guy went down, collapsing a yard over the line. Eddie let himself run down, jogging twenty yards. Then a small guy, bald, and wrinkled around the eyes, trotted over and threw Eddie his sweat pants and jersey. The little guy was Doc Hansen.

"You got legs but no brains," Doc said tartly. "You forgot everything you knew and ran it your own way. Okay, don't listen to nobody. Go ahead and be a chump."

Eddie shook his head, puzzled. "I couldn't lay back any longer, Doc," he said. "The traveling was slower than I expected. So I let loose. But it was too late."

Doc Hansen's lips crackled in a cynical laugh. "Pretty soon you'll be telling me that you could have taken Bat. The guy's outa your class, fella."

Doc turned his back to Eddie, walked away. A burst of handclapping attracted Eddie's attention. He looked down at the finish line and saw the circle of officials and runners gathered there. The circle broke and Marty Hudlin walked out of it. Marty had finally come around. Eddie sidled up to Bat Nordell standing on the outer fringe of the onlookers.

"The guy really knocked himself out trying to take you," Eddie commented. "He missed but he made it interesting."

Bat Nordell was a dark, dead-panned guy. However, the story his eyes told was quite different. They were narrowed and there was almost a fierce glow in them.

"Hudlin wanted a race and he got one," Bat said. "He got the stuffing run out of him. Maybe he won't be so anxious to try again."

Eddie felt a little chill at Bat's flat, cold-blooded statement. There was something about him Eddie didn't quite get. Away from Doc Hansen, the guy seemed to be a regular lone wolf. For the first time that coldness began to rub under Eddie's skin. He didn't like the rough, unsportsmanlike crack about Marty Hudlin.

Eddie was standing there a bit perplexed when Chuck Oliver sauntered over. Chuck put out his hand to Eddie.

"I see Bat is breaking you in to play stooge for him," Chuck said. "You couldn't copped the run tonight. But you don't run to win when you're working for Bat."

"You'd better come again on that one," Eddie said, frowning. "Bat has done a lot for me. But he's never asked for any help from me. He can take care of himself on the boards."

Chuck laughed. "You'll smarten up," he said dryly. "But for your sake I hope you get hep while you've still got a good pair of legs under you."

Eddie walked into a scene that was not pretty in the dressing room. Marty Hudlin was there and Marty was steaming under the collar. Marty was saying:

"You'll get yours yet, Bat. You're on your way down—and fast. Those pins of yours won't win you many more medals."

"You had your chance tonight and you muffed it," Bat retorted. "I'll always be good enough to whip you, Marty. The next crack you get at me you'll be wearing some other outfit's colors. You're through at the Olyphant A. C."

"Sure, I'm through," Marty said bitterly. "You've got the kid now to be your new plughorse. And when you burn him out, you'll find another. It's happened before me and it'll happen after me."

Bat switched his sights to Eddie, then back to Marty again.

"If Eddie has the stuff, he'll go places," he said firmly. "I didn't hold you back, Marty. You just didn't have the stuff."

Marty Hudlin turned to Eddie. "Hullo, sucker," he said. "So you're Bat's newest protégé. Well, don't take too many lead nickels. That's all Bat passes out. But even they've got a string on 'em."

Marty closed the door hard behind him. Bat never blinked an eye. Bat looked at Eddie.

"That was a punk race you ran out there," he said. "I think you'd better do what Doc tells you the next time."

Eddie was silent a moment. In the last half hour he had learned a lot about Bat Nordell. Eddie wasn't going to make the mistake of letting Bat shove him around. Eddie said:

"I don't know what this is all about, Bat. Maybe you're all right and the other guys are all wrong. But somebody once told me that there are two sides to every argument. I haven't heard much of your side of this one. I'll play ball and dig out the answers and make up my own mind."

Doc Hansen stepped in front of Eddie, stuck his bald head almost in Eddie's face.

"Why, you lousy, flat-footed bum," Doc said excitedly. "You can walk out any time you want and nobody will miss you. You ought to be grateful but you're turning out to be another Marty Hudlin."

Doc said more, but Bat finally cut him short, waving a silencing hand in front of him.

"Doc gets excited once in a while, kid," Bat said. "You make up your own mind on things."

THE next day a newspaper columnist let loose a blast at Bat Nordell. The fact was that Marty Hudlin had gotten to the columnist and given him a lot of "inside" dope that made hot copy. The newspaperman had in turn really thrown the whole book at Bat. Eddie read every word of the write-up. He wanted to get the details, find out more about the set-up in which he was involved.

The story ran that Marty had been Bat's pacemaker. Champion that Bat was, he couldn't figure pace. He needed a guy

to go out in front and level off the pace to his liking. Bat's price to his stooge consisted of a guarantee of membership in the ritzy Olyphant A. C. Bat also provided a job through a wealthy member of the association. And when Bat burned out one hopeful, he was usually quick to find a replacement. Exit Marty Hudlin and enter Eddie Stuart.

Eddie mulled the whole situation over in his mind. Even if he wanted to, it wouldn't be a simple matter to walk out on Bat. Perhaps it was part of Bat Nordell's plan to tie his stooge up with a job and make him feel knee deep in obligations. Nevertheless, Eddie did feel indebted to Bat and Pop Hansen. Between them, they had sliced seconds off his time, smoothed out his running form. Double that with the job connection that Bat had helped Eddie to make and that spelled some sort of loyalty on Eddie's part.

The next time that Eddie toed the mark was in a minor meet. He followed Doc Hansen's instructions and finished third. With the top-notchers passing that one up, Bat loafed out an easy triumph. Eddie couldn't help but feel that he could have given Bat a run for his money. Time and again he had to repel the urge to unshackle himself and turn on the heat. Eddie had plenty left when he finished that mile run.

The same thing happened in Eddie's next few times out. Eddie began to sniff something. Bat Nordell had the sucker-bait out somewhere along the line. Eddie was almost convinced that he could beat Bat Nordell. Eddie had been studying Bat's clockings, keeping an eye peeled on his every maneuver. Bat didn't seem to have his old fireball kick in the stretch. Nor did Bat seem to be running with the same precision that he had when Marty Hudlin was pacing him to victories.

It was several days before an important invitation meet in Philly that Bat Nordell brought up the point of front-running and it came as no surprise to Eddie. All during the practice runs of the previous week, Doc had Eddie pacing Bat.

"I want you to change your tactics in the Philly run," Bat said. "You'll grab the lead and try to hold it. Doc will tell you

how he wants the quarters clocked. You do what Doc tells you and I'll do the rest."

Well, here it was. The chips were on the line and Bat needed a pacemaker to pull him through so that he could hit the turns and straightaways on schedule. That Bat should come out so blatantly with his demand galled Eddie. But he had been expecting this and Eddie had his own answer. An answer that would write off the books the double-cross that Bat had dished to the others.

"Okay, it's a deal," Eddie said evenly. "I'll do your dirty work for you, Bat. I'll get out in front and you'll have to run your legs off to whip me. I'll be running to win because this is the payoff between you and me. When it's over, I'm turning in my resignation at the club and I can worry about another job. I'd rather have it that way."

Bat gave Eddie that dead-pan stare. "Marty Hudlin tried something like that," he said coolly. "Only he wasn't nice enough to warn me about it in advance. He preferred the double-cross method. But he didn't lick me and neither did his pals and I don't think you will. We'll see."

There wasn't a single empty seat in the huge indoor track arena when the call came for the mile run. They were all there, the best milers in the business. Chuck Oliver drew the pole position and Eddie got the spot beside him. Chuck grinned at Eddie.

"I hear you ain't working for Bat tonight," he said. "The word is that you're going to set a hotter pace than Bat will like. Maybe if things get tough in there, somebody might happen to box Bat up or even bump him. Those things have happened before."

"None of that stuff" Eddie snapped. "I'm running to win but nobody gives Bat the business. Get that straight."

They lined up. The starter said, "On your marks."

The gun sent the six-man field lurching forward. Eddie got off to a flying start. He sprinted fifty yards, grabbed the lead and eased off. He fell into a smooth, methodical stride that gobbled up chunks of

yardage. It was a tough, fast pace that Eddie set right from the opening gun. But it was no faster than the clocking Doc Hansen had set down for Eddie. That puzzled Eddie, Doc's call on the time of his quarters. Doc was asking him to do faster quarters than the pace Bat ordinarily wanted.

EDDIE pushed that thought out of his mind. Doc Hansen had Bat's interest at heart, and whatever was up Doc's sleeve was certain to work to Bat's advantage. The field moved up, maintaining a sizzling pace. It was an open secret that Eddie was out to burn up the boards and win. Nobody meant to let Eddie steal a beat on them.

Twice around the boards and Eddie widened his lead to ten yards over Marty Hudlin. Then trailed Chuck Oliver and Bat in that order. The other threat in the field was Leo Caldwell, the Midwestern record breaker.

Eddie was running loose and easy. He heard the crowd's throaty roar and knew his time for the half mile was plenty fast. Going into the backstretch of the next lap, steel bands began fastening around Eddie's legs. There was a terrific pull in his chest that threw off a hot, burning sensation.

Eddie fought doggedly to hold his pace. Heavy footsteps pounded behind him, then faded. Again they came on and again Eddie met the challenge with a steel heart, refusing to falter. One by one the runners made their bid, only to drop back into the pack. Eddie's chest began to pound from the pace. Soon his ears picked up the steady, driving steps that were moving up on him. Eddie sensed that the runner was Bat Nordell. Then he knew it.

Bat Nordell was coming on and the mob was going berserk. Shoulder to shoulder, Eddie and Bat were hammering down the homestretch, neither runner yielding an inch to the other. The tape stretched thirty yards ahead. Eddie's stride was jerky and he weaved from side to side. He kept driving, driving toward that goal. Then Eddie was running alone. He ran five more yards and the tape broke across his chest. He felt himself falling.

Hands reached out, grabbed him. Then Doc Hansen had Eddie, and put him on the boards.

The blur cleared from Eddie's eyes. He got to his feet and Doc kept a steady hand on him, leading him to the dressing room. Eddie tried to say something, but Doc pressed a finger to his lips. He maneuvered Eddie over to the rubbing board, and Eddie stretched out on it.

A few minutes later Bat Nordell came into the room. Bat had a big grin on his face.

"I've got me a real protégé now," Bat chortled. "Hey, Doc, did you see the way Eddie let me have it in the stretch. I knew then I had the kind of protégé I've been looking for."

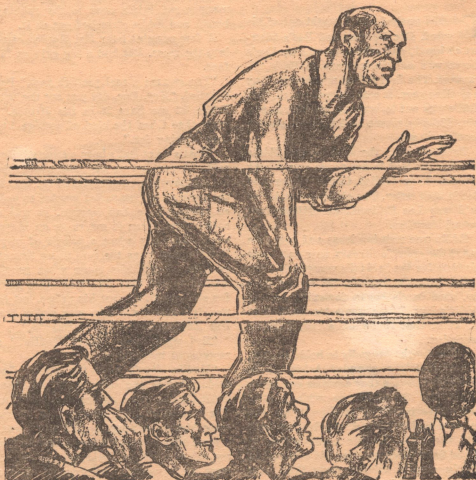
"That's what Bat's been wanting," Doc said. "A protégé—a guy who could take his place when he stepped down. Call it the pride of a champ. Bat wanted to pass on the stuff he had learned. It was a notion first. Then it got to be an obsession. Especially when a couple of guys Bat thought were the real thing flopped on him. It got him down when people started to say that Bat used these guys for stooges. Bat's past his prime, but he wouldn't retire while he was under fire. But Eddie solved all that tonight."

"But what about Marty Hudlin?" a newspaper man asked.

"Hudlin didn't have the stuff," Bat said. "It was the same with the other guys. Hudlin was a natural front-runner. The guy after him happened to be the same kind of runner. So the story went around that I needed a pacemaker to win my old age. Maybe I did sometimes. Almost every runner who goes out after a record needs one. Those were the times, I had Hudlin pace me. But Hudlin thought he was being abused. He pulled a double-cross and tried to set me up for Chuck Oliver to take. That's why I got rid of Hudlin."

Doc Hansen said, "Funny thing about it is that the kink in Eddie's running was his pacing. So we got him to hold back his kick in the other races. But we knew he was ready for this one. He showed that tonight. Of course, Bat had to get him a little sore to turn the trick."

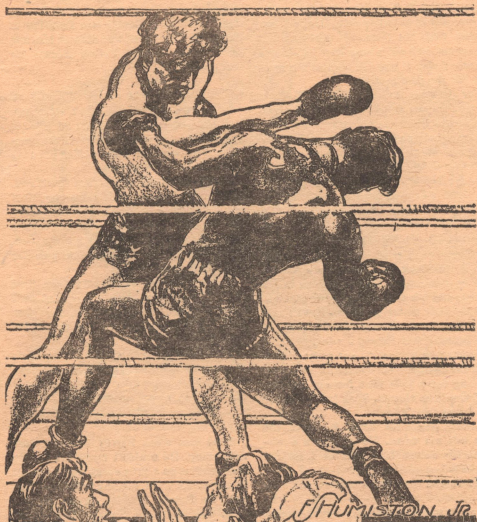
Kill the Champ!



Great Prizefight Novelet

Rowdy Madden hammered his way to a champion's crown by a fluke kayo—a kayo that made him the most hated ring king in history. And while the fight crowd screamed for his blood, he could not know that he would have to meet the battered ex-champ again to learn a ring lesson that would stick.

By Duane Yarnell



CHAPTER I

ROWDY MADDEN had had plenty of warning. For three years they had been saying, "When you think you've got the champ wide open, watch out! That open jaw ain't a target. It's knockout bait!"

Rowdy Madden was in there against the champ and for three rounds he had done all right. But now, suddenly, he saw

an opening. The champ's jaw was uncovered.

Or so Rowdy Madden thought.

Rowdy threw a roundhouse from the balcony seats. The champ stepped in close, bobbed his head. Rowdy's roundhouse whistled over the champ's shoulder. His momentum carried him up against the champ's body. He pushed out his left to take the shock of the contact.

That was his mistake. The champ tied

that left with his own. Rowdy Madden didn't see the right. Not until it was six inches in front of his eyes. The right came whistling up from the floor. Rowdy tried to roll. But it wasn't fast enough.

Bam! The leather-covered fist landed at the point of Rowdy's chin. His feet lost contact with the floor. He came up off the canvas and did a neat backflip. When he came down, it was the back of his neck that hit the canvas first.

For just an instant Rowdy Madden thought he was lying on a boat deck and a powerful light was blazing in his eyes. Then the boat stopped rocking and somebody reached up and turned out the light.

Rowdy didn't know how much later it was. He thought the ship was sinking. His face was wet and it seemed that waves were slopping against it. His mouth had a salt taste. His stomach was doing a loop. He felt like hell.

A bee buzzed past his ear. It annoyed him. Rowdy Madden opened his eyes and then he understood. He was sitting in his corner, and his manager, Frosty Brown, was sloshing water in his face. The salt taste was blood. Rowdy Madden's blood. The buzzing was Frosty's voice.

Frosty was saying, "I got you a match with the champ. You wanted it. You been bawling for a title shot for six months. And then you blow it. That bell certainly saved you then."

Rowdy shook his head. Some of the fuzz left his mind. He sat there a moment, his young face twisted from the simple effort of thinking.

"It looked like a sure knockout," he said.

Frosty swore and his eyes were glacial. "The champ don't leave himself open," he said bitterly, "I been tellin' you that."

Rowdy said, "What round is it?"

Frosty frowned. "That bad, hunh?"

Rowdy Madden tried to remember. He couldn't. He wished Frosty Brown would go easier on him. Sometimes he wondered why he'd ever signed up with a guy like Frosty. A fight manager could do a fighter a lot of good if he knew how to be sympathetic. Frosty Brown couldn't be that way. The rougher it was on Rowdy, the more bitter Frosty always got.

Frosty said, "It's fourth round. Coming up, Remember?"

Rowdy thought it over. He didn't remember. The champ had really belted him. Rowdy sat back and closed his eyes again. Frosty was talking, but Rowdy wasn't listening. Rowdy was listening to the crowd. The crowd was against him and somehow he blamed Frosty Brown for that, too.

THE crowd was saying, "That's all for the pop-off kid! He's kill-crazy. But the champ's taking care of him. A guy can be kill-crazy against a stumble-bum. But tonight Rowdy Madden's in there against the champ!"

Rowdy Madden sighed. They hated him. Thanks to Frosty. But some day they wouldn't hate him. Some day he'd prove that he had the stuff to wear the mantle of champion of the heavyweight division. Some day he'd make them see him for what he was.

Rowdy Madden was twenty-four. He'd been a heavy for three years, and he'd come up fast, considering the fact that he'd had to figure out a lot of things for himself.

He'd been halfway up the ladder when the war started and that would have been the end of it, except for one thing. Rowdy Madden had a mother and three kid sisters. They needed the dough that Rowdy's fights would bring in.

That was when Rowdy Madden went half crazy. He couldn't make his family independent on a fight every three months in some tank town. He had to hit the jackpot. So Rowdy Madden began saying, "Get me up there, Frosty. Get me in there with the champ! I'm gonna fight my way to the title and then I'm gonna get into the army! We gotta do it fast, Frosty!"

Frosty was willing. Frosty played the horses and he liked to buy bubble water for the dolls. That took money. Frosty began to work Rowdy hard and often. Rowdy did the rest.

Rowdy began to try for knockouts. He began to pile up a record. He took care of them fast and early. He didn't stall. He just went in there and made his own

openings. Then he cut them down. One round, two rounds . . . three at most. A right to the jaw, a left to the head. One by one, he cut them down.

Somewhere along the line Frosty Brown began to grow expansive. "Another Dempsey," he'd tell the press. "The guy's got executioner blood in his veins. Lookit what he done to the last guy! He murdered 'im!"

The press began to talk about Rowdy Madden. They listened to the things Brown had to say and they printed them. Frosty was laying the groundwork for that title fight. He was building Rowdy into a killer.

The press did the rest. The press quoted Rowdy, when it was Frosty talking. "Get me the champ! I'll murder him! I'll tear him apart!"

Rowdy didn't like it. He didn't like anything about it. He wanted the champ and he was taking the short cuts. The championship was important. But he didn't like the bloody way Frosty was putting it.

"Lay off," he'd tell Frosty. "I'm no killer. I'm just a fighter with a job to do."

"I'm building a gate. Let 'em hate you. That'll make it a better gate when you do get the champ! I'm dein' all right by you!"

Well, Frosty had done all right. He had made them hate Rowdy Madden. He had made them look forward to the day when he would be in there against the champ. Tonight they had come in droves and had paid heavy sugar to see the show. And tonight, after three rounds, Rowdy Madden was reeling. The pop-off kid was paying for all the things he'd said. That was what the crowd thought. . . .

The buzzer sounded. Rowdy was impatient. Frosty was trying to tell him what to do. Rowdy swung around on him. His brown face was angry.

"Listen," he flared, "when you're out there with the champ, you can't follow a script. You do the best you can and let it go at that. Shut up, Frosty!"

Rowdy Madden heard the bell. He got up, went shuffling out. He studied the champ. Marty Allen was about Rowdy's size and build. A six-footer with long,

smooth-muscle arms and power in the shape of his shoulders. Marty Allen had been around a long time. But his face didn't show it. That face was almost unmarked. Marty Allen was that kind of a champion. The kind who knew how to protect himself.

The crowd screamed, "Get that kill-crazy kid, Marty!"

The champ closed in, went to work on Rowdy's body. Rowdy tried to cover. But the champ was clever. He got inside Rowdy's guard, rattled his belly with a left and right. He blocked Rowdy's counter punches and danced away again. Smooth, the champ. Rowdy had a fighter's admiration for the way the champ worked.

They sparred for an opening. Rowdy Madden tried to concentrate on the champ, but the crowd bothered him. The crowd was screaming at the champ, demanding that he put Rowdy away. The champ wasn't being influenced, though. He was dancing around, waiting for an opening.

ROWDY blocked a left and fired his right. He connected with the champ's neck, jolted him. The champ tried to cover but Rowdy pressed him. He followed the advantage, lashed out with left and right to the head before the champ could hang on.

For an instant they were locked in an embrace. The champ dug his chin in Rowdy's neck. But Rowdy didn't hate the guy for it. He could not hate the champ. Marty Allen was a decent guy.

Ordinarily, the champ didn't ride his opponents in the tie-ups. But tonight the champ was tired. The champ had taken his entire life's earnings and he'd bought an annuity for his kids. He was going to enlist at a buck private's salary. But he had one thing to do first—turn over a million bucks to the Army Relief fund. The champ wanted to do something big like that.

For six months he'd toured the country. Fighting as often as he could arrange a fight—turning over all his dough to the Relief Fund. Tonight he was fighting his last challenger. Rowdy Madden was pret-

ty far down on the list of eligibles—but Rowdy had wanted a chance at the heavyweight crown and the champ had been big enough to give it to him.

That was why Rowdy couldn't hate the guy. The champ had worked hard and he'd laid his title on the line at every meeting with an opponent. He'd turned over his dough to the army fund, asking nothing but the satisfaction of giving the crowd a good show.

That was the champ. Rowdy wanted to whip him, but down inside he had to admire the guy.

The ref broke that tie-up and then, for an instant, Rowdy Madden thought he saw an opening. He forgot his previous experience. The champ's chin was uncovered. Rowdy cocked his right and swung it.

Bam! Rowdy landed the right. And then, suddenly, he was on the back of his neck again.

The ring was spinning crazily and Rowdy was holding on to the floor with both hands. His mouth was bleeding again. It felt like a piece of raw steak. He tried to get up but he couldn't. Rowdy swore at himself for stepping into that trap. But it was too late to do anything about it.

The ref was counting. "... four ... five ... six. ..."

Rowdy heard the scream of the crowd, the delirium of it. "Where's the kill-crazy kid? He's yellah! He's had enough!"

That did something to Rowdy. He shoved hard on his arms, and his chest came off the canvas. The blood was pouring fast from his mouth and he saw the ref take a step toward him.

Rowdy yelled, "I'm okay! Don't stop it!"

The ref said, "... eight ... nine. ..."

Rowdy shoved again and he was up. But the ring was still spinning. He saw the champ move toward him. The champ's eyes were steady now, and his arm was cocked. There was a blur of fog around the champ's body. It was like a picture out of focus.

The champ stepped in close and swung. Rowdy was too far gone to do anything but take it. The blow landed glancingly.

Then, swiftly, something happened. Rowdy didn't see it. He was in too much of a fog. But the crowd saw it. The champ had stepped in for the kill. But his ring shoe had hit the little slick spot on the canvas where Rowdy had lain bleeding. The champ had tried to catch himself, but he was off balance. His arms went up to grab a rope. His jaw was completely uncovered and he was falling away from Rowdy Madden.

Rowdy Madden moved instinctively. He did not question that opening. He knew only that it was there. Somewhere a little bell rang a warning in his mind. He threw everything he had. He hit the champ as he was falling toward the ropes. It was not a hard punch, but it sent the champ sprawling between the ropes.

The champ went out backwards. His head banged the corner of a sports writer's typewriter. A blue gash turned quickly red above the champ's temple. He kept falling, slid off the edge of the press table and landed on his head upon the concrete floor. The crowd's silence thundered like a gathering storm. A woman screamed.

The ref, bewildered at first, counted the champ out. The champ was down on his face and his eyes were closed. The ref conferred quickly with the boxing commissioners. Their faces were white, their eyes bitter. They nodded very unenthusiastically. The ref came over, held the bewildered Rowdy Madden's hand above his head. He said, tightly:

"The winnah—and new champeen of the world—Rowdy Madden!"

Rowdy felt a burst of wild elation. He'd done it. It was too early for him to wonder how. His elation burned higher. He stared at the crowd. His chest came back and his chin went out. He was the champ! He'd made good his boast. He'd blasted his way to the championship with two fists and a heart that wouldn't admit defeat. Now he was in. He waited for them to accept him.

"Get that kill-crazy kid! Get that dirty—"

Rowdy couldn't believe his ears. They *hated* him! He saw that crowd rise as a man. He saw the aisles disappear as four streams of humanity surged down toward

him. He saw half a dozen frantic cops leap toward him to protect him.

"Get the kill-crazy kid!"

It was a roar now. The roar of an infuriated mob. Rowdy didn't see the bottle coming. It was an empty. It caught him back of the ear and he began to fall. He knew he was going out. That didn't matter. He knew only that he had won the title and that they hated him. He did not know why. Until unconsciousness gathered him in, that bothered him. Then he was out and nothing bothered him for a long, long time.

CHAPTER II

EVERYTHING was white. The bed, the ceiling, the walls of the room. He turned his head. Half a dozen monkeys were making faces at him. He blinked. Somebody had set a vase of fresh pansies on the table beside him. The room smelled like flowers. It smelled like a veterinary's kit. It was a hospital room and it smelled like hell.

Frosty was there. Frosty was grinning. "Hi, champ!"

It was daylight. Rowdy said, "What time is it?"

"Noon. You got conked by a bottle. They can't hurt the champ, though. You'll be out in a couple of days."

Rowdy blinked a couple of times and things were clearer. He remembered something. "They hate my guts." He said it bitterly, one syllable at a time, unbelievably. "Why?"

Frosty grinned. Frosty was a thin guy. He had cruel eyes. "Sure they hate your guts—you lucky devil. That's what we want, ain't it? Next time you fight, they'll pay a million to watch you get killed."

Rowdy reached out and grabbed Frosty's tie. His knuckles turned as white as the bedroom walls. "Listen. They hate me." He twisted the tie and Frosty purred. "Why?"

Frosty snarled, "Don't be silly. You couldn't get into the Boy Scouts on the strength of the way you won that title! You know what I'm talking about."

Rowdy was bewildered. He said, "You're

driving me nuts. Tell me why they hate me."

Frosty said, "I don't feel like talking. I got a morning paper. I'll let you read it."

Rowdy took the paper. He held it at arms' length and fastened his eyes upon his picture. He started to read and his brain began to ache.

CHAMPION BY A FLUKE

Last night Rowdy Madden won the heavyweight championship of the world. Last night kill-crazy Rowdy Madden became the most loathed man in boxing history.

Marty Allen, the ex-champ, was making a last swing around the country before enlisting. He was fighting without pay, risking his title to pour money into the Army Relief Fund. He was tired last night, but even at that he was a far better man than the loud-mouthed kid who had threatened to kill the champ.

Marty Allen had Rowdy Madden whipped. He had him on the canvas, bleeding. But when Marty came in for the kill, he slipped in a pool of blood. A thousand times during his career champion Marty Allen has refused to swing at a fighter who has lost his balance. Marty Allen might have expected this kill-crazy kid to do the same for him. He didn't try to protect himself from Rowdy Madden's killer gloves. He tried to save himself from falling.

But Rowdy Madden had been boasting. He'd been promising the champ a whipping. He couldn't do it fairly. And he didn't want to eat his words. So, when the champ slipped the challenger let him have it. The commissioners can do nothing about it. Legally Rowdy Madden was right. Morally, he was wrong. He's the new champion—and a more unpopular champion never lived.

Rowdy Madden will never last long. He isn't fighter enough. His only chance is to make a tour of the bushes himself, to fight in the minor leagues until he learns more about the game. In the meantime, champion Marty Allen is through with the ring forever. A head wound, according to latest advices, had injured Marty Allen's optic nerves so that he will be in semi-blindness the rest of his life.

Thus a great champion has reached the end of the trail. There will be no enlistment for Marty Allen now. There will be nothing but oblivion left for him in the fight game. His family has a small monthly income from an annuity Marty established. But there is nothing else. Marty Allen was generous with his money. He never turned down a hard luck story. But today he's living a hard luck story of his own.

Here's a salute to a great fighter—a fighter who, although he's no longer champ, will

forever be the uncrowned champ in this observer's books.

Rowdy Madden finished the story. For a long time he sat leaning back on his elbows and staring at the ceiling. He could understand why they hated him now. He had been guilty of one of the dirtiest tricks in the fight game. He had taken advantage of another man—the champ—while the other man was falling.

Rowdy closed his eyes and he was sick. *They hate you, Rowdy, boy. Frosty made them hate you in the first place. They were waiting for you to prove that you were kill-crazy. And you proved it. You didn't know what you were doing. But they'll never believe that, Rowdy. They hate your guts. It'll never change. . . .*

Rowdy's face was white as he looked back at Frosty. He said, "There's only one thing I can do. I don't want a title I won like that. I'm gonna step aside. I'm gonna renounce my claim to it!"

FOR an instant Frosty was incredulous. He recovered quickly. "That wouldn't solve anything. People would only say you got scared, that you backed out because you didn't have the guts to defend it. Besides, you need dough. You can earn a jackpot as champ. This is the chance you've wanted."

Rowdy considered that statement. There was logic in it, he hated to admit. The fans hated him. They were, in all probability, waiting for him to defend that title, waiting for him to get carved to ribbons. If he quit while he was under fire, they'd call him yellow. It wouldn't solve anything. Particularly since Marty Allen could not come back to retake the title.

Rowdy said, "I don't know what to do. I'm stumped."

Frosty's eyes had a glow in them. "It's simple. People think you're lucky, that you're a powder-puff champ. You've got a chance to prove that you're worthy of the title."

Rowdy nodded. "Yeah. If I could win a few fights—if I could convince 'em I don't have to pull dirty stuff to stay in there—"

Frosty said, "I'll get you some fights.

Plenty of fights. The fans want to see you defend that title. You'll clean up."

"The sooner the better," Rowdy said. "Gunner Borklund is the top challenger. I want to meet him."

Frosty leaned forward and his tone was that of the father trying to tell his kid to keep his fingers out of the lawnmower. "Borklund is too tough. You're champ. You can be choosy. First thing we'll do is go on an exhibition tour. We'll play the whistle stops and we'll clean up. And you won't be risking your title."

Rowdy swore. He reached out a big hand. "Maybe," he said, "you'd like to have your necktie twisted."

Frosty sat back out of reach. "Now wait a minute—"

Rowdy said, "I can still walk!" His brown eyes had a glint in them. "I'm no powder-puff champ. Either I've got the stuff or I haven't. I want to know myself. Get me Borklund. Nobody else. I don't want any setups!"

Frosty shook his head sadly. "We got a chance to cash in a lot of blue chips." He shrugged, got up. "But I never argue with my fighters. If you think you can take Borklund, I'll see what I can do to schedule it."

Rowdy said, "Borklund's a better fighter—right now. I'll want plenty of time to get ready. Maybe three months. I'll be ready for him when the time comes!"

Rowdy Madden was in the hospital for two days. When they discharged him their tests showed there was nothing the matter with him. But there was a feverish glow in his eyes. He was sick. But no doctor could help him.

Rowdy called the ex-champ. When he heard Marty Allen's voice, he said, "Marty—this is Rowdy Madden. I got something to talk over with you. I know what the papers say. You're sore as hell and I don't blame you. But—"

Marty said, "I'm not sore." Marty sounded tired. "You took advantage of me and maybe I ought to hate you for it. But I don't. I feel sorry for you, champ! You loused up a great sport and now you're gonna have to pay for it. Maybe I can't read the papers to my kids any more. But I can sleep nights. You made a

mistake, champ, and I'm sorry as hell for you."

Marty Allen's voice faded. The wire went dead. Rowdy tried to call back, but a woman's voice told him that the ex-champ wasn't home. Rowdy felt like the devil. If the champ had been sore, it would have been easier for him to take. But the champ had been too big for petty anger. The champ felt sorry for Rowdy! That hurt.

Rowdy Madden saw only one "out" for himself. Day by day the papers burned him to a more brittle cinder. They painted him as a title embezzler. They built up a feeling of hatred, of resentment against him. Rowdy knew that Frosty was fanning the flames of that hatred, but he couldn't hold Frosty down. Frosty had scheduled a fight with challenger Gunner Borklund. Frosty was trying to build a million-dollar gate. . . .

Soon Rowdy Madden would climb through the ropes again. He wanted to win. He had to work to win and he knew it. So Rowdy Madden worked. . . .

CHAPTER III

THE hatred was there. Every fight fan in the world was hating Rowdy Madden at that moment. But they were hating him from the back of their loud speakers. Millions of fans waited for Rowdy to be torn to ribbons. But very few of them were on hand for the title fight.

It was an outdoor battle. For two weeks the weather had been rainy. Ticket sales had been poor. Twice the fight had been postponed. And now, under a cloudy, misty sky, Rowdy Madden waited for the championship battle to begin.

Weather wasn't the only factor. The fans hated Rowdy. They hated him so intensely that they did not wish to give him a chance to profit by their hatred. The papers had subtly hinted that it would be nice if the gate was small. Public opinion had done the rest. It was one of the smallest championship fight gates in years. Invisible boycotting had turned the trick.

The ring light beat down upon the can-

vas in a white hot glare. Rowdy stood in his corner, his red robe hanging slightly open at the front, a patch of bare torso showing. Across the ring stood Gunner Borklund, the challenger. The Gunner looked fit.

Frosty was leaning against the rope, whispering to Rowdy. "I've told you how to fight this guy. His left hand is dynamite. Don't ever let it land. But I'm not worried about that right hand. I scouted him in training. The hand never healed after he hurt it on Galento. Keep on his right side or you'll be the ex-champ in a hurry."

Rowdy had never really hated a man until this moment. He hated Frosty Brown. Frosty had greed in his eyes. Frosty had helped make Rowdy a hated champ and he had done his job too well. The fans hated Rowdy so much they refused to pay to see him fight. There would be little profit in this meeting, either for Rowdy or for Frosty after their expenses had been paid. So Frosty would have to wait for another fight before he could make his pile.

Rowdy said, "Sit down, Frosty. I'm ready for this guy. I'll take him—"

"You gotta win," Frosty whined.

Rowdy went out and listened to instructions. But all the time he was studying Gunner Borklund. The big blond Swede was from the lumber country. He had an axe-man's build. He weighed two hundred and five and he was hard. He had a long reach and he could punch. Rowdy understood that his evening was cut out for him.

The ref said, "The fans want murder. Keep it legal. No dirty stuff!" Rowdy colored, for the ref was glaring at him.

"Get back to your corners and come out fighting!"

Rowdy went back. He eased his robe off his shoulders. The bell rang and he whirled and danced out. The fans began to scream. It was as if one mighty voice were drumming through that arena.

"Get the kill-crazy kid!"

Rowdy met the challenger in mid-ring. He flicked his left. Gunner Borklund blocked it with his right, bobbed his shoulder and came in over Rowdy's right.

The glove landed in Rowdy Madden's face. It was a bombshell. Rowdy tasted blood and danced backward. That left was dynamite, just as Frosty had warned.

Gunner Borklund came swarming in to follow his advantage. He hit Rowdy in the midsection with that left again and Rowdy had to try to tie up the challenger. As he drew closer, Gunner hit Rowdy in the face with a right. It jarred Rowdy. But it didn't hurt much. Gunner had had a clear shot at him, but the right lacked steam. Rowdy breathed easier as they clenched. The Gunner's right was weak. Rowdy could spend his time worrying about that left.

They split apart and then they closed again. Rowdy blocked the left and swarmed in close. He rattled the challenger's ribs with a flurry of hooks. He blocked the returns and danced away.

BORKLUND lowered his head and followed. That left came looping toward Rowdy's head. He rolled with it, countered with a right to the neck. Borklund roared an oath and kept pressing.

Rowdy backed against the ropes. He sprang off them, bolted the challenger in the gut again. He started to fire a right, but Borklund stabbed that left.

The thumb snaked out, laced across Rowdy's eye. Rowdy turned to the ref. His eye was watering from the foul. The ref frowned. The crowd screamed, "Get the kill-crazy kid!" The ref shrugged and said nothing. The ref was on the crowd's side.

Rowdy turned back, tried to see through the blurred tears. A glove came up and caught him in the mouth. Another blow nailed him over the heart and he started to fall. Rowdy spun half around. A hot poker seared against his kidney as he fell. Then he was down and the ref was counting over him.

Rowdy Madden was, at that moment, a man gone wild. He was the champ and he was getting the business. He did not mind losing the title if he couldn't keep it fairly. But he hated to be fouled out of it.

Rowdy was hurt. But he didn't stay down. He leaped to his feet at the count

of three. He charged across the ring, met the challenger before he could leave his neutral corner.

Rowdy fired a left and it missed. He saw the Gunner cock his right. That was what Rowdy wanted. He was in close now. He would take the right knowing it wouldn't hurt him. Then he would block the left follow shot and for just an instant the Gunner would be wide open. That would be the payoff.

The right was exploding toward Rowdy. He saw the challenger already setting himself for the left that would follow. Rowdy made no attempt to block the right. He wanted both hands free for what was to come.

He shifted his head, to let the leather slide off. But it didn't. The blow caught him on the side of his jaw. Rowdy's grin faded and he was down. The blow had been so sharp it had caught him so unawares that he had no chance to deflect it. The ring was rolling beneath him and somewhere a voice was tolling a count.

Rowdy rolled over on his face. Through the blur he could see Frosty's expression. Frosty was upset. Frosty was yelling, "Get up! Get up, you bum!"

Rowdy's mind began to clear. Frosty wanted him to get up. Frosty was afraid. Frosty had told him the challenger's right was gone. That proved what kind of manager he had. Frosty had been tricked. Probably some doll had whispered to him—a doll who would get plenty of pretties from Gunner Borklund, now that she had sold a bill of goods and made it stick. Frosty had been crossed up and now Rowdy was paying.

Somehow Rowdy found the strength to regain his feet. He got up at nine. The Gunner rushed in for the kill. But it was too late. The bell caught him.

Rowdy had to be taken to his corner. Frosty came up and slopped water on him. Frosty pulled the elastic band away from Rowdy's belly and all the time he was sputtering.

"You're tryin' to ruin me!" Frosty wailed. "Just when we're set for the big money, you go crazy on me."

Rowdy said grimly, "You better keep that yap shut or one of these days I'm

gonna reach down your throat and pinch off your appendix!"

Frosty glared. He grabbed the colodion bottle. But he kept quiet. He worked silently until the warning buzzer sent him scurrying out of the ring.

Rowdy was still groggy when he went out. He tried to hold on as the challenger closed with him. But Borklund brushed him aside with a flurry of body blows. A hook caught Rowdy in the neck and he started to fall. Two more smashing hooks sent him to the floor and again the ring was spinning.

The ref looked uncertain. He wanted to stop the fight. It was in his eyes that he wanted to stop it. But the crowd was screaming to let it go on. Somehow Rowdy managed to attain his feet. He had to keep going. He had to weather it out.

But the challenger was on top of him, driving those punishing fists into Rowdy's face, shoving him back against the ropes, crucifying him.

Rowdy knew he was fading. He had to gamble. One punch. One lucky punch. . .

ROWDY swung. His fist smashed into a bony skull. His hand was afire. The fire raced up the arm and into Rowdy's brain. There was another burst of fire inside his chest and he realized that he was going down. This time, if he fell, he would not get up.

Rowdy clawed at the thick cigar smoke that was like a fog across the ring. The smoke would not hold him. He saw a leather bomb roaring toward his head. Self-preservation was strong within him. He pulled both hands up to protect his face. He took the jolt on his gloves.

But the challenger shifted his attack. He drove a roundhouse left to the body. The blow landed just below the short ribs. It packed power and punishment. The leather sank deeply into Rowdy Madden's non-resisting and tortured flesh. It pumped out Rowdy's breath. . .

They carried him out. He did not know it. He did not hear the count. He did not hear the catcalls. He did not hear the sighs of relief as the ref said, "The winnah and new champeen—Gunner Borklund."

Rowdy came out of it when they dumped water in his face. Frosty was there. His eyes were glacial as he stared down at Rowdy. He was cutting the glove off Rowdy's right fist. The fist was swollen and it was still afire. Rowdy stared down at it and felt a little faint. A bone had cut through the back of his hand. It looked messy.

Frosty was jerking it around. He was talking a mile a minute. He was saying, "We had a chance and you blew it."

Rowdy got up. He swung once. He caught Frosty in the mouth and nothing had ever been so gloriously painful. He saw Frosty fall. He smiled a little. Then he fainted. . .

The next day he saw Frosty again. Frosty had a report on the gate receipts. He said coldly, "It was a lousy crowd. Training expenses were high. A couple of thousand is all you cleared net."

Rowdy thought of his Mom and the kids. They needed dough. But not that badly. He said, "I'm not gonna be fightin' for a while. Not with this smashed hand. I don't like you, Frosty. I'll give you a thousand bucks for my contract. I want to be free."

Rowdy waited for Frosty to make up his mind. At last Frosty said, "Okay. If that's how you want it." Frosty looked sad. He looked like a man whose gold mine had just turned to a deposit of sand.

Rowdy said, "So long, Frosty. I'm dyin' for a breath of fresh air."

Frosty got it. He got out. . .

CHAPTER IV

ROWDY could not get a fight. For three months he had been trying to line up a comeback campaign. But everywhere it was the same.

"You got a bad hand, Rowdy. Besides, you wouldn't draw beans at the gate. The crowds wouldn't come out. You got whipped once and that was what they wanted. They wouldn't pay to see it again."

So he went to the smaller clubs. But even then, it was the same old wheeze. "We don't want no one-handed fighters."

When the boxing commission says you're in shape to fight, come around."

Three months it had been. And now he was at the end of the trail. Rowdy Madden, a champ three months earlier, was broke. His hand was still stiff. He needed a fight. But he could not get one. He was not ready for one.

Rowdy Madden was desperate. One day he was reading a fight magazine. He noticed a blurb that gave him an idea:

KILLER BLANE ON CARNIVAL TOUR

Killer Blane, until a couple of years ago one of the top men in the heavyweight division, has hit the carnival circuit. The Killer is working for Mammoth Shows and is packing them in against all comers three shows a day.

The carnival is offering the rubes ten bucks a round for each and every round that anyone stays with the Killer. There is a top payoff of two C notes for anyone who can kayo the Killer. The carnival is running little risk. Killer Blane can still punch. If he would leave the bottle alone, he might still be up there in the big dough instead of fighting three yokels a day.

Rowdy was desperate. His right hand was gone, but he still had a left. He looked again at the name of the town where the carnival was staying—just over the river in Jersey. Rowdy was not thinking of the ten bucks a round he might win if he stayed with the carnival battler. He was thinking of the two hundred fish he would get if he could land a kayo. Two hundred fish would buy a lot of salmon. . . .

Two nights later, Rowdy Madden stood in front of the huge fight tent, while up on the platform a barker went into his spiel.

"Step right up, gents, and win some easy money. Ten bucks a round for each and every round you stay with the Killah! What? No takers? Come on boys, show your lady friends your punch. . . ."

Rowdy knew it was crazy. He was in no shape to fight. He hesitated momentarily. And as he hesitated, a man stepped out of the crowd.

He was a husky-looking guy, but there was a droop in his shoulders. His hair was a little silvery at the temples. He was wearing dark glasses. The barker took one look at him, then paled.

"You want a shot at the Killah, do you, friend. This is kind of slow company for you, ain't it?"

Rowdy understood then. The man with the silvering temples, the man back of those dark glasses, was Marty Allen—the ex-champ! The man that Rowdy Madden had started down the trail to oblivion! Rowdy blinked. He studied the ex-champ. He saw in the man's face a look of desperation. He saw a white, not yet completely healed scar upon the ex-champ's temple. It took a moment for Rowdy to realize the truth.

The ex-champ was worried! He was also broke or he wouldn't be here. He was fighting for peanuts and he was here because Rowdy Madden had sent him here!

The crowd eddied and swirled around Rowdy. He was caught in the undertow, sucked toward the ticket booth. He bought a ducat and went inside. He was still upset. Still puzzled. Why was the ex-champ here tonight? Why had the ex-champ's hair turned to silver on his temples? Rowdy was uneasy. He could not escape that feeling of responsibility for whatever might have happened to Marty Allen.

Ten minutes later Marty appeared. His eyes were narrowed, squinting without the dark glasses. They had a queer, groping look in them. Marty started to climb through the hemp. He reached for a rope and grabbed a ribbon of air, six inches above the rope. He stumbled into the ring and the crowd laughed. Marty whitened, said nothing. Rowdy watched and his throat was tight.

The ref called them to the center of the ring. Marty walked unsteadily, a little gropingly. It was evident enough that his eyes were not right.

THE instructions were over. Marty Allen went back. He waited calmly until the bell rang. Then he whirled and started for the center of the ring. Marty Allen lunged toward a man in the center of the squared circle. He swung. The man leaped aside and swore. The crowd guffawed. For Marty's intended target was the ref.

Killer Blane stepped around the ref, let fly a roundhouse right. The ex-champ didn't see it coming. It caught him flush in the mouth. The ex-champ went down and blood poured from his split lips. The ref picked up the count. He was counting them off. And fast. Rowdy swore and glanced at the second hand of his watch. It took five seconds for the ref to reach eight. This, then, was the business.

But the ex-champ was made of stern stuff. He rolled groggily to his feet. He went reeling in, arms up, punching the air full of holes. There was a smirk on the Killer's mouth. You could read his mind. It was a blackboard, out there on his forehead, a blackboard of thoughts that were emblazoned in red chalk.

The Killer had the ex-champ in the ring and he was giving him the works. The Killer liked it. He could put the former champ away or he could cat-and-mouse him. He decided on the latter.

The Killer's gloves laced Marty Allen's face. A thumb closed Marty's left eye. The ref turned away, looked bored with it all. Marty swore and closed in. But he was punching a target he could barely see. He was missing the target. Slowly the Killer's gloves began to pile up red welts on Marty's body until the welts melted and merged, became one huge swelling of redness.

Marty Allen was sobbing—the desperate sobs of a man who finds himself helpless against something he cannot understand. He lurched ahead, swung a left that missed. Then he followed with a swift right that reminded Rowdy of the champ at his best. The blow connected! It caught the Killer flatfooted. It landed against his chin and the guy went rolling.

The ref began to count. He counted slowly this time. Rowdy looked at his watch again. Twelve seconds were gone when the ref reached five. Then the bell rang. Rowdy didn't like that, either. He had seen short rounds before. This one, despite the action, couldn't have gone much beyond two minutes.

But the crowd didn't beef. They had paid four bits to see action and they were seeing it. Action was all they wanted.

The ex-champ had won a couple of hundred bucks, but he had been counted out of it.

The ex-champ knew. His shoulders drooped a little more as he waited. Rowdy watched his wristwatch and two minutes went by while they were getting the Killer in shape.

The Killer was ready again when he came back. He bulled his way through the ex-champ's guard. He blasted a right to the chin, a left to the heart. Marty Allen went down and he did not get up. Not for five minutes. Then they had to help him from the ring.

The crowd cheered. The crowd wanted more. The barker looked at the Killer and the Killer nodded. The barker stood in mid-ring. "If you gents want to see more, let a man among you step forward."

Rowdy Madden leaped toward the ring. The spiler took a look at him, but apparently did not recognize him in his rumpled clothes. He smiled faintly. "Okay, gents. Outside. You gotta buy new tickets. You're gonna see a new show."

Rowdy had his ring togs. When the tent cleared, he changed his clothes in the ring, stuffed his street attire under the canvas. A few minutes later the crowd came filing in.

The ref called them out. But Rowdy didn't leave his corner. He said, "I know what to do." He was looking straight at the Killer. "All I've got to do is tag him early. And brother, when you start counting, count right. I don't want to have to take you, too."

KILLER BLANE grinned and his fangs stuck out yellowly, but there was fright in that grin. Killer Blane's eyes showed recognition. He was fighting a second ex-champ in the same evening and this guy could see!

The bell rang. The Killer came out, and there was caution in the way he circled. Rowdy had just one thing in mind. He maneuvered Killer Blane into a corner. He fainted with his injured right and the Killer bit on it. He reached up to block the right. Rowdy fired his left in under his guard. It landed high and hard on

the Killer's chest. The carnival battler went back against the rope, bounced off like a diver off the high board. Rowdy met him with another straight left, this time to the mouth.

Killer Blane went down like a poled ox. Rowdy went to his corner. He looked at the ref. The ref was frowning, his mouth open.

The ref started counting. He was in no hurry. He took his time getting to five. Rowdy said, "I don't want the lights to go off. I don't want anything to happen. And you better speed up the count, bud, because I got another punch left."

The ref speeded up the count. He was green when he finished. So was the Killer. Rowdy stepped around the fallen battler. He grabbed the ref. He said, "Two hundred fish. I want 'em."

The ref said, "We'll settle after the show."

Rowdy understood that one, too. He turned to the crowd. "This gyp artist don't want to pay, friends. You laid your dough on the line to see a show and now it's all over but the payoff. How'd you like to see 'em count the money out right here?"

The crowd pressed forward. They began to mutter.

The ref said, "You win the hand, friend." He had a session with the spiel merchant and a few minutes later he counted out the money. Rowdy climbed down. The crowd was filing out. Rowdy knew he was going to have to dress in there alone. He thought of the two hundred bucks. At that moment he spotted Marty Allen. Impulsively he said, "Marty—take this dough. Meet me outside on the midway after I dress."

Marty hesitated. He was wearing his dark glasses again and the squint was gone from his eyes. A faint smile crossed his face as he stepped over beside the ring.

"I think," he said "that I won't need to take it outside. I'll wait until you dress. I don't think we'll be in any danger."

They stood there alone while Rowdy dressed. They were a little self-conscious at first, but it was a case of misery loving

company. It was Marty who finally broke the ice.

Marty said, "I owe you an apology, Rowdy. A couple of months ago I was over at Jacobs' Beach. Frosty was there. I heard him tell a guy that you were half knocked out the night you blasted me through the ropes. I didn't believe it until I heard Frosty admit it. You tried to tell me. I was a dope not to listen."

Rowdy said, "It's okay." He suddenly felt very fine. "I don't blame you for what you thought."

Marty said, "You still pack a punch, Rowdy."

"With my left," Rowdy said. He held up his right. "This one smells. I don't know if it'll ever be right again."

Marty said, "What're you doing here?"

Rowdy said, "I read a piece in a fight magazine. I figured a couple of hundred would be nice. It looked easy. I couldn't connect any place else."

Marty nodded. "It's a small world," he said.

"Or a big magazine," Rowdy said. He looked hard at Marty. "Look—you're on your uppers. You wouldn't be fighting with your eyes in that condition if you weren't. It's none of my business, but—"

Marty said, "No offense. Sure, I need dough. I made a lot, but a lot of it got away. I put everything into an annuity. The wife and kids get almost two hundred a month. But prices are going up. They could use more. The Army can't use me and I'm sucker enough to think my eyes might get better."

Rowdy looked squarely at the ex-champ. "You don't really mean that, Marty."

Marty shrugged. "Naw," he admitted. He smiled, a sad, futile smile. "I'm whipped. It's no more fight for me. I wouldn't admit it until now. But I know it tonight without these glasses—Oh, I'm through. . . ."

Rowdy said, "You got bad eyes and I got a bad hand. If you could use my eyes or I could use your hands, we'd get that title again. I—"

Marty blinked. His mouth came open. "Say that again." He held out his hand, stopped Rowdy. "No! You don't need to

say it. I know what you just said, and, friend, it was a mouthful. Lemme see that hand." Marty looked at the hand, felt it with sensitive fingers. He said excitedly, "It's a good job of knitting. You need a few more months of rest. Then you'll be ready." His eyes were bright as he studied Rowdy. "I'm ready to join up with you. You've got a new manager if you want it."

Rowdy swallowed. "You've got a fighter," he said. "Brother, have you got a fighter!"

CHAPTER V

THEY had two hundred dollars and it wasn't going to last long. Marty said, "I heard your fight with Gunner Borklund. Even with a good right hand, you'd have trouble with him. You've got to learn some more about boxing. You need more than a punch to stay up at the top. I think I know an angle."

Rowdy said, "How can I learn it if I can't get fights?"

Marty grinned. "You don't like Killer Blane."

"If that's news, you oughta hear me tell about the Civil War they had once."

"I'm not kidding, Rowdy. I know where you can get all the fighting you want and never have to use that right of yours. That carnival pays ten bucks a round for every round a guy can stay with Killer Blane. A good clever kid could keep the Killer out of range with his left. But he'd have to be clever as hell."

Rowdy thought it over. "I get it," he said. "I go into the ring against him. I don't try for a kayo. I just circle. I keep him off balance with my left and I never fire my right."

"You'll learn plenty. And it'll sharpen your left. At ten bucks a round, you can keep in spending money."

"I'm ready," Rowdy said.

Two nights later they found the carnival. Killer Blane blinked as Rowdy stepped up. They tried to ease Rowdy out of the picture, but the crowd liked Rowdy's looks. So the tickets were sold and the show had to go on.

That night Rowdy Madden went three

rounds before Killer Blane landed one against his chin. Rowdy fought a strictly defensive battle, bobbing, weaving, feinting his right and jabbing with his left. For three rounds he had the Killer in knots. Then the Killer got him.

Rowdy rolled with the punch, but not enough. It knocked him off his feet. The ref picked up the count and it didn't take him long to reach eight. Rowdy glanced at Marty, but his new manager gave him the sign to stay down.

Later, after they had collected thirty bucks, Marty said, "There's no point in getting up off the canvas and getting killed. You got a lot of experience and the crowd got a good show. Next time you'll do even better."

Rowdy fought again the next evening. He stayed the full five rounds and when it was over he was fagged out. But he had another fifty bucks.

"We'll give it a rest for a few days," Marty said. "I saw a few things I can teach you. When you shoot that left, don't drop your right so much. It leaves too much chin out in the cold. Do that against Borklund and you'll wake up with an icicle on it. Here, like this—you shoot the left and then you pull your chin down in the little hollow of your shoulder. That way you're protected."

Rowdy practiced it against Marty. It took half an hour. But when he finished he knew that he had added another trick to his collection. Marty was a good teacher.

They laid off three days, then found the carnival again. Rowdy went a couple of rounds before he was tagged. Next day he tried it again. That day he went the distance. Seventy bucks more.

Killer Blane was upset. Killer found Rowdy and Marty in a cheap flop house. He said, "You guys are giving me a lot of trouble. I got a wife and kid myself. Why don't you blow?"

Rowdy shook his head. "We're sticking around."

"There's gonna be blood flowing if you do," Killer said.

Rowdy yawned. "Yours," he said.

They stuck around. For a month Rowdy and Marty followed the carnival circuit.

Sometimes Rowdy got a bum deal and didn't collect a cent for his evening's toil. But other times his bicycling kept him out of danger long enough to collect a nice piece of change. The only reason the carnival people put up with it was that even after they'd paid out their money there was still plenty of it left. Besides, they had discovered that Rowdy wasn't trying for knockouts. Their two hundred bucks were not in danger.

At the end of the month Rowdy said, "I think my hand can take it. The rest and the brine soakings have toughened it. I think I ought to try it, Marty."

"Okay. Give it the works."

That night Rowdy gave it the works. It was in the first round against Killer Blane. He smacked the Killer flush on the chin. The Killer was wide open. He had long ago learned not to worry about that night.

The Killer went down. He stayed down. It took fifteen seconds, counting the extra time the ref consumed. Rowdy collected his two hundred and they added it to their growing jackpot.

"Now," he said, "we're ready. We've got enough to take a gamble at signing the champ."

Marty Allen was frowning. "That," he said, "might be difficult. The champ's touring the sticks. He's making plenty of dough and he's protecting his title. But I'll try."

SO THEY tried. They had a fight a month with the other contenders. But there was little money in it. The fans were interested only in the champ. And the champ wasn't having any of Rowdy Madden.

Rowdy began to fume. He was keeping in shape. He was fighting some good boys, but they were not good enough. Rowdy knew that sooner or later he was going to find himself trained down too finely—that he would go stale. It was get the champ now—or regret it when he did.

The papers were not exactly cold to the new team of Rowdy Madden and the man he had blasted to oblivion. They did not understand the collaboration. But they still respected Marty Allen. So they

began to give the Madden-Allen combination some space.

They began to focus upon another meeting between Rowdy and Gunner Borklund. But even that failed to do the job. The champ was touring the sticks. He didn't want any part of Rowdy.

Marty grew more thoughtful all the time. He began to say less and less to Rowdy. They had fought most of the challengers and the rest were sidestepping the youngster. They were desperate for a fight and they could not get one."

Rowdy said, "Marty, what's wrong? Are you getting sick of our partnership?"

Marty was evasive. "No. Not that. I'm just trying to get you signed with Borklund. If I can't I'll give you a chance to get a new manager."

"I'm satisfied," Rowdy said. "Stick with me."

A few nights later Marty disappeared. He didn't show up for a week. Rowdy was angry at first, then disappointed, then scared. He thought Marty had run out on him. But at the end of the week Marty came back.

"I did it," he said. "I got you a match with the champ. You've got a month."

CHAPTER VI

THIS time the fans did not stay at home. This time they packed the Garden. It was for the heavyweight championship of the world and the interest had been fanned to a high pitch.

Rowdy stood in the center of the ring and for the first time in his life he heard a few of the fans cheering him. Some of the newspapers had hinted that Rowdy Madden must be an okay guy, after all, if he had joined forces with the man he had supposedly ruined. Nobody guessed the real answer. But the feeling had changed.

The ref was saying, "You got a nice crowd. Give 'em a good show. Break fast and don't hit in the clinches. You know the rules. Follow 'em. Now go to your corners and come out fighting at the bell."

Rowdy walked back to his corner. Marty took his red robe. He put an arm over Rowdy's shoulders. "Last time you fought

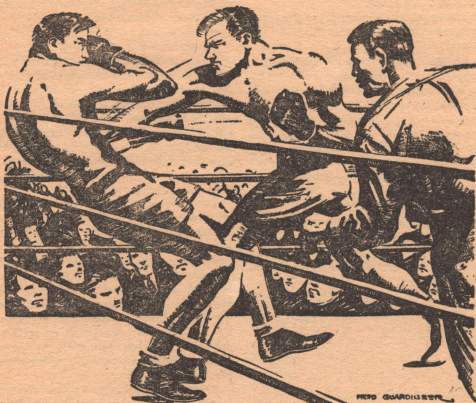
this guy you were a one-to-four shot. Tonight it's one to two. The odds are about right. In a year from now you'd be the better fighter. Tonight he's got you shaded on experience."

Rowdy said, "Experience don't help you any when you're sitting on the canvas."

Marty nodded. His eyes were bright. "You'll have to watch both hands tonight. The champ's got dynamite in both mitts."

They circled. For almost a minute they feinted and danced, searched for openings that wouldn't come. The crowd grew impatient and began to scream for action.

Rowdy forgot to watch himself. He was young and youth is impatient. He wanted a fight and he moved in fast. He blocked the left with his own, fired his right. He caught the champ over the heart. But the champ held his ground. He tied Rowdy's



Marty leaped from the ring. The crowd grew silent. Then the bell rang and Rowdy let go of the ropes, whirled, went gliding out to meet the champ.

The Gunner's left was out in front of him. Rowdy remembered that left. He remembered the way it could snake out, the fang marks it could leave on his head. He remembered the way that thumb could lance out like a forked tongue, the venom it could leave in his eye. He parried the left with his own, feinted with a right. But the champ wouldn't lead. He tapped gloves and danced away.

right under his own armpit, then fired a jab to the face.

Rowdy felt the sting of it. The blow was fair enough and there was no gouging thumb. Rowdy backed away, tried to cover. But the champ was all over him. A jolt to the belly winded Rowdy Madden. He bent over and his guard came down. Bam! A right hook rattled his back teeth and he staggered, tried to hold on.

Rowdy was hurt. And the champ was after a knockout. The champ wouldn't let Rowdy get set. He slugged him with everything but the ring posts. He kept

Rowdy brushed away from him. He hit him with rights and lefts, batted him back against the ropes. Rowdy's knees went rubbery. They corkscrewed beneath him. The canvas came up and hit him in the pants. He sat there. His mouth was dry at first, then there came a rush of saliva into the little pockets back of his tongue, the way it always is just before you're sick.

The ref was waving his arm. . . . "Four . . . five . . . six. . . ."

Rowdy shook his head. Marty was screaming. "Take it, Rowdy. Take the count."

Rowdy obeyed his manager. He did not get up until the count reached nine, mainly because until the count reached nine he could not move.

Rowdy staggered as he got up. The champ surged in and belted him in the face, Rowdy went down again. He took a full bucket—nine counts. When he got up, the ref came over and brushed his gloves. The ref had a question in his eyes. Rowdy answered it with a snarl.

The fight went on. The champ pressed in close and Rowdy managed to hook his chin over the champ's shoulder and hang on for a few precious seconds. But it was not enough.

The ref parted them and once again Gunner Borklund went to work. He had his quarry groggy and he pressed his advantage. He put Rowdy over in a corner. Rowdy ducked his head and covered it with his arms and gloves. He was like a turtle trying to protect himself from the hoof of a kicking mule. His shell of protection held through five straight jolts. The sixth jolt went through.

ROWDY took the punch in the face. He went down again. This time he was down at the bell and the count had reached seven. The ref came over. The ref watched Marty go to work on Rowdy with practiced, sympathetic hands.

The ref said, "I think he's had enough."

Marty wanted to win. But he was decent about it. He looked at Rowdy. He held a bottle of smelling salts under his nose and when Rowdy swore, Marty said,

"It's up to you. Do you think you can go back out there?"

Rowdy said, "If you can push me hard enough."

Marty said, "He'll be there."

The ref left and Marty worked, and all of that time Marty was talking. "I haven't got long. But I've saved it until you could use it. Gunner Borklund jobbed you out of the championship. This is your time to get back at him. He's the dirtiest champ in the business. You've got a score to settle with him."

Rowdy was dazed. And angry. He said, "Tell me some more."

Marty talked swiftly. "Frosty was afraid that if you did manage to win, he'd lose you to the Army. He couldn't use a fighter who was in the Army, and he wanted to be sure to be on the winning side. So he rigged it so you wouldn't win. He told you Borklund's right was weak. You took a couple of easy ones and got cocky. So Borklund belted you into dream-land."

The buzzer sounded. Rowdy said, quickly, "What was Frosty getting out of it?"

"Plenty," Marty said. "I'll tell you later—if you stay awake out there."

Rowdy stayed awake. His head had cleared, more from shock than anything. He took a punching during that second round, but he was rolling with the punches, taking the shock out of them. He weathered out the round on strictly defensive fighting, and when he came back to his corner he was fresher than when he'd gone out.

Marty kept talking as he worked over Rowdy. "Frosty knew that Borklund would be a good champ, that he'd last a long time and that he'd make a lot of money. So he made a quiet deal with Borklund's manager. In return for rigging the fight for Borklund, the manager would cut back half the profits to Frosty after Borklund won the title."

Rowdy remembered a lot of things. "That tramp. Frosty acted like it was killing him when I was losing. But that was camouflage. All the time he was grinning inside."

"He couldn't afford to let it be known that he had a piece of Borklund's contract.

It wouldn't have looked good. So he kept in the background."

Rowdy was scowling. His blood was beginning to bubble. "How'd you find out all this?"

Marty said, "It started with a hunch. Frosty was spending too much dough in the hot spots. He had to get it from some place and the fight game looked logical. He likes the dolls, and a guy who likes dolls and drinks as much as he does is apt to talk. Somewhere along the line he usually jilts a doll and she resents it. I asked a few questions around. I got a couple of sports writers to help me. We found the right doll—one he'd given a dirty deal. She told us what we wanted to know."

The buzzer sounded again. But Rowdy wasn't finished. "That's how you got the fight for me. You made 'em kick in or face the publicity."

"Yeah," Marty said. He saw the blaze in Rowdy's eyes. He looked at Gunner Borklund. "Poor Gunner," he said, under his breath, as he stepped down out of the ring.

Rowdy was all right now. His head was clear and he was mad. He heard the bell and he leaped toward the center of the ring. He saw the champ stalking him, and for an instant he was looking at a hydra-headed monster. The champ's body, the champ's face. The other face was a grinning Frosty Brown.

ROWDY blocked a left with his own left. He fainted with his right. The maneuver drew a lead and Rowdy ducked under it. He came up inside. He had a punch in his system and he got it out. He belted the champ in the mid-section. And hard.

The champ's breath was coming out, but he sucked it back into his lungs. He tried to cover. But his belly ached. He was leaning forward and there was a little piece of forehead sticking above his guard.

Rowdy belted that piece of forehead and the guard came up all the way. But there was a bigger expanse of midsection exposed and so Rowdy belted it. The champ staggered, tried to hang on.

But Rowdy remembered a trick he had

learned from the Gunner. He brushed Gunner aside, kept backing away. The Gunner would take a step forward, trying to clinch. Rowdy would belt him in the teeth and take a step backward. He had the Gunner running after him, trying to tie him, trying to rest. And all the time Rowdy was backing a step, belting, backing another step. It was a hell of a way for a beaten fighter to be taking punishment. But it was working.

Gunner Borklund's strategy of getting fat while fighting in the sticks had been fine—until now. But it boomeranged on him. In the sticks he had forgotten how to take punishment. He had learned only how to dish it out. But now he had to take it—take it from a man who should have been whipped by now. It was too much, too bewildering.

Rowdy read these things in the champ's eyes and it gave him strength. He was in the center of the ring. He fired a long, looping right. The champ ducked. Rowdy came in close and his left swept up from the floor. He caught the champ at the end of the chin. Gunner Borklund came up off the floor, bounced off the ropes, fell forward and landed on his face.

Rowdy went to his neutral corner and the ref made the count. It was over and a new champion was born. The crowd surged into the ring, a grinning Marty Allen leading them. The crowd was yelling Rowdy's name. Everything was suddenly all right again.

Eventually the press guys had enough and the radio had to go back selling soup again. The extras were on the streets and the world was settling down and Rowdy and Marty took the long walk to the dressing room together.

They went inside and closed the door. Marty had a nice smile on his face. He said, "We've got a jackpot now. Enough for both of us. My eyes are getting better all the time. I wonder how we would look in uniforms. There's some place they can use us in."

Rowdy saluted. He turned and went into the shower. He wasn't gone long. He came back out at once and took off his wet clothes. Then he went back in again and he was whistling.

Pucksters on the Prod

By Mac Davis

*While there is life, there is fight. The ice immortals keep their blades
burnished long after they themselves are consigned to the puck
junkpile.*



THE spirit, the fire, the courage of great sports heroes never quite dies out, it remains within them so that for a thrilling moment they can cast off the weight of years

and show the bright fire of youth. When that happens there's another exciting sport story to tell.

Lester Patrick was a hockey player. From his early days in Montreal when he first strapped on a pair of skates to the day many years later in New York when he closed his brilliant career for ever, the Silver Fox's flashing blades etched many thrilling exploits in the annals of hockey. Yet he was an old man for sports when he fashioned his greatest and most brilliant moment, during the Stanley Series of 1928.

At that time the New York Rangers went to Montreal to fight it out with the Montreal Maroons for the Stanley Cup—the world series of hockey. Manager of the Rangers, Lester Patrick hadn't been on the ice for half a dozen years; his hair had turned silvery gray, he was crowding forty-five.

That night he sat on the sidelines and saw his Rangers lose the first series game to the Maroons. The Ranger camp was confused and disheartened. Only the Silver Fox remained calm and confident.

In the second game the Rangers and Maroons fought out the first period without a score. Up and down the ice, shooting, passing, checking—it was a bitter game

that demanded plenty of grit of the players. Suddenly Nels Stewart came whirling down the ice with the puck at the end of his stick, and in the twinkling of an eyelash he sent it spinning toward the Rangers' net.

Lorne Chabot, the Ranger goalie, crouched low to intercept the flying puck. The puck struck him in the eye with a sickening thud and down went Chabot, half blind. Panic gripped the Rangers, for not only was Chabot their best goalie, but the only available one.

It was a desperate situation, and the Silver Fox thought fast. He turned to his players and commended: "Go out there, boys, and argue with the referee!"

Surprised, one player asked: "But what shall we argue about?"

Lester Patrick snapped back: "Anything, but keep talking until I get back."

As Patrick left the ring the Rangers went to work on the referee. They argued and bickered about this and that. They even complained about the condition of the ice. But they kept talking until suddenly, amidst all the bickering, Lester Patrick skated forth. He was dressed in uniform and carried a goalie's stick.

"All right boys," he stated calmly, "I'm playing the net."

Through the remainder of that game the old Silver Fox, like Horatius guarding the bridge, stood off the terrific Maroon attacks on the net. The Rangers, fighting with new fire, scored and the game was forced into overtime. They scored again in the overtime and won.

In the final games of that memorable series, which the Rangers finally won,

Lester Patrick never went back to the net. But exciting as were those games, they never-matched the thrilling moment when old Lester Patrick came out of retirement, his gray hair glistening in the glare of the lights as he skated across the ice to announce calmly:

"Okay, boys—I'm playing the net!"

THE snows of another winter powder the grave of Frank McGee, perhaps the greatest stick-handler who ever carried a puck down the ice. Frank McGee was a weaving ghost on steel, and wherever hockey men gather they talk with awe of this son of a wealthy, tradition-bound Canadian family who played so recklessly the furious game of hockey.

One day his team tangled with the Wanderers of Montreal. It was a big, bruising team, and playing opposite the young and inexperienced Frankie McGee was Pokey Leahy. Before the game was minutes old, tough Pokey Leahy smashed into Frankie McGee and the kid was carried off the ice minus one eye.

When Frankie left the hospital and returned to the hockey wars he didn't talk much about that accident. The years went by, and despite the handicap of having only one eye, Frankie became hockey's most sensational star. In those days of seven-man hockey, when the forward pass wasn't even known and the blue lines hadn't yet been introduced, this one-eyed immortal roamed all over the ice. This Ottawa Comet scored 14 goals in a Stanley Cup game against Dawson City. In another cup game against Queens he scored four goals unassisted in the brief span of 64 seconds.

But it was in 1905, during Ottawa's Stanley Cup series with Kenora, that the saga of Frankie McGee reached a high pinnacle. Kenora had a powerful team that year and was a heavy favorite. Frankie McGee had broken his wrist just before that series, and he warmed the bench as Kenora won the first game. So, doctors orders or no, there was no keeping Frankie out of the second game. He had both wrists in steel braces, but he managed despite this handicap to score the winning goal.

Then came the rubber game of that grueling series. With effortless ease Frankie fought off every Kenora attack to keep his team in the running, and when the clock showed but two minutes left to play he really put the pressure on. With the puck dangling from the end of his stick, he started down the rink. The entire Kenora team blocked his way, but Frankie skated right through them and scored the winning goal.

When the World War flamed over Europe Frankie McGee tried to enlist, but was rejected for his eye disability. Still determined to fight for his country he had a friend of his size and build enlist for him under his name and Frankie went overseas a buck private. He advanced to a captaincy, and then, on a winter night in 1916 at Corcucllette, an enemy shell came roaring out of the sky to write finish to the life story of Frankie McGee. He died as he had lived, going full blast into fire and battle. . . .

GOALIES each year vie for the prized Vezina Trophy, which is awarded annually to the top goalie in the game. This trophy is a fitting memorial to one of hockey's immortals, Georges Vezina, the speedy, smooth little fellow who was a terror on ice. At the net Vezina stymied the toughest opposition; the rougher the going the better he liked it.

From the first day Georges Vezina came to hockeyland as a raw rookie he never missed a game until that tragic night when his great career came to an end. After years of grueling campaigns Vezina fell with tuberculosis.

The doctors advised a long rest. Little Vezina, the gamecock, just grinned and replied: "As long as I can lace up my skates I'll go on playing hockey!" It wasn't bravado, just the fierce devotion he had for the game. Well, the inevitable happened. He finally collapsed on the ice, and not long after died. So passed a hockey player, leaving his name and vivid fame deep in the memory of hockey fans. . . .

Eddie Shore, the one-man hockey riot, is beloved by millions of fans. Sensational star that he is, Eddie narrowly missed

being a big-league hockey player because a manager was too hot one day. It makes an amusing tale.

Away back in 1923, Frank Patrick was manager of the Boston Bruins. His was a long and distinguished hockey career, but Eddie Shore represents his biggest mistake.

In the summer of that year Vancouver was in the grip of a heat wave. One scorching day Frank Patrick drowsed peacefully on the shady porch of his home when suddenly a youngster clattered up the steps, nudged him out of his slumber and said, "Mr. Patrick, I'm a pretty good hockey player and I want a tryout. My name's Eddie Shore, I've been playing in the amateurs."

Patrick lazily drawled: "You've got a gall waking me up just when I get to sleep. Go on and beat it! It's too hot to talk hockey. Come back when there's ice on the ground. I can't be bothered now."

Angrily Eddie Shore stomped off and the big league hockey manager went back to sleep, forgetting the whole incident. Eddie Shore finally signed up with a small club in the Western Canada

League and everything was fine except that he was so broke he didn't have carfare to get there, so he hitched a ride to Regina to start his hockey career.

Eddie worked for the magnificent salary of \$800 for the season. But soon his fame spread and one night Frank Patrick stopped off at Edmonton to see him play. Patrick offered \$3,500 for Shore, but the team refused. Soon after, the Western Canada League blew up and Eddie was purchased by the Boston Bruins, where he became a big-league sensation.

Here Shore was paid \$7000 for the season and Patrick thought he had a bargain at that. Imagine his chagrin when Eddie Shore confronted him and asked: "Remember me? I'm the hockey player you could have had for the asking, but now you're paying plenty for the privilege. I'll bet this'll make you hot, but I'm the same kid who came to you in Vancouver that summer, but you were too hot to talk hockey!"

And indeed the big-league hockey manager did look foolish when he recalled the time he let Eddie Shore slip through his fingers.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933
Of 12 Sports Aces published bi-monthly at Springfield, Mass.
for October 1, 1942

State of New York) ss.
County of New York)

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. A. Wyn, who, having been duly sworn according to law, depose and says that he is the Publisher of the 12 Sports Aces and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 557, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business manager are: Publisher, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.; Business Manager, A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Periodical House, Inc., 67 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.; A. A. Wyn, 67 West 44th St., New York, N. Y.; Rose Wyn, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.; Warren A. Angel, Rockville Centre, N. Y.; C. & A. Publishing Co., Mount Morris, Ill.; E. Campbell, Mt. Morris, Ill., and E. L. Angel, Rockville Centre, N. Y.

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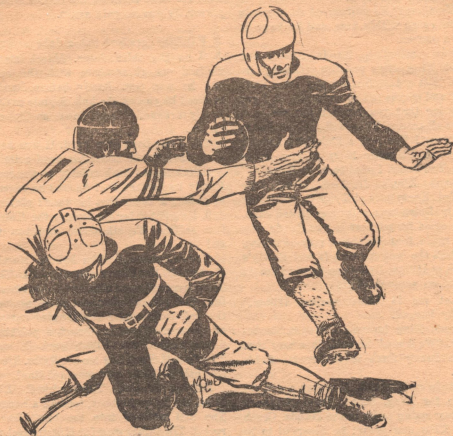
5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.)

A. A. WYN, Publisher.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 16th day of September, 1942.

SHIRLEY L. BERIOK,
Notary Public, Bronx Co. Clk. No. 220
Certificate filed in N. Y. County No. 1085
Commission Expires March 30, 1943

The Touchdown Fool



By Dale Cochrane

"Wrong-way Dolan!" they called him, because he'd once scored a touchdown—for the enemy team. And when Randy Dolan tried to live that monicker down, he found his cleats tripped up by his pigskin past.

RANDY DOLAN was sitting on the scrub bench when a hard firm hand gripped his shoulder. "Me?" Randy gulped, seeing it was Coach King.

The young football mentor of the Tyler U eleven regarded Randy with a grim and steady gaze. His tight voice was barely audible above the screeching, yelling

fans who jam-packed the stands for this Tyler-Hilton game that was now in its last quarter. "You—in for Burton. Now hold 'em!"

Randy Dolan swallowed hard and threw off the dark gray blanket in which he'd been draped. He began moving toward the field fastening his helmet as he did. He

pumped his feet up and down, but it didn't bring any blood into his numb legs. He was medium-sized, with a boyish face and scared blue eyes.

"Hold 'em!" He murmured those words of the coach within him, and he knew it was a prayer.

Only yesterday, Randy approached Coach King after practice. "Coach," he said. "I'm not such a big guy for a half-back and maybe not so hot a player. I got no gripe that you haven't put me in a game all season. But—will you put me in tomorrow? For just a little bit? I won't forget it. I'll make it up to you—some way. You know, I used to go to Hilton—"

Coach King's freckled, blond face nodded. Everybody at Tyler U. knew that Randy Dolan was a former Hilton man. Who could forget that it was Randy who had made that bonehead play—running the ball the wrong way? It was Randy's finish at Hilton. He'd been laughed out of school on account of it.

"Let me in there against Hilton," Randy begged.

Coach King lowered his eyes, doubtfully. "We'll see," he said, in a way that made Randy flush to the roots of his hair.

Randy understood. This was a critical game for King. Scouts from Northern U. were going to be in the stands. Coach Hap King was great; he deserved to be in big time. And as his brother, Jiggs King, had pointed out in his syndicated sports column that morning, this was his chance.

Randy reported to the official, and he knew this was his own chance, too. Tyler led Hilton 7-0. It had seemed an adequate enough lead in the first half, but in this second half Hilton had threatened again and again. Now, with four straight first downs under their belt, they were marching on to a touchdown.

Hilton came out of their huddle. Their first play was an end-sweep, a boy named March carrying. March went far to the sidelines. When he cut in he was met by Biff Rogers and Tiger Colaggi, and his end-sweep died where it had begun—on the nineteen-yard line.

Hilton tried a crusher through the line,

and Randy moved in to break that one up himself. He got his arm around the runner's pants, and his cleated heels dug dirt. He went down on top of the Hilton player. It was no gain again.

HILTON cracked out a fake reverse on the third down. March materialized out of nowhere with the ball, and he was past Randy before Randy realized he packed the ball. Stymie Smith finally dragged March down on Tyler's eleven.

The Tyler boys blew hard. It was hold—or else! Randy shook his head grimly.

Hilton moved back quickly to the line. Randy was aware that he was so scared of pulling a boner that he wasn't playing ball. He gritted for the task as the Hilton line shifted. Fourth down and two to go!

A quick reverse. The ball to March. He hit the line like a cannon shell. The line converged upon him, swelled to breaking. The referee ploughed in to recover the ball from under the tangled mound of players. Then he thrust a pointing finger toward the Hilton goal. It was Tyler's ball. First and ten for Tyler. They had held on their own ten-yard line!

Playing it safe, Tyler kicked. Big Mike, the Tyler fullback, toed off a honey. The ball whizzed into the blue like a rocket. The safety man for Hilton reached out his arms to gather the leather to him on the midfield stripe. It struck his chest and bounded away! He chased it back five yards to his own forty-five where he downed it.

Five thousand Tyler fans in the stands were screaming like mad. Every player on the Tyler bench was on his feet. Coach King was up, waving his arms and shouting approval. Tyler had pulled out of a hole! Hilton was back on its haunches with only minutes remaining in the game.

"We got 'em!" Stymie Smith, the Tyler captain, yelled to his teammates, and Randy swelled with pride that he had had a part in it. He knew those scouts from Northern U. must be nodding their commendation of the brand of play Coach King had instilled in his boys.

If only we could snag another touch-

down, Randy thought, prayerfully to himself. Another tally by his boys and King would surely cinch that post at Northern—and Randy would have evened his score with Hilton.

And then before Randy realized, he saw that touchdown materializing!

Hilton lined up, a single wingback. The ball was snapped. The Hilton quarter swiveled in an attempted fake pass to the right. He hesitated suddenly, as if he were expecting a player to come around to take that pass, and the ball bobbled out of his hands.

Tyler men knifed through the line, Randy with them, to get that ball. Someone snatched it before it touched the ground. Randy was hit hard, whirled around. Another man hit him and he went down.

Randy staggered up, his brain fogged, the world spinning. He shook his head to clear his vision. He could make out his own players falling away, and then suddenly it struck through to him. The dark fog he saw was a Tyler man who had that ball securely in his cradled arms and was flogging through a suddenly bewildered Hilton crew! They seemed too stunned by the sudden recovery to make any effort to stop him.

But one man stood between the runner and the clear field ahead. Randy's woozy brain hammered with excitement. Here was his chance to make good against Hilton. Here was his chance to repay King's confidence in putting him in the game.

HHEAD thrust forward, shoulders low, Randy lunged at the wouldbe tackler. He blocked him out, rolled on the hard turf as he did. He straightened up, the roar of the crowd thundered in his ears. Every man was on his feet, cheering hoarsely as the runner pumped to the goal and across it, his pursuit futilely trailing him.

Randy got up, grinning, as he looked at the scoreboard, his head clearing. He watched the new tally slide into place. But the scoreboard said: Tyler 7—Hilton 6.

Randy looked at his teammates. They were advancing toward him almost in a

body. He had a look at their faces and he suddenly felt sick inside.

"You—you stupe—" Stymie Smith choked at him.

Randy tried to swallow past the hard knot that was in his throat. He blinked his eyes. He looked up at the scoreboard again, and it still said the same thing: Tyler 7—Hilton 6.

...e looked back at his teammates. Biff Rogers came menacingly at him, slapped him hard against the shoulder with the flat of his hand. "Nice going!" His voice stabbed with venom.

Randy stared uncomprehendingly. He saw another player come in, himself waved out.

"You helped make a touchdown," Stymie Smith said. "But you made it for—Hilton! You tackled your own man!"

Randy dragged to his place on the scrub bench. He tried to bury himself under the blanket that the team manager draped over his head. No one said anything. Even though his head had been terribly woozy, it seemed impossible to Randy that he had made that mistake. It all seemed unreal.

Out on the field the players lined up to kick for the extra point. Randy buried his face in his hands. He heard the boot of leather loud in the quick silence that had settled over the stands. There was a sigh of relief, and then the stands roared in a cheering fury.

The kick was blocked! The gun blasted. Tyler's game, 7-6!

Randy braced himself for the ordeal of the locker room. Tyler had won, but he knew he'd surely ruined King's chances for the coaching spot at Northern. If somebody had taken a sock at him, Randy would have actually felt better. Anything, if only he could be spared the silent, accusing glances of his teammates. He knew what they would call him, what was on every one of their minds: "Wrong way Dolan! Wrong-way Dolan! He doesn't know where his own goal is!"

A voice said, quietly, firmly, behind Randy, "Dolan."

Randy turned and through blurred vision he saw the freckled, blond young face of Coach Hap King.

"Buck up," King said. "It was a mistake that could happen to anybody."

"I'll never play again!" Randy blurted. "I'm through. I guess they were right at Hilton—giving me the air. I'm—I'm no good!"

"Forget it. You're not through with football," King said. "You're going to play in the game next Saturday. We can't have you go through life with today your last memory of football. It's not good for your spirit or character—and sport is supposed to help that. I'm going to put you in there again next week. You'll have to make good."

Randy stared. He couldn't believe his ears. He tried to choke words of thanks, of appreciation, past the knot in his throat. He tried to say it wouldn't do any good for the coach to try to help him. But Coach King turned away, and Randy was left alone with those unspoken words still in his throat.

Next morning, with memory of his humiliation at Hilton bright in his mind, Randy made arrangements for leaving college. He visited the registrar and his faculty adviser. He also paid a visit to the local Air Corps enlistment center. He met Colaggi, a dark-browed, hulking tackle—and Stevens, a boy on the college paper, as he came out of the building.

"Hi," said Colaggi. "Signing up?"

Randy nodded, too numb with the misery that was still in him to say a word.

"Lots of the fellas are, as I guess you know," Colaggi went on. "With this eighteen and nineteen draft, they're not even gonna wait to finish this term. They're just waitin' till Saturday's game with Midwest is over." He stopped, eyed Randy with sudden suspicion. "Say, you're not figgerin' to pull out before that, are you?"

"Oh no," said Randy.

But Randy went back to his frat house room and packed his bag. That night, without saying good-bye to anyone, he slipped away.

A sedan pulled alongside him at the curb on the way to the railroad station.

"Where do you think you're going?" said a voice.

STYMIE SMITH got out of the car and slammed the door behind him. "Colaggi told some of the fellows at your frat house that you were pulling out. They kept an eye on you, and they saw you sneaking off without a word. I got wind of it and I hopped in my car and came down. What's the idea. Don't you know we got a big game on Saturday. Don't you know that Midwest is Tyler's first big-time game in years?"

"I've signed up for the Air Corps," Randy said.

"Sure, and so have a lot of the other fellows. But you don't have to pull out before the big game. No, you don't have to tell me why you're going. But what kind of a flyer are you going to make if you pull out when the going gets hot? You got to learn to lick things—and not let them lick you. Or am I beginning to sound like a preacher?"

Big, lanky Stymie Smith opened the door of the sedan, and Randy got in. At the frat house, Randy put his suitcase back in his room and went down to dinner. He was late, but the brothers didn't let on as if they knew anything at all of what was going on.

"Hi," they said. "Hear you signed up with your Uncle Sammy. It looks like it won't be long before we're all in there."

During the next few days, it wouldn't have seemed strange to Randy if his football mates hadn't been excited about the forthcoming game with Midwest, Tyler's debut into big time. Getting into the Big Fight had every right to overshadow that. It would have if the opponent had been any but Midwest.

Between the excitement of getting in the Big Fight and playing Midwest, it was no wonder the boys were getting nerves. Why Midwest had Hips Eberle, All-American star of the past two years, at quarterback. It was Eberle's last game before getting into service. Eberle's older brother had already made a name for himself on Bataan, and was a prisoner of the Japs. Only a younger brother was left to carry on the family's football tradition.

As usual, Randy worked with the scrubs. Varsity was ragged in practice,

but Coach King comforted them that it meant good ball on the field. It was the only way to needle their flagging spirits. There was not another practice session left.

King even had a slap on the back for Randy as he passed him in the tunnel leading to the showers. Randy wondered if King remembered his promise of the past week—that he was going to put him back in there. King had Burton in the quarterback slot, and Burt was a mainstay. In spite of King's easy confidence when he faced members of the team, Randy saw that his face was tight and drawn and that his eyes were grim.

Whispers had it that King had been given the brush-off by Northern after last Saturday's 7-6 debacle. Randy knew how much that meant to King, and what his own share of responsibility in his rejection had been. If there were only some way he could pay King back. If he could only make good for him.

Randy went home to troubled dreams. He dreamt it was Saturday afternoon and Tyler was taking the field against Midwest. King came up to Randy, told him that Burton had left for the Army and that he was putting Randy in the quarterback slot in his stead. The game began. Tyler took the kickoff.

On the next play, the ball was passed to Randy. Randy did a quick reverse, and then he became confused. He wasn't sure in which direction the goal lay. Somehow he straightened that out in his mind before the Midwest tacklers got to him. He broke away, and a clear field stretched ahead of him. Then, suddenly, he realized he was running in the wrong direction. . . .

Randy came out of that troubled dream in a sweat, his bedclothes a tangle about his thrashing arms.

Eight thousand fans jam-packed the Tyler stadium the next afternoon, eager for a view of the magnificent Midwest team—and All-American Hips Eberle. Even the most sanguinary Tyler rooters did not expect to see a Tyler victory. How could Tyler win with a fellow like Hips in there?

RANDY trooped out on the field with the scrubs. Cheers rose in a swelling crescendo for Tyler. The band blared forth its mightiest. But Randy was aware that something was different about this day, and he knew everyone else felt the same.

In more ways than one, the war was close to them. They had only to look up at the half-empty parking lot to see one of its effects. The windows of the college powerhouse at one end of the horseshoe stadium were blacked out. An air-raid siren was atop the library. For almost everyone it was a last game. They wanted to make it a corker!

Big Stymie Smith won the toss for Tyler and elected to kick. Randy watched tensely from the scrub bench. Biff Rogers booted a good one from the side of his toe. It carried out of bounds almost dead in the coffin corner. It was Midwest's ball on the six-yard stripe! The stands went crazy.

Midwest lined up quickly. The ball was snapped back from center. Hips Eberle took it and reversed. He passed the ball to Rabbit Ranowski, and Ranowski hurtled forward. The Tyler line surged to stop him and Rabbit suddenly flat-passed the pigskin backward and to his right. Hips Eberle was there to take it!

He took the oval under his wing, running behind the interference of two big Midwest bruisers. Tyler's wingback sprinted in to cut Hips off. Rabbit, however, was still running after his plunge through the line. He hit the wingback and they piled up together.

Hips was still running. A Tyler back dived for him, and Hips did one of his famous "wiggles." Like a slippery eel, he outstepped the wouldbe tackler's embrace, and the Tyler man ate dirt.

Hips picked up speed, weaving in and out. He passed the midfield stripe. Only Tiger Colaggi was ahead of him now at safety, but Stymie Smith was coming in fast at Hips from an angle. Colaggi moved in carefully at his prey. He was too smart to try a tackle. He moved in on Hips, just to slow Hips enough so that Stymie could bring him down.

But then Hips sensed the strategy!

From the tail of his eye he saw Stymie coming in from behind, and he put on the last notch of speed. It was up to Tiger Colaggi to stop him now. Tiger dived. Neatly, gracefully, Hips pivoted.

From a reclining berth on the turf, Tiger watched Hips gallop over the stripe for a marker!

The game was hardly under way, and it was Midwest 6—Tyler 0.

The kick for the extra point was wide, but Tyler's demoralization already seemed complete. Tyler went strictly on the defensive, kicking out every time the least danger threatened. It wasn't the kind of ball to win games, but it was the kind to hold Midwest from running wild. Tyler wasn't taking any more chances with slippery Hips Eberle!

The gun ended the half with Midwest still on top by the same score of 6-0, but the score didn't indicate how one-sided the fracas really was. Luckily, Tyler had been able to tighten up every time Midwest threatened the goal. Midwest had run up an amazing total of yards gained and first downs.

What chance did Tyler have as long as Hips Eberle was in there?

And then a seeming miracle "took" Hips out of the game! Coach King was pacing the locker room, trying to put a little offensive fight into his boys when Jiggs, the pigskin mentor's newspaperman brother, rushed into the room. Jiggs was older than brother Hap, but he had the same freckled, blond countenance. He waved a wet photographic print in one hand.

"Hap!" he shouted. "Take a look at this!"

Coach King took the print, looked at it, then up at his brother. "I don't get it," he said. "What is this?"

"Take another look," insisted news-hawk Jiggs. "It's a shot that Pixie, our photographer, just took. That's not Hips Eberle out there in the game. Boy, is this a scoop! Hips is in the stands, watching, where we took this picture."

"Are you sure?" said King doubtfully. "It certainly does look like Hips' picture, but—"

"It's Hips' brother—his younger

brother who's out there subbing for him. A green soph named Morgan Eberle. All it says on the program is M. Eberle. That covers both Morgan and Mike, the guy we call Hips. I got the story direct from Hips when I saw this picture of Pixie's. Hips is in the Air Corps. Just signed up. He's on his furlough now, and he didn't want to risk injury by any more playing—at least in an unimportant game like this!"

KING turned from his brother to his team. His blue eyes glowed. "Get that, fellas? He's in the stands watchin' because he didn't want to take any chances *against a bunch of jerks like us!!* Are we gonna take that? He thinks we're too unimportant to bother with!"

Shouts of, "No, we won't take it!" echoed in the metallic confines of the locker room. King turned on the pepper and made the boys fighting mad. They were ready to rip Midwest limb from limb by the time they trooped out to the field for the second half. Randy trailed them, but he stopped long enough for a glimpse of the shot that Pixie had taken of Hips Eberle.

When he took his position on the scrub bench, he waited grimly to see what the "rejuvenated" Tylers would do. And he knew it was important that they do something, for coming out to the field Randy had noticed the same Northern scouts who had viewed the game the week before—again on hand in a down-front box.

Randy looked down to where the Tyler team was lining up, against the back-drop of the blacked-out windows of the college powerhouse closing off the end of the horseshoe stands. And a prayer was in his heart.

Hips had worried the Tyler eleven. They had admitted as much to King back in that sweaty room under the stands. Now, with Hips off their minds, they unleashed their own offensive unafraid.

But almost as fast as a march down the field got under way it bogged down. Midwest had a way of knifing through the line to snag their men. And then, with

Midwest in possession of the pigskin, Tyler began to play ragged, listless ball.

The quarter ended with Midwest threatening from the Tyler twenty. They had cracked out four successive first downs, and nothing seemed destined to stop them.

Randy suddenly doffed his blanket. There was a vacant space alongside Coach King on the first-string bench. Randy came up behind King and stepped over the bench onto the place. King turned his taut face to look at him. A faint glimmer sparked in his eyes.

"This is the last game, coach," Randy said. "Do you want those Midwest babies stopped? Will you send me in there so I can make up for last week?"

King stared at him. "What makes you think you can do any good? What makes you think you won't mess it up worse than it is?"

"Because I got something to fight for, coach," Randy said, wincing at the way the football mentor's words knifed into him. "Because I got more to fight for, I think, than anybody out there. Do I sound like a man who's ready to be licked, coach?"

"Do you always talk like this?" asked King. "Where have you been all the time? You talk like I like to hear words talked."

"I been hiding under a barrel," said Randy. "Been hiding under there because I lost my sense of humor. I made boners, I'll admit. But I guess I made them because I'd become all wrapped up in my own little self." The words came rapidly to his tongue. "Getting in this war has made me do a lot of thinking. It's made me realize that a man fights best when he's fighting for things and for people outside himself. Well, I got a lot of things like that to fight for in this game. It's like that Big Fight, I just won't lose—I can't!"

Seconds later, Randy was trotting out on the field. It was Randy Dolan in and Burton out. It was time out, and in the huddle Randy got a chance to talk to his mates. On the first play Stymie Smith hit the Midwest ball packer so hard he

lost the ball. Tiger Colaggi ripped in to recover it for Tyler.

MIDWEST went into its defensive formation. In the huddle, Stymie Smith looked at his men for a moment before he spoke. His eyes met Randy's, caught the unvoiced plea in them. Randy was asking for the ball.

"Number 27," Stymie called. "You're totin' it, Randy." His voice was steady, firm. He knew the stake in this for Randy.

Tyler men took their positions, single wing with Randy in the tailback.

"Two . . . six . . . hep!"

Randy took the ball on the snap. He dug his cleats deep in the turf and ran wide to his right. Stymie and Tiger Colaggi ran ahead of him, bowling clear the way. Randy cut through the line. Stymie took care of Eberle, and Tiger screened a wingback.

Randy slipped and went down on the twenty-eight!

Randy carried the ball again on the next play. He knifed at the center and went down on the twenty-nine. Four Midwest linemen hit him like a collapsing wall.

Back on the bench, Hap King gritted his teeth and tilted his head doubtfully. Randy toted leather again. He ripped apart the Midwest line and carried sixteen yards before they brought him down.

Hap King stared. A little guy like Randy flaunting Midwest's behemoth linemen! King couldn't sit still. He stood up. Everybody else on the Tyler bench was standing. Again Stymie fed it to Randy. He cut in and carried it to Midwest's thirty-yard stripe.

"Who is this guy Dolan?" Burton muttered. He was standing next to King. "Where's he been? Where'd he come from?"

It wasn't only Randy. Every man on the Tyler eleven was clawing, crawling, slugging through Midwest opposition. Midwest called time out for consultation and reinforcements. Play resumed and they hit Randy hard and hit him again. He took it all—and gave back more. He

dazzled the ends with elusive, swiveling hips. He went through tackle for four, and three more through center took him to the one-foot line. There was no hesitancy now, no fear of pulling a boner.

He went over the top for the marker, lay there panting on the sod while the stands, the team and everybody but Midwest went gently berserk. The score Midwest 6—Tyler 6!

It was up to Stymie's educated toe now. He went back into punt formation. The ball snapped to Randy. But he didn't set it down for the kick. It bobbled in his arms for a moment, and then he tucked it under his arm!

He ran to the left, then reversed and cut in sharply. An impregnable wall confronted him. His legs pumped him forward. He soared into space. Over the wall he went!

It was 7 to 6—Tyler, when the gun cracked the end of the game. Every Tyler man came off the field grinning like a huge, panting jungle cat that has just finished a meal.

"What happened?" gasped Coach King, his freckled, blond face still blank with amazed disbelief. "How'd you do it? What came over you?"

"It was Randy," said Stymie Smith. "When he came in there he gave us hell. Like maybe he was the big-shot player on the team and not just a—well, a scrub. He told us that if this country was goin' to win any wars, we'd have to show a helluva lot more fight than we were giving. He said, 'If we're stopped by Midwest how will we look against real tough guys. Let's go tear 'em apart.'"

"Not quite," said a quiet, seriously subdued voice. It was Randy. "I told 'em all that. But I told 'em more, too. I fig-

ured that maybe this game seemed like small stuff, with all of them thinkin' about tomorrow when they'd be getting in the real fight. I told 'em this was a real fight—and that this game meant a coaching job for you, coach. That Northern scouts were in the stands. 'Let's pay coach back for everything he's done for us individually in past years,' I said to them. 'Why, coach is so damn right he won't even tell you those scouts are here.'"

"Hogwash! Baloney!" said several others on the team. "Randy's just tryin' to cover up his own individual play!"

"Right," said King. "It was brilliant. And I want to say something more for you, Randy. That was the real Hips Eberle in there—and as great a defensive player as he is an offensive one. Yet he didn't stop you once. That picture I pulled back in the locker room was a fake. It was a stunt I rigged up with my brother Jiggs. I thought if you forgot it was Eberle out there, you might really begin to fight."

"Randy told us it was a fake," Stymie said. "He bawled us out that you had to pull a stunt like that on us to make us fight."

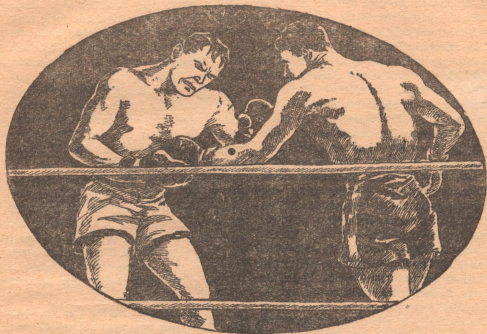
"Yeah. I took a look at that picture," Randy said. "I knew it was an old one right off. You could see the powerhouse in the background—but its windows weren't blacked out!"

King grinned. "Yes, it was a fake. But I hope you'll excuse it. After all, Randy, you pulled one yourself about Northern scouts being in the stands."

"Like fun I did!" said Randy. "Why'd you think I played like I did? Oh, no. I saw them in the stands when I came back for the second half. Here they come now. Look behind you, coach."



No Crowns for the Asking



By Ned Cady

For the fans' money, there is only one kind of champion—the kind that takes the crown instead of having it handed to him.

CHALKY WRIGHT faced Lulu Costantino in the Garden. It was the only bout in months which had a crown laid on the line, and the fans were out in force.

Round one. The men came out of their corners. Costantino was just a kid, Wright almost old enough to be his grandfather. Wright went into his perfect stance; that sweet leg action of his which lets him hit with all he has but box with such restful ease that he might as well be sitting in an armchair.

Young Costantino out-bobbed, out-ducked, out-danced, out-weaved, out-everything but out-hit Wright. Twice they got into clinches, and twice Wright near-

ly murdered Lulu with left upper cuts.

Round two. Same thing.

Round after round. Same thing. Wright close to the ropes, circling on a pivot, facing his foe. Young Costantino covering more ground than crab grass does on the prairie, but never tempting Wright into a false move.

At the start of the fight the fans were nearly all with Costantino. A few of the loyal Harlem delegation were yelling, "We'll fight all night with Wright!" But the hearts of the crowd always are with the youngster in the ring; America is built that way.

After the third round, all but those who bet on Costantino were with

Wright. They were with the Chalk because he held the crown, and because championships have to be taken.

The man who wants to be crowned in the hearts of the fans as well as in the books of the officials, has to get up on his hind legs, wade in, and show that he is fit to rule his division. There can be no respect for the bloke who, like Freddie Welch, is "just half a point ahead of his gallant opponent, Willie Ritchie," as the English referee said in awarding him the diadem. No stuff like making the other boy beat himself through errors, will make any man anything but a technical champion.

Look back through the years. Jess Willard wore Jack Johnson down and took the crown. But nobody loved him for it. Nobody particularly wanted to see him stay up there.

Jack Dempsey went out to take that championship. He was there to prove who was boss of the ring world. With his pretty footwork and his blazing speed, Jack could have been a nifty boxer; don't let them fool you with that talk about his just being a wild slugger. But Jack was out to belt that crown right off the giant's cranium. And belt it off was just what he did.

The most popular man to fight Jack was Luis Angel Firpo, the Wild Bull of the Pampas. Firpo's ring record was nothing compared to the long strings of victories of Bill Brennan, Bartley Madden and others who were around in those days. But when most of the champions have been forgotten, the tales of Firpo will still ring loud whenever a fanning bee takes place around the hot stove by the old cracker barrel. For Luis Angel went in there to take that bauble; to grab it in his two fists and shake it loose. And if newspapermen had not helped Jack back into the ring, Luis would have taken that belt home as the first tribute to the good neighbor policy.

FOOTBALL teams like Notre Dame always win the hearts of the fans and are likely to win championships, too. When Notre Dame gets its hands on that pigskin, every play is aimed at a touch-down. There is not a signal in their book which calls for making three yards and then stepping out of bounds to hold the clock, or making six inches to gain a first down and hold the ball.

In one game with Ohio State, with the highest ranking in the country as the stakes, they rammed three touchdowns across the line in less than five closing minutes of the fourth quarter, and they needed all of them to win.

Fans will go to see the New York Football Giants or the Chicago Bears even when those teams are not in the lead. They know that those two outfits are out there to take charge on the field—and I do mean take charge. They do not share a game with their opponents, they take it or make the other team take it from them.

This last World's Series was like that, too. The once aggressive Yankees had become accustomed to having a big inning or so, and then coasting. And even so, they were aggressive enough when at bat.

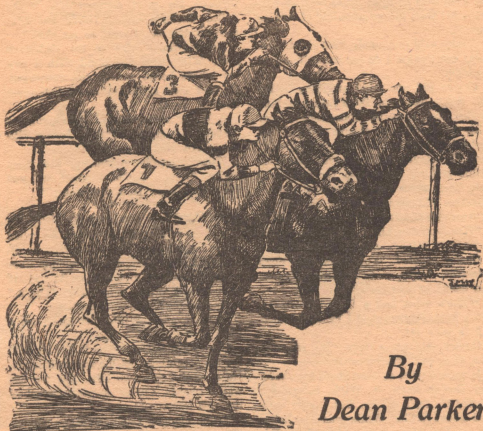
But those Red Birds from St. Louis had something which has not been seen since before the first World War; oldtime reporters say not since 1906. They were aggressive on the defensive as well as when at bat.

The closing play of the series was aggressive in spirit. Cooper wasted a ball, whammed it down to second and caught Joe Gordon off the bag. Never mind just felding the other team out, fight them out . . . that is how the Cardinals won.

They are champions because they did the only thing the fans will stand for—they stepped out there and took the crown.



Beggars Don't Ride



By
Dean Parker

★ ★ ★

Tricky Willie broke a rule of long standing when he bought himself a bangtail. And thereby Willie, who ordinarily was an encyclopedia in matters pertaining to the gee-gees, was sucked into a horseflesh frameup that was one for the books.

★ ★ ★

WILLIE SHAD'S eyes gleamed as he posted the letter. "I'm too old for active service, and you're too small. Mailing this money takes the sting away. We're doing something."

Curley Callahan's face was glum as he watched Willie. He had the deep blue eyes and the happy-go-lucky disposition of the true Celt, but today he was worried. Willie was giving away all their money.

"Sure, I believe in giving to the U.S.O.," he said argumentatively. "But not half of our winninga. Nobody gives us half back when we lose a bet." Unconsciously he tried to flatten his black curls against his skull. Curley hated his wavy hair.

Willie grinned at him. "Kid, you talk a

good miser, but it's all talk." Willie was a tall, lean man with sharp, alert eyes. He was a very smart boy with a betting dollar. Racing people called him Tricky Willie. They said he knew more ways of winning a bet than Morgenthau did of raising money.

Curley said resignedly, "All right. Give away our dough. I do not mind living on nothing."

Curley did not mind anything Willie did. Willie had been like a father to him. Curley had been an apprentice jockey with an indifferent future until Willie had taken hold and made a race rider of him. They journeyed from track to track, Willie picking the horses for Curley to ride. They made a pair that won the admiration of betting men and the fear of bookmakers—particularly Soap Edwards.

"Have you seen him yet?" Curley asked.

"Who?" Willie's eyes were guileless.

Curley snorted. "You know who. Soap Edwards. You came to Bay Side because you heard he was here."

Willie's voice had a forged hardness. "He's here, Curley. And I hear his bankroll is very fat."

Curley said plaintively, "We will clip him, then we'll give it away."

It wasn't true, at least about his share, and Curley knew it. Willie religiously banked Curley's money. But Curley worried about Willie. Willie was absolutely set on the idea of breaking Soap Edwards. Soap was a big bookmaker, he would take a lot of breaking, but so far Willie was doing all right. Curley was afraid some day Soap would maneuver Willie into a crack and pinch it off.

Willie's dislike for Soap was bottomless. Soap had tricked a string of horses away from Willie when Willie was a young guy. There was a girl mixed up in it, too—a girl who had listened to Soap's smooth words and believed him instead of Willie. The story went that she had later died of a broken heart. Curley didn't know about that. He did think she must have been a very dumb doll to pick Soap.

Willie came out of it with two fixed rules—don't own your own horse, you can make more money betting on the oth-

er man's; and don't mix sentiment with business. Curley admitted that they were two darn good rules.

The clear notes of the bugle sounded through the quiet summer air. Willie pulled Curley's arm. "That's the fifth race coming out. I want to see that."

He hurried Curley to the clubhouse lawn. Willie was like a kid with a new toy where horse racing was concerned. He had seen a million races and never tired of them.

A husky voice stopped their progress through the crowd. "Willie. Tricky Willie. Is Ah glad to see yo!"

Willie joyfully pummeled the aged darky. "Hiyuh, Cap'n. Haven't seen you for a long time. How they going?"

CAP'N'S face was a glossy black, his hair crinkly white. When he rolled his eyes he looked like an animated goliwog. He had been around racing since the man sent the first field on its way. If he had any other name than "Cap'n," racing people had never heard it.

"Not so good, Willie. Ah could use a little."

Curley's face clouded as Willie reached for his pocketbook. Willie was at it again. He handed Cap'n two bills. The top one was a twenty. Curley suspected the bottom one was the same.

Willie clapped Cap'n on the shoulder. "There's more, old-timer, when that runs out. See you around." He turned and caught Curley's frown. He said a little sharply. "I've never regretted giving away dough. Every guy I help sooner or later does something for me."

Curley sniffed. "I guess Cap'n did something for you."

Good humor returned to Willie's face. "Not yet. That's something to look forward to." He gripped Curley's arm. "They're running, boy."

They surged forward to the rail as the field bombed past the grandstand. A little filly with a fleet turn of speed had grabbed the lead. Curley looked at her appraisingly. It was too early, the distance too great. The little filly would be tired before long.

In the backstretch the little filly weakened. A big bay charged by her and

opened up a long lead. He held it clear into the stretch. An eighth out he looked like a certain winner. A sixteenth out the race changed. A picture-book black, his coat glistening, bounded out of the pack. His legs were flashing scythes mowing down the difference. A stride more and the black would have won. The bay lasted just long enough to stick his nose across in front.

Willie let out a sigh of pleasure. "What a finish! Old Melody Lane almost won. I thought he had been retired. Nice training job getting him in shape like that."

Curley wasn't surprised at Willie's knowledge. If there was anything about horses that Willie didn't know it wasn't worth knowing.

Willie turned from the rail, and a fat figure in gaudy sport clothes blocked his passage. The man wore a greasy grin as he stuck out his hand. "Hello, Willie. Heard you just got in today."

Willie ignored the hand. The frost in his eyes would have frozen Arctic vegetation. "Now my day's complete," he murmured. "I've seen Soap Edwards."

The grin stayed on Soap's face, but it was as false as a Hallowe'en mask. "Always the cut-up, huh, Willie? Look me up if you want to bet anything at this meet."

A flicker of amusement touched Willie's face. "Curley and I would like to make another score off you. I'll be looking you up, Soap."

He walked under the grandstand, Curley at his heels. Curley said, "Do you two love each other! If they ever give you knives it'll be a bloody mess."

Willie wasn't listening. He was looking at a girl in an isolated corner, a girl whose shoulders were shaking.

Willie walked over and touched her. She turned a tear-streaked face to him, then tried to pull away. "Easy," Willie said. "Turn off the tears and tell me about it."

Curley watched disgustedly. He could feel another touch coming on. She was a good-looking girl, he noticed, even if her eyes were red and swollen from crying.

Willie's tone broke down her resistance. Curley had often heard that tone soothe a troubled two-year-old.

"Melody Lane just had to win today," the girl said between sobs. "He just had to. What will we do now?"

"Tell me about it," Willie invited.

The story came out between sniffles. The girl was Jane Kumpy. Her father was depending on Melody Lane taking today's purse to clear him of pressing obligations.

"Is your dad Colonel Kumpy?" Willie asked.

She nodded, and Willie pressed her hand. "I'll see what I can do." He flashed her a smile and walked away.

Curley looked back and saw the girl had quit crying. She was making up her face. Willie's smile had something, too.

"Colonel Kumpy," Willie said. "His reputation is as phoney as his title. He picks up old or broken-down horses and builds them up to winning a purse. He's got Melody Lane in good shape. He's going to win soon. I knew Kumpy had a daughter. It's tough on her, poor kid."

"Hey," Curley said in alarm. "What are you thinking?"

Willie grinned. "We'll wait until morning."

CURLEY guessed where they were going in the morning. Willie said on the way, "Colonel Kumpy needs dough all right. It might not be so bad owning a horse again. We can win a bet with Melody Lane, then turn him over to someone else."

He turned a corner before Curley could protest. A big, paunchy man sat disconsolately before a stall. His hair was white and he affected a sweeping mustache and goatee.

"Willie," he said in a soft drawl. "Ah'm glad to see you."

Willie looked at him sourly. "Still trying to hide that Brooklyn accent. What do you want for Melody Lane?"

Colonel Kumpy looked a little surprised. "Five thousand."

"Forty-five hundred," Willie snapped. "I'll be back when he works again. If he's sound you've sold a horse."

The colonel wanted to talk, but Willie wouldn't stay. "He's a counterfeit Charley," he said to Curley. "I'm giving him

five hundred more than anybody else would. I'm thinking of the girl. She deserves a break." He looked sharply at Curley. "And don't say anything. This will work out right."

Curley said glumly, "You're acting like a guy that needs six marbles to be even. Dames are poison." He didn't say any more. Even Curley could say too much to Willie.

They were back at the colonel's stall three mornings later. Willie put a watch on Melody Lane's workout. He looked at the watch, then walked towards the horse. Curley watched him carefully go over the animal.

"He's sound," Willie announced, straightening up. "The Raleigh Cup goes in two weeks. Is he entered? Okay. I'll have your money in the morning."

The colonel led the horse away. Willie said, "There's twenty-five hundred to the winner in the Raleigh. Winning a bet will make up the difference. It's a nice deal, Curley."

Willie picked up the horse the next morning and led him over to old man Rodgers' stalls. "Take care of him, Mac. He's going in the Raleigh. He's ready. We'll cut a fat hog." He walked away, whistling. Willie felt pretty good.

Three days later old man Rodgers set Melody Lane down for a mile. Curley handled the rein work, and he knew without asking that the time was slow.

Old man Rodgers murmured, "He don't look so sharp, Willie."

Willie's eyes clouded. "He doesn't. He shouldn't have tailed off this quick. Try him again in a couple of days."

They tried the horse again, and again Melody Lane turned in a poor performance. "He's eatin' good," old man Rodgers said. "He acts perky in his stall. But out here he runs like he don't give a good darn. What do you think, Willie?"

Curley watched Willie. Willie was perturbed. "I don't know, Mac. Rest him a few days."

Curley turned the horse over to old man Rodgers. He followed Willie. He wished he had an idea, but he didn't.

They turned a corner and ran into Cap'n.

"Ah heah you done bought Melody Lane," Cap'n said. "Ah handled dat animal when he was a three-yeah-old. Can Ah see him, Willie?"

Willie took Cap'n back to the stall. "Dat's ole Melody Lane all right," Cap'n chortled. "Dat's muh baby. Hiyuh, ole horse. Don't you know old Cap'n?"

The horse looked Cap'n over indifferently, then turned to his manager.

"Ah didn't think you'd ever forget ole Cap'n," the ducky said sorrowfully. "How he doin', Willie?"

"Bad," Willie said tersely. "He doesn't care about running."

"Dat don't sound like Melody Lane. He was the runningest horse Ah ever seed."

Willie's head snapped up. "Is there a way you can be positive this is Melody Lane?"

Cap'n lowered his voice. "Ah never told dis before. When Ah was muckin' out his stall a long time ago Ah stuck him with a pitchfork. I sho sweat waitin' for dat hole to heal up."

"It left a scar?" Willie's voice was tense.

Cap'n nodded. Willie dragged him into the stall. "Find that scar," Willie ordered.

Cap'n lifted Melody Lane's off foreleg. He examined it minutely, then lowered it carefully. "No seah," he said in an awed voice. "Dis sho ain't Melody Lane."

Old man Rodgers said, "Paint job, Willie. They fixed up another horse to look like Melody Lane."

WILLIE ran his hands over the animal's coat. "No paint job," he said positively. "This horse is the absolute twin of Melody Lane. All except for that scar." He stepped back and Curley could see the thought strike him.

"Twin brother," Willie said in a flat voice. "There's been twin foals before. I want to talk to Colonel Kumpy."

Colonel Kumpy was gone and had left no trace. Curley heard Willie swear then one of the few times in their association.

"Melody Lane was foaled at the Royal Oak Stock Farm," Willie said grimly. "That's near here. Let's talk to the breeder."

Ma'dux, the breeder, talked freely,

"Melody Lane? Sure, I remember him. A lot of people have owned him, and they've never been sorry. Fine blood lines. I wasn't here when he was foaled. My foreman took care of the mare. Funny thing. I got back two weeks later, and my foreman quit."

Willie said thanks in a tight voice and left. All the way back to the track he kept a thoughtful silence. He pulled Cap'n off to one side, gave him money and instructions.

Cap'n nodded. "Sho will, Willie. Ah'd hurry back."

"Where's he going?" Curley asked.

"Wild-goose hunting," Willie snapped. "Without any ammunition."

Curley gave up. They were all crazy.

The Raleigh Cup drew nearer and nearer. Willie didn't put the horse on the track again. "He needs work," Curley kept saying. "If you're still going to run him. Willie—"

"I'm waiting," Willie said in a flat voice.

The day before the race Curley noticed a new quality in Willie's face—a beaten quality. He had never seen Willie look like that before.

As the afternoon lengthened into evening Willie's face grew heavier. Soap came around, his face gloating. "Running Melody Lane tomorrow?" he asked gleefully. "I'll handle a bet."

Willie's voice sounded like breaking glass. "Get out, Soap, before I break your neck."

The evening shadows were thickening when Cap'n came up breathlessly. "Dis darky were runnin' his head off. But we's got it, Willie. We's got it."

Willie sprang to his feet. "Cap'n, you did? Where?" He pulled Cap'n to one side and listened intently. "Curley," he shouted over his shoulder. "You turn in early."

Curley was hot as he stretched out on the tack room cot. Willie never told him anything.

In the morning Willie was tired. His head dropped and his eyes were heavy. Curley noticed his disheveled clothes and his dusty shoes. Cap'n looked the same way.

"See you in the paddock," Willie said, and threw himself on the cot. A few seconds later he was sound asleep. . . .

Curley walked out of the jocks' quarters into the paddock. Willie was there and his old cheerfulness was back.

He looked at the board and said, "Melody Lane is five to two. I just bet Soap thinks Melody Lane won't run."

Curley's voice was anguished. "Willie, you're crazy. This dog won't run. He hasn't even worked the last week."

Willie tossed him up into the saddle. "You ride your race."

Curley was heavy-hearted during the parading. Willie was losing his judgment. Melody Lane wouldn't run. Curley had worked him twice and knew.

The starter caught the field straight and snapped his thumb. Melody Lane was away fifth. Curley was surprised. It was better than he thought the horse could do.

Tobacco Tax was away winging, Double Play on his heels. Rounding the first turn Melody Lane was still fifth. The horse was running smoothly; Curley felt power beneath him, but he wasn't fooled.

THE field swung into the backstretch unchanged. Something came up on the outside, challenging Melody Lane. The horse tugged on the reins in protest. Curley's mouth popped open and he yipped. Melody Lane wanted to run.

Curley let out a reef, and Melody Lane bounded forward. He moved into fourth place and his stride was sweet. The track moved back of them at an astounding rate. The wind whipped tears into Curley's eyes and the rail boiled away at his left boot. This wasn't the Melody Lane of the morning workouts. This was a race-horse aching to walk his beat.

Double Play swung out from the rail on the far turn. Melody Lane shot for the opening. Curley didn't have to steer him. This old boy knew the score. He slipped through the gap, and only Tobacco Tax was in front.

They went around the last turn tight and true. When the stretch was straightened out, Tobacco Tax had two lengths to

the good. Curley wasn't worried. He had time and distance and an armful of horse left.

His hands and heels pumped encouragement. A sixteenth out they picked up Tobacco Tax, and Curley knew it was all over. He almost waved to the other boy as they went by. The crowd's crashing acclaim as Melody Lane flashed across the wire was the sweetest sound Curley had ever heard. He'd never question Willie again. The guy knew everything.

Willie, old man Rodgers and Cap'n were waiting when Curley brought Melody Lane back. The judges nodded at Curley's waving bat. The race hadn't even been close.

The three were still waiting when Curley came out from the scale room. Willie said, "Mac and Cap'n want to buy Melody Lane. They'll pay for him out of the purses they win." He walked off down the track with Curley.

"You'll be mailing another check," Curley said sourly.

"You know of a better place for it to go?" Willie asked.

"No," Curley said honestly. "I'm just griping from habit. I'm glad we're sending that dough." He grinned broadly. "That twin horse stuff was all a dream, huh, Willie?"

Willie matched his grin. "I'll bet Soap is trying to find some answers. That guy's getting sicker, Curley. I'll have to watch him. He almost hooked me."

He looked at Curley's face and laughed. "Twin foals all right. Maddux didn't know about it. His foreman saw a chance to make some quick dough. He hid one of the foals, then sold him to another horseman. There was the best of blood lines in that colt. The horseman could register him as coming from one of his own mares.

"It'd take a shady horseman to pull it, and one nearby Maddux. The foreman

couldn't transport the colt very far. He was too young. I picked out the guys around Maddux I thought might have tried something like that. Funny thing, the crooked horseman got the foal with no speed. It happens that way in twins. One has the speed, the other's the dud. That's why the twin was never heard of—he wasn't worth racing."

Curley's mouth was open. "But I don't see—"

"I sent Cap'n out to those farms under suspicion. He had to sneak around, looking over all the horses, until he found Melody Lane. It almost took him too long. We loaded up the twin last night and slipped out there. We changed horses and brought Melody Lane back with us. I'm a horse thief, Curley."

"Did we see Melody Lane run that first day?"

"Yeah, that was Melody Lane all right. Soap knew about the twins and set this up. After I bought Melody Lane he rang the twin in that night and sent Melody Lane out to the farm. The Colonel was just a stooge for Soap. I fell for his daughter's sob story, though. That gripes me."

He went on, "If I found out Melody Lane wouldn't run I was still out the purchase price. And if I did go ahead and bet, Soap had me doubly hooked. What are you grinning about?"

"You broke all your rules and still came out on top. You bought a horse and mixed dames with business. Tell me you're not lucky," Curley jeered.

"I didn't break them all," Willie said calmly. "Remember that one about helping guys? Suppose I turned Cap'n down that day. Would he have looked me up again? Would I have found out about Melody Lane?"

Curley sighed. You couldn't beat this Willie guy.



Sand Shy



By
E. E. Halleran

*When a wise golfer
takes his cuts with a
wise-guy caddie, the
sand is sure to fly.*

YOU gotta know the right people to get along in this cockeyed world—and you gotta get the right guy's bag if you wanta make any dough in the caddie racket. That's why I started to simmer when I got a look at the chump they deal me for the qualifying round at Oceanside.

The Oceanside tournament is a pretty snazzy affair and usually a smart guy can make a nice thing out of lugging the carpet-beaters for some drip who happens to get hot. Let a duffer win some dizzy knick-knack he can take home and

brag about and he'll likely be so pleased with himself that he'll slip his caddy a ten-spot or so just because he feels so good.

I took one gander at the jerk they wish on me and right away I see where I'm working for just plain caddie fees. For one thing this guy don't look like he'd ever get excited enough to toss his cabbage around—and anyway he don't stack up as no parts of a winner. He's medium tall and kinda skinny with a faraway look on his pan that makes me wish I'm in some other racket. It ain't the dreamy

drips what are the suckers in this game: it's the enthusiastic clowns with a yen to be heroes.

We play the qualifying round like it's some kind of a funeral rehearsal. The other two players in the threesome ain't much on talk, but this Mister Rogers I've got is about as noisy as a bullnose clam at high water. He hits the ball, though, and with my coaching he gets around the course pretty good.

His drives are all down the by-gosh middle and he clicks off his iron shots like his name is Hagen. I keep him wised up on all the tricks of the course and bring him in with a neat little seventy-three which looks plenty good for a spot in the top flight.

All he says to me is "Okay" when I hand over his sticks, not a word for all the inside dope I've been slipping him as we go along. He forks over the usual two-bit tip on top of the caddie fee, nothin' at all for the strokes I've saved him by expert advice. That ain't very encouraging but I have hopes that maybe he'll loosen up later.

After supper I hear that his seventy-three is low enough to win the medal. Then I feel a little better because that ought to help soften him up for some kind of a shell-out.

Then, just as I'm getting ready to go home, I hear one of his pals talking to him near the clubhouse parking lot.

"You musta been hot today, Rogers," the guy says. "You haven't been down in the low seventies since you took up golf again. What happened to your sand-trap jinx?"

Rogers pulls a funny grin. It wasn't much, but it was better than anything I'd seen on his mug all afternoon. "No traps," he says shortlike.

"I thought so," the other guy laughs. "You'd be a champ if you could just find a course without sand."

Rogers grins again. "Maybe so. I can't figure out whether golf courses have too much sand or whether I don't have enough. I'm scared of it."

"That's a new one I never heard of," the other guy cracks. "I suppose the professors would call that silicaphobia or

something. My trouble would be hydrophobia. I'm scared silly by water holes."

RIGHT then I begin to see what I'm up against. Not only is this guy Rogers a sourpuss—he's a nut! Imagine guys talkin' like that! Silly-cosis and hydrophobia. I know about the last one: it's got something to do with mad dogs, and I begin to feel a little happy that it's the harmless screwball I'm hooked up with—not the mad dog guy.

Next day I'm on the job and we go out for the first round of match play. Rogers is the same absent-minded Ike he was the day before. I keep coaching him along, but most of the time he don't even seem to hear me.

For instance, I study his shot and suggest, "Six iron!" So he says, "I'll take the five." Then he underhits the ball and the shot works out just right, making me look bad.

One way or another he manages to score okay, though, and he is four up at the turn. Then on the tenth he has an approach that seems to worry him. He thinks it's a six shot, but I know a six would be too much. He grunts a little and takes the seven I hand him. His shot looks good, but it ain't hit fair, at least it don't sound right to me, and the ball drops into a deep trap just short of the green.

He glares at me like it was my fault, then walks on silent as ever and looks over the bad lie he has in the sand. I give him the blaster, and this time he don't put up no argument. He just steps down into the trap and takes three puny cuts at the ball before it accidentally bobbles up on to the green. By that time the hole is lost so he picks up and concedes.

I begin to see what he meant when he was talking to his pal. He can shoot pretty fair golf while he's on grass, but something about the sand has got his nanny. He ain't got the guts to take a good swipe at the ball. I've seen lots of guys who couldn't seem to make themselves swing through when they were in sand, but this dope is the worst yet.

On the thirteenth he gets trapped again and it's the same story all over. It costs

him the hole, and if it had been medal play he'd have been eased right out of the tournament. He concedes after taking five ladylike shots, his last bunt only knocking the pill under an overhanging bank.

I hear him talking to his opponent. "I guess I must be the world's champion chump when it comes to traps," he says. "Three years ago I blasted out of a trap and the ball hit a caddie. Ever since that time I've been gun-shy of a niblick. I can't make myself swing through."

The other guy grinned. "In that case I ought to apply for bigger and better traps," he cracks. "That seems to be my only chance of beating you."

He was right, at that. Rogers stays out of the sand from there in and takes the match easy at the fifteenth.

Between rounds I pry the whole yarn out of a kid I know and I learn that the accident cost Rogers quite a few clams. The kid he hit wasn't hurt much, but Rogers was plenty worried. He took the caddie to a lot of fancy sawbones to make sure there wouldn't be no trouble later and generally made quite a fuss about it. After that he gave up golf for a couple of years. I figure if he's that soft a touch maybe I can wring a few extra shekels out of him somehow before this tournament is over.

THE afternoon match we win in a breeze. Rogers hits only one trap, losing the hole, but the rest of the way he bangs the ball around like it's educated to do just what he wants. We take a duffer from upstate so fast he ain't sure he's ever in the match—which he mostly ain't. I begin to feel better. It looks like I'm bootin' home a winner—a sure enough softie what oughta cough up real generous if he once gets through okay.

In the semi-finals next morning he ain't quite so hot and his disposition goes sour when the going gets bad. He gives me hell for swinging his clubs at dandelions. He glares when I hand him a couple of wrong clubs. Twice he stops putting to glare some more just because I try to give him a tip or two on the condition of the green. I keep my patience through it all, though, and when he hits a trap on the sixteenth

with the match all square I forget his dirty looks and give him some real sound advice.

"Pick it clean if you're scared to blast," I tell him. "Sometimes a guy what ain't got the guts to take sand can luck 'em out that way."

He gives me the old fish eye again and takes his customary four helpless whacks before conceding the hole. That puts him one down with two to go and I begin to see that I've put my shirt on the wrong hoss. This guy ain't the man to come through when the pressure is on.

He comes to life, though, and slaps in a bird on seventeen to square the match again. A steady par is good enough to take the next hole and the match when his opponent gets lumpitis and three putts. It puts us into the finals, but I ain't a bit happy over it. It looks like Rogers will never stand the pressure of a final match, especially if he happens to hit sand on one of the early holes.

I hear his opponent is to be a bloke named Childers, a big lug who shoots a swell game of golf and gets better when the heat is on. That settles it with me so I go out and find myself a bet. I have to give two-to-one, but it seems fair enough and pretty soon I have ten bucks riding on that final match—on Childers. It looks like I won't be comin' in for extra sugar from Rogers so I figure I'll make it up the smart way.

Rogers is his usual talkative self when the final begins, which is to say he don't open his yap. He is back on his game, though, and there's some mighty fancy golf shot on the first few holes. By the time we reach the sixth with everything even I figure my bet is pretty safe. Childers is just as good as Rogers and the match will be decided by the first sand trap we happen to meet.

By the time we make the turn, however, Rogers has still not landed in any sand. Instead, Childers blows a shot on the long eighth and we go to the tenth one up.

I see that Rogers is getting nerved up, though. He bawls me out because he has to wait for me to come up with the clubs, and he takes a crack about not using his irons to clip dandelions. When a man gets

all hot and bothered over little things like that it's a cinch for his caddie to spot the beginnings of a crack-up.

Still he won't fold and when he wins the eleventh to go two up I begin to worry about my ten fish. Suppose the dope should win?

On the twelfth there is a nice deep trap just short of the green, and Rogers' approach has to carry it to make the carpet. He studies the shot a long while, tossing up a handful of grass to get a line on the light wind.

"Number eight?" I suggest. That ought to drop him in the trap all right where he can get himself plenty good and rattled. I've got to take steps to protect my investment.

He gives me a funny look. "You wouldn't kid me, would you, Rusty?" he asks, some sarcastic. "I'll take the six."

He's still studying the shot so I haul out the seven and hand it to him. He is so busy figuring the shot that he never notices the difference. He sweeps the club head back and forth a few times, his eye on the pin, then he squares off and whacks one.

IT'S a honey, and for a minute I'm afraid it will make the green. However, the seven wasn't enough club and the ball hits the brink of the trap and rolls back down to the bottom. Rogers looks at the club, then he turns to me. "Rusty," he says, his dirty look a lot different from his easy tone, "have you ever heard of assault, battery and mayhem? No? Well, you'd better look 'em up and be warned. Another trick like that and you'll learn 'em all."

He snatches the niblick and heads for the trap. I keep well out of reach. I ain't forgot that silly-something disease he has and I ain't taking any chances on a nut which might get violent. Worse than that I'm afraid he'll get sore and forget his sand worries. He might accidentally hack one out on the first try if he could just stop thinking about his troubles.

I didn't need to worry. He takes his usual exercise and pretty soon he is only one up. It beats all how one little accident

will make a guy so scary—but it's a cinch this clown is that way.

It don't bother him so much as I hoped, though, and he comes back strong to hold his one-up lead through the fifteenth. The sixteenth is a one-shotter and Childers squares the match there by banging in a long putt for a bird. That makes us all even with two to play so I figure now is the time to give my ornery employer the works.

I start talking to him as we head for the seventeenth. "You gotta loosen up and slap one here," I warn him. "Give it a little something extra. It's a long hole and you'll need every inch to stay even with this siege gun."

"Shut up!" he snaps. "If there's one thing I don't need it's a kid trying to make me press. Make believe you're deaf as well as dumb for the rest of the round."

Right then and there I lose all my sense of loyalty. Any man what'll talk like that to a boy don't deserve his best help and advice. From here in I figure I'm going to look after my own interests—which same being the ten plunks for five on Mr. Childers.

I give Rogers the needle in the old approved caddie style. I stay behind so he'll have to wait when he's all ready to make a shot. I rattle the clubs when he goes into his backswing. Twice I pass over a wrong club so he'll have to come back for another. As we walk toward the green I mention how close Childers is to the pin, hoping maybe Rogers will press trying to get closer.

He's a tough monkey, though. He takes it all and plays up safe, getting another par for a half to put plenty of pressure on the final hole. Somebody has to win now or we go into overtime.

The home hole is a short par four, but the green is shaped like an elbow with traps all around it. Both drives are long, mashie niblick seconds being the ticket for both players. Childers shoots first and plays it safe for the wide front part of the green, safe but a long way from the bucket.

"Here's your chance," I tell Rogers, "He can't do better than a par now and you can go for the pin and get your bird."

During the early rounds the hole has been in the front end of the green where the turf is good, but now it's back on the angle where the committee has always had trouble keeping the grass because the soil is too hard. I guess Rogers didn't know about that part because he takes my advice and shoots for the pin. The shot is a pip, but it won't hold on that hard green. Instead of taking its backspin it bounces a couple of times and trickles across into a trap.

"Too bad, boss," I say sympathetically. "But I guess it's kinda lucky for me, seein' as how I've got some dough on Mr. Childers. Your usual four shots in the desert will just about save me some lettuce."

HE STOPS dead for a minute and I'm afraid maybe he's going to take a poke at me. There's a wild light in his eyes like crazy inventors have in stories, so I shove a niblick at him and back out of range. Maybe it wasn't real smart of me to mention the bet, but I wanted to needle him for some of the mean treatment he'd been giving me.

Childers' caddie starts for the flag, but Rogers stops him. "Never mind, son," he says. "Let my charming youth do the honors. I prefer to have his faithful services and inspiration near at hand."

Childers grins. "Okay with me. Remember the rule about a ball hitting the caddie."

Rogers smiles—a real ornery smile. "I remember," he says, dropping down into the pit. "It means loss of the hole, I believe—loss of the match, in this case—but a minor matter when all is considered."

It sounds to me like his silly-what'sit disease has caught up with him, but I

take the pin anyway. Almost as soon as I do there's a cloud of sand exploding out of the trap and for a moment I can't see what has happened. Then there's a little thud and the ball trickles right down to the cup.

Rogers climbs out of the trap, looks at the ball and looks at me. Then he says, "Damn!" A mighty peculiar remark for a bloke who has just pulled a nifty shot.

Childers' putt is too feeble and he leaves himself almost a stymie. It seems to rattle him and he misses again, leaving Rogers to sink a six-incher for the hole and match. He does it while I feel kinda sick and walk off the green.

I fling the bag down on the clubhouse steps and am just bending down to see how bad I've nicked his brassie on the concrete when Rogers comes along.

"Here's your sticks," I tell him, trying hard to be nice and forget the way he has been treating me. "We won the old jug, I guess. Say, did you ever hear about how Harry Cooper slipped his boy such a wad of change when they won that big—"

Rogers pins me with that glassy eye again. Then he hands me the exact buckten that's the regular caddie fee. Not even a lousy nickel tip!

"Is that all I get?" I ask.

"It is—while the state has such narrow-minded laws about murder and the like," he growls. "Now get out of my sight before I—"

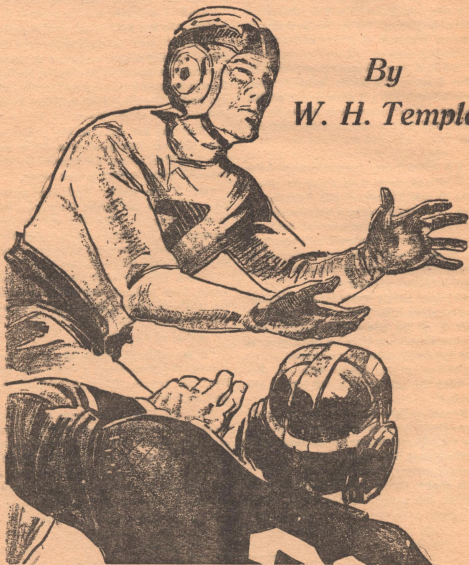
After thinking it over from a safe distance I'm danged if I don't believe the crazy nut was tryin' to sock me when he blasted that ball out of the trap. Maybe I'd better find myself a different kind of a job. You run against too many screwballs and mean people in this racket.



These gridiron renegades had to go whole hog on school spirit in order to collect

Pigskin Pay Dirt

By
W. H. Temple



STANDING on the gridiron, feeling the smooth pigskin between his hands again, Roger Kirk saw how different it was going to be this year. The war had done things to Tarleton football.

The crowds would be smaller, but more than that, Tarleton football was going to be for students, and not for hired hands.

Four veterans approached Kirk. They were linemen Wishocki, Novak, and

Donovan, the bruising fullback, Brad Montana. Montana was their spokesman. He said, "I have been a mug here. Now the snobs and the fancy boys are going to play football and I am going to have fun. You hear about Chink Chelsey? I understand he changed his name. He's playin' somewhere else this fall."

Chink Chelsey was an All-American end. Others had left with him when the news came through that the payoff would be light this year. The scholarships would stand but there would be no alumni slipping a greenback here and there.

Kirk began tossing a football through the air and Coach Pop Benson came up to him. Benson said, "It's going to be an odd team. A few of the veterans. And a bunch of amateurs who never played football in college. I'm glad you're back, Kirk. How do you feel about playing with the amateurs?"

Kirk said, "The last two years I just missed being All-American. The experts claimed my forward wall was so good I couldn't help but be a wonder boy. It got under my hide a little. This year I aim to show them on my own. And maybe some of this is good. Chick Chelsey went to class about once a week. I heard he was being slipped fifty bucks a week in addition to his scholarship. Scholarships are fine for guys like me who want an education, but that kind of thing is wrong."

Benson said, "I'm glad you feel that way. We'll give Tarleton a good team and an honest one. You'll be a credit to a glorious school. You—"

Kirk shook him off. He said, "You can skip that, coach. This is a rich man's school. In general the football team is ostracized. The students cheer us, but they don't speak to us off the field. We're mugs. I'll play football, but it's strictly business. I make touchdowns and I get an education in return. It's very simple."

They scrimmaged a week later. The varsity backfield was Kirk and Montana, a sophomore named Hastings, and the quarter was Richard Lennox. Lennox was slim and aristocratic, he called signals with a Boston accent. He was a big shot on the campus, and Kirk had often seen

him driving around in a fancy-looking car.

Lennox called the numbers and the ball came back to Kirk. He started around the end and a scrub tackle drove at him. He came in too high. Kirk swerved, his knee drove against the would-be tackler's jaw. The scrub was stretched out cold.

Brad Montana winked. He said, "We're getting hunk at last."

Kirk snapped, "It was accidental."

Donovan grinned. "Sure, these fancy boys just can't take it."

The play went on. Pop Benson came up close, his eyes alert for any slugging. It was clean after that, but Kirk's heart sank. When Hastings or Lennox carried the ball, the old guard sat on their tails. The team was shot to bits.

After the workout Kirk walked back to the professor's home where he had free room and board for acting as caretaker. Professor Atwood said, "Roger, I have bad news. My health has forced me to retire, and I'm leaving for the Coast and closing the house."

Kirk collected his belongings, then started down the street, wondering where he could get another job. Along Fraternity Row he saw Lennox. The quarterback said, "You deserting school like the rest of the rats?"

Kirk put down his bag. "I'm leaving unless I find a job. But right now I'll take on the job of closing your mouth."

Lennox drawled, "Accept my apology. Our fraternity porter has just been fired. You can take that on if you like and live here."

KIRK went inside with Lennox. This was not his crowd but it was a job. He needed it. He was shown to a room, and then going downstairs he found a white coat and prepared to wait on table. Two other students were also waiters. Kirk carried a tureen of soup upstairs, placed it on the serving table, then prepared to dish it into soup plates. He had one table to take care of, there were three of them in the large dining room, crowded with students he had seen around the campus but had never met.

He was slightly nervous at a job he had never handled before. He served Richard Lennox at the head of his table. The young man at Lennox's right, said, "If you have no objections, waiter, serve me my soup without your thumb in it."

Kirk reddened, then remembered that he couldn't afford to lose this job. Silently he dished up a second soup plate, returned to the table, and the heckler, grinning, thrust out a foot. Kirk caught himself just in time, but a little of the soup spilled onto the table. The diner tapped his glass with a fork. He said loudly:

"The man with two left feet. There's a spot on my cuff waiter, and you'll foot the cleaning bill."

Roger Kirk hesitated just a moment. Then, very calmly, he poured the plate of soup down the young man's neck. The fellow jumped up, spluttering, took one look at Kirk's determined face and hurried from the room. Kirk started for the door.

Lennox said, "Where are you going?"

"Leaving," Kirk barked. "What did you think?"

"You haven't been fired," Lennox grinned. "Pileher has made a habit of baiting new waiters. I think you broke him of it tonight. Good work."

Puzzled, Kirk returned to his task. He could not figure Lennox out. Lennox almost seemed to be on his side, but that was unbelievable. Kirk finished serving the meal, went downstairs for his own dinner, then went to his room to study for the evening.

The next day he cleaned the rooms after his morning classes, then hurried down to the football field. Under the scrutiny of Pop Benson there was no dirty play. Roger began to take hope. Lennox, although he had not played football in college, was a shrewd quarterback. The varsity might amount to something yet.

As the days went by, Kirk settled into his new job, doing the work efficiently and never mixing with any of the fraternity members. Montana, Novak, Wishocki and Donovan had rented an apartment and asked him to come in with them, but he decided to stay where he was. He want-

ed a chance to be able to make up his mind whether he hated Lennox or liked him.

Pop Benson read off the starting lineup. He said, "This is it. It won't be easy to beat Tech. This is a green team but it can be a good one. Give me all you've got."

Roger Kirk trotted down the ramp, a hollow feeling in his stomach as he raced across the turf. He went through signal practice, and it was obvious that the team was not pulling together as it should.

He went out finally to the center of the field. They won the toss and he chose to receive. The teams lined up and then the ball was coming through the air, a long, low kick.

Kirk danced back three steps, then cradled the ball in his arms. He ran straight forward, then angled toward the sideline. Montana blocked one man out on the eighteen, and Kirk twisted out of the arms of another. A host of tacklers drove him into the ground on the twenty-five.

Lennox, bland, his voice silky, called the numbers. Hastings went at left tackle for two yards, Montana got three more. Lennox kicked and Tech took over.

They went in for power plays. They gained only a few yards at a time but they gained. They piled through Wishocki's end of the line. He was the weak spot, and once the quarter found it, he hammered it like a man playing a blow torch. They got down to the Tarleton twelve-yard line as the quarter ended.

The teams changed sides and Tech came at them again. The fullback hit Wishocki and bulled through to the eighty-yard line. A halfback squirmed around the end and Kirk hit him on the seven. The Tech quarter faded back, cocked his arm and an end caught the pass on the two-yard line. Lennox brought him to the ground but it was a first down.

Twice the Tarleton line held. On the third play the fullback raced through tackle and over the goal line. Novak went through to block the kick, but it was six to nothing.

THE Tarleton attack stalled deep in their own territory and the score was unchanged at the half. The team went in the locker room and Pop Benson came in and looked them over. He said, "Wishocki, you feeling all right?"

The tackle said surlily, "Yeah. Why?"

Benson said, "And you, Novak? Donovan? Montana? I watched you play last year. You were All-American timber. You were sandlotters this first half. I know how you feel. You had your team drop out from under you. Some of the boys you're playing with today are green. But they'll come through if you'll lead them. You can do it. You can win this game today."

They went out again. Tech was content to play for a one-touchdown win. They had a fast charging line and they bottled up Tarleton. Montana was sluggish as he hit the line, his old power was gone. Hastings, the sophomore, was just another runner. He didn't have enough.

With five minutes of the fourth quarter gone, Tarleton was on its own fourteen, first down. Lennox said, "We gamble. We pull a Frank Merriwell." His crooked grin flashed and then he snapped the numbers.

The ball came back into Kirk's hands. He faded, watching the ends come racing in at him. He had no protection. The last two years they had guarded him like the gold at Fort Knox, but this was another line. He hunted vainly for a receiver and then tried to run. His feet went out from under him and he landed on his face on the five-yard line.

A tackle got up grinning. He said, "Glamour boy, this purity game has sure showed you up."

Lennox drawled, "When I call a pass, you're supposed to pass, Kirk. Try it again."

Again Kirk had the ball. He ran across toward the sidelines. An end charged him and Lennox blocked him out. Kirk sighted his receiver across the field and let the ball ride like a bullet. The end caught it on the twenty-five, he got to the thirty-two before they nailed him.

Hastings made two. Kirk took the ball again, cut back as though to pass, then

slammed through tackle for five yards.

"Your specialty number coming up, Montana," Lennox murmured.

The fullback made just two yards, one less than they needed. He got up looking fresh as a daisy and he did not seem perturbed.

Lennox called the numbers. Hastings was back to kick on fourth down but the ball went to Lennox. The quarterback drove straight through the center, and when they pried him off the turf he had gained just one yard. Blood dripped from his nose.

He said pleasantly to no one in particular, "Rough game this football, isn't it?"

Kirk went back and took the ball. He had lost the heavy feeling that had numbed him all afternoon. The team was not much but they were moving. Tacklers came toward him and he sighted between them and fired the ball. He went flat on his back and Lennox pulled him up.

"We're at midfield," Lennox said. "You're the boy to win this one, Kirk."

Kirk had the ball again. He faded back and then instead of passing, he lateraled to Lennox. The quarter streaked downfield to the forty. The minutes were ticking off. They got to the thirty-two and time was running out.

Lennox called the signals and the pigskin socked into Roger Kirk's hands. This was the ball game, riding on this pass. He angled back, giving his man plenty of time, letting him get to the fifteen.

Then he threw it, and the end started running. He got beyond the safety. He hit the ten and the ball was in his arms, a clear field ahead to a touchdown. He raised his hands and the ball went right through them.

He came back shaking. He said, "Kirk, I was too sure of it."

Lennox said, "Play ball." Hastings kicked out on the seven-yard line.

Tech ran three plays into the middle of the line. Kirk went back as safety and there was a minute and a half to go. He stood there thinking that they were being beaten by a team that they could have trounced a year ago.

The Tech punter booted the ball and it

was a low kick. Kirk turned, ran toward midfield and took the ball over his shoulder. He started back down the field. Lennox knocked a tackler ten feet out of play. Kirk raced straight ahead over the twenty-yard line. Montana was at his side. The fullback threw himself at the Tech safety and missed. He landed on the ground, grinning. Kirk pounded right into the man, knees driving, spinning as he hit it. He stumbled a moment, then broke free and went over the goal line. The kick made it seven-six, Tarleton, and the game ended.

KIRK, leaving the lockers some minutes later, went past the coach's office. The door opened and his teammates of the past two years came out. Kirk grinned at them. Tarleton was going to have a bull club yet.

Montana said, "Benson just told us we laid down out there. He said we were letting the old school down. When we told him we didn't give two cents for the old school, he said we'd have to change our attitude or quit the squad. It made things very nice. We quit. We are now spectators."

They went on down the hall and Roger Kirk saw the team's hopes fading with them, Tarleton football was blasted.

At the fraternity that night, Lennox said, "Kirk, we're holding a dance tonight. Why not join us?"

Kirk, surprised, said, "Thanks, I will." He did a little studying, then finally went downstairs. Couples danced across the dining room, and Lennox drifted by, a blonde on his arm. Kirk grinned and cut in.

The girl said, "You're one of the pros. I thought all you boys chewed tobacco and talked like movie gangsters."

"Some do," Kirk said. "But a fellow from across the tracks who comes here on a scholarship isn't necessarily a tramp."

Someone cut and Kirk joined Lennox on the sidelines. He said, "That gal belong to you?"

Lennox drawled, "You're calling your own signals in this league, chum."

Kirk discovered he was having fun. At

eleven he had an idea. He walked across the campus to the apartment of Montana and his friends. He went inside and they were playing poker.

Kirk sat down. He said, "I have a hunch you guys are wrong. There are some pretty decent gents in this college. Lennox is all right, and so are some of his friends. They've always given us a brush-off, but I think they judged us all by rats like Chink Chelsey."

Montana said, "I thought you had more brains. Times are changing, lunk-head. That fraternity is looking out for itself. I'll give you two to one, those tramps will give you a bid some day. Not because they like you, but there aren't so many wealthy people around any more to support fraternities."

Kirk went on back to the fraternity. Lennox was standing in the doorway. He said, "Rog, the boys would like to have you become a member here. I know you're short of money, but you could pay the initiation fee out in work. Interested?"

Kirk thought of Montana's words and said, "Thanks, not right now."

Lennox nodded, saying casually, "If you change your mind, let me know," and that was that.

They played Kings that Saturday. After Kings would come Grayley, the toughest team of all. And Kings was right behind them.

Tarleton started fast. Early in the game they got the ball on their own thirty. "We don't waste time," Lennox said. Kirk faded back and threw one thirty yards down the field. The end romped across and it was seven to nothing a moment later.

Kings was a precision team. They pounded at that line. There were four men sitting in the stands who might have won that game for Tarleton. They sat there watching their one-time teammates take a beating and come back for more. They fought back gamely but they never had a chance.

It was over finally. "Nineteen to seven," Coach Benson said. "It's no disgrace." He fell silent, thinking of Montana and his friends and what might have been.

Kirk walked back to the fraternity

with Lennox. He said, "You're as good a signal caller as I ever saw. Why didn't you come out for football before?"

"I did," Lennox said. "I'd played in prep school. I reported here, as a freshman. I wasn't on a scholarship, I was just a kid who wanted to play football for the fun of it. The freshman coach had eleven men who were here on scholarships. He had his team picked. He put me on the awkward squad. I stayed three weeks, then I dropped out. No one even knew I left."

The next day Roger Kirk went again to see his former teammates and urge them to report. He got nowhere. Montana said, "That Lennox. He didn't even get his uniform dirty Saturday."

"He's a signal caller," Kirk defended him. "He's got a football brain."

"And he lets you take the bumps," Montana said. "No, thanks, I want no part of him. But this week-end Grayley will give him his lumps. You know who's playing for Grayley? I saw a picture of their last game when they beat State fifty-six to seven. The guy carrying the ball was none other than Chink Chelsey. Only the caption said his name was Smith. They made him into a back—too many people would have recognized him as an end."

"We could report him," Kirk said. "It would be nicer to say nothing and beat him. Wouldn't you guys like a crack at him?"

Montana said, "I've had a yen to get my mitts around a football but nothing doing. Not in this league, kid."

Kirk went sadly home. The Grayley game was the all-important one of the season. It would make or break the team. He was captain and this was his last year and the Grayley game was going to be murder. The squad had played far over its head against Kings. They had nothing left.

THROUGHOUT that week the squad's play was listless. Each member of the team knew the hopeless odds and it was reflected in their scrimmages. Pop Benson gave no sign of pessimism but

Kirk could read the disappointment in his eyes.

On Friday night before the game Kirk was sitting in his room. He heard a rumbling in the distance and suddenly it grew louder. It came nearer, and looking out of his window he saw hundreds of students massed in the street outside. Then suddenly the students chanted in unison,

"We want Kirk! We want Lennox!"

Kirk's door burst open. A throng of students poured inside. They grabbed him and hurried him down the stairs.

Lennox was pushed out beside him and they were taken down the stairs and outside together. In a group were the other members of the football team. They were herded to the front of the procession and the snake dance across the campus began. The entire football squad was on hand.

Kirk glanced back at the procession. Torches had been lighted and the students were singing college songs. A thrill went through Kirk. This was something new in his experience. He was suddenly a part of Tarleton, the school was in his mood to stay.

Beside him Lennox said, "The football team belongs to Tarleton now. It's not bad."

Too choked up to answer, Kirk nodded. The procession went on. It led to Rackham Auditorium, and inside the building the football squad was led to chairs on the platform. The building was filled, and then Pop Benson appeared. He gave a little talk, he introduced each player, and the rafters shook as the men acknowledged the introduction by standing up. Fred Rusing, the football radio announcer, gave a talk.

The meeting ended and the team went outside. Kirk saw Montana, Novak, Donovan and Wishocki standing on a corner. They looked bewildered. This was something new to them, they did not quite understand it.

Lennox suddenly stopped Kirk. He walked over to the former football stars. He said, "There's been a revolution here. Why not come over on our side? We'd be proud to have you."

Montana wavered momentarily. Then

he said, "You're having fun, aren't you? You're a big man on this campus. And now you've added football to your trophies. You go out there and call the signals and let someone else take the bumps. When you block a man, you look like you're waving at him. You can go to hell."

Lennox whitened, but said nothing. Kirk pulled him away. They went on down the street and Kirk said, "You're a symbol to those tramps. There are fellows like yourself on the team who are taking a beating. But they only see you."

"I've got a football brain," Lennox said. "That's all I've got. I'm brittle. In prep school I broke my leg twice. I've broken both collarbones and a wrist. I've held back here. I've figured that I can help the team by running the strategy. I figured that if I got hit and cracked up, I'd help nobody. Maybe I figured wrong."

There was not a vacant seat in the stadium the next afternoon when Kirk ran down the ramp with the team. He glanced up at the stands as he went on the field, and in a box behind the Tarleton bench were Montana and his mates. Montana had a pair of field glasses. He said to Kirk, "Give that Chink a bat for me, Rog."

The Grayley backfield was pure dynamite. There was Chink Chelsey, alias Smith, who was a streak of light. There was Kurvik, the best spinning back in the game. There was Gatling, a plunging fullback without a peer unless it was Brad Montana. And the quarter, Mayo, was a sharpshooting passer. They had a line in front of them that averaged two hundred pounds.

Tarleton kicked off and the ball was downed on the Grayley twenty. Gatling cracked the left side of the line for four yards. Chink Chelsey danced around the end, and Kirk went over and met him head on. He landed on his back and Chelsey was beside him. Chelsey grinned. He said, "I remember that Lennox. He never liked me. He'll like me less today."

Kurvik took the ball, spun and came into the line. Kirk got his hands on him and lost him. Kurvik went up to the forty-

yard line before Hastings pulled him down.

Chelsey carried again. He went off tackle and Lennox went up and hit him. Lennox did not waver. He crashed him head on and then he lay on the ground and Chelsey walked back grinning. Lennox got up, staggering a little. He said lightly:

"When does the next train go through?"

It was a parade. Chelsey, and Gatling, and Kurvik—and the Tarleton linesmen had never seen anything like it. They were in there fighting, but they needed more than fight. And when the Grayley team reached the twenty-yard line, Mayo went back and flipped a pass. Chelsey took it on the five and scampered across the goal line. The kick made it seven to nothing with eight minutes of the quarter played.

GRAYLEY kicked off. Tarleton started on their twenty. Lennox called the signals. He took the ball himself and rammed off tackle. He got up, white-faced and gritting his teeth.

He said, "They don't expect me to carry. Maybe we can fool 'em."

He went in the line again and once more he was trampled. Gatling and Chelsey hit him at the same time. They knocked him into the air like a rag doll. He landed flat and it was some time before he got up.

Kirk went back to pass. He was rushed and the pass went wild. He tried again but he had no protection. The Grayley line streamed through, and he grounded the ball. Hastings kicked out of danger and Grayley started in again. Lennox was in there blocking every play. But nothing could stop that football machine.

It was thirteen to nothing early in the second quarter. It was nineteen to nothing when the half ended. It was a rout and Kirk knew it would be worse in the last half. Grayley would pile it on. They were out for fifty points. They would bury Pop Benson's ideals under a terrific storm, because what he stood for was anathema to schools like Grayley.

The squad went to the clubhouse. Len-

nox suddenly smiled and pitched forward to the floor. The trainer bent over him, uttered an exclamation, and Lennox was carried to the rubbing table. The trainer and the doc looked him over.

The doctor said, "He got an awful wallop on the head. Slight concussion. I don't know how he played."

After several minutes Lennox regained consciousness. He lay there, pale, inert, and the locker room door opened. Montana stood framed in the entrance, and behind him were his friends.

Lennox saw him and smiled without humor. He said, "You had me right, Montana. Just a panty-waist, that's me."

Montana came in slowly. He said, "I saw you when you were hurt. I had the glasses on you, I saw that Chelsey boot you on the head. You played almost a whole quarter by instinct. I don't know how you did it."

Pop Benson whirled. He said, "No one gave you permission in this locker room."

Montana nodded. He said, "I know. Last night the boys and I watched that torchlight snake dance. It started us thinking. And then when Lennox got hurt today and kept on playing"—he reddened—"it made us feel kind of small. We'd like to play a little football if you don't mind, if the team is willing to have us. You don't have to worry about our condition either. We're always in the pink."

Kirk drew a long breath. Pop Benson said softly, "Get your suits."

They went out there again. Wishocki and Novak and Donovan were up front in the line. Montana was the fullback, and Shaffer, a substitute quarter, was in for Lennox.

Tarleton received. Montana went back and quick-kicked. He booted the ball out on the seven-yard line, when the kick went over the safety's head. Grayley prepared to move. Korvik spun into the line. Wishocki rose and smashed him for no gain. Gatling hurtled at the other side and Novak and Donovan dropped him for a two-yard loss.

Grayley should have kicked, but they were out to score, and so far it had been

easy. Chelsey went around the end. He got into the secondary and Brad Montana's two hundred and twenty pounds hit him like a runaway truck. The ball bounced out of Chelsey's arms and hit the ground. Kirk fell on it on the twelve-yard line.

Chelsey was slow in rising, and Montana said, "You play for pay, I play for fun. It makes a difference, kid."

Tarleton's ball and Kirk went back and passed to Hastings. They went to the seven-yard line. Hastings made one through tackle and the ball went to Montana. He hit the middle of the Grayley line. He plowed down to the three. He took it again. With four men hanging on him he walked across the goal line. Shaffer kicked the point.

Grayley took the kick-off. They got to their forty, were stopped and booted out on the Tarleton fifteen. Kirk passed for twelve yards. Hastings made seven and Montana hit the line for a first down. Kirk reversed off tackle, and when Montana, running interference, cleared out three men, he made midfield.

Shaffer, the skinny and scared sub quarter, went around end on a sneak play for the first and only moment of glory in his football career. He went twenty-seven yards to the Grayley twenty-three.

KIRK passed to the eighteen. Hastings got to the twelve and Montana went down to the eight. Montana took the ball again. He spun, handed it to Kirk, and went into the line. Grayley piled up on Montana and then saw Kirk sprinting around the end. He went over standing up. The kick was missed but it was nineteen to thirteen and a ball game.

Montana said, "They thought it was a breeze. They know different now. From here on it will be very tough."

Grayley came with a rush. They got across the fifty and down to the Tarleton fifteen. Gatling and Kurvik smashed at the tackles and were brought down. Mayo went back and passed. An end was in the clear.

Kirk ran across to him. He crouched, then leaped high in the air. He haunted

down the ball on the three, found his footing, then started upfield. He was knocked down on the ten.

Shaffer was nervous. His signal calling faltered. They kicked and Grayley attacked again. They gained but they could not score. The game went into the fourth quarter and Grayley was playing for a one touchdown win and glad to get it.

There were four minutes to go when Tarleton got the ball on their own five. A slim figure came running across the field. Lennox grinned whitely at them and took Shaffer's place. He sent Montana into the middle to the eight.

They lined up. Lennox was in there, talking to them, grinning, and Kirk could feel the flow of renewed hope through the members of the team. He went back and took the throw from center. He cocked his arm for a desperate gamble on a pass deep in his own territory. But it was not a pass. Hastings came by and took the ball in the ancient Statue of Liberty play. He ran the ball up to the thirty before they put him down.

"Now or never," Lennox said. "They expect a pass."

He called the signals and Kirk was deep, his hands extended for the ball. But he did not get it. The pass went to Hastings up close and the line opened and mousetrapped the Grayley forwards who charged blindly for Kirk. Hastings went ten yards to the forty.

Kirk had it again. He found no receiver and he turned and ran toward the sidelines. Montana spilled two men. Kirk went up to midfield, danced past a tackler and was in Grayley territory. Gatling smashed him to the ground and he got up, shaky and dazed. Lennox gave the ball to Montana three straight times and he made ten yards to the thirty-five. The goal posts looked far away and the clock said two minutes.

Kirk said, "I'm O. K. again. Let me have it."

He threw one out to Hastings and the half made eight yards. Montana added the first down. The stands made so much noise Lennox had to yell the numbers. They got to the twenty, the fifteen, and three times Grayley held. It was fourth and seven and Montana could not get those seven.

Lennox said, "We win or lose it now. Over the goal line, kid. Pay dirt or defeat."

The ball slapped into Kirk's hands. It was a high pass, he'd had to reach for it, and the ends were coming at him fast. He went back five, ten yards, and his hands felt icy cold. This was it, all or nothing.

Hastings was on the five and Kirk threw the ball. He was dragged to the ground. He twisted and saw Hastings leap high, his fingers curl around the pigskin. He came down and fell forward, smashed from behind. He fell across the goal and it was nineteen all.

Montana held it, Lennox swung his foot and the ball went between the up-rights. Twenty to nineteen and the Grayley rooters sat stunned. Grayley received and the gun went off with Mayo throwing a desperate pass that went into the boxes.

Roger Kirk was dead tired. He started slowly across the field, his bones aching, his face streaked with grime and sweat. Up ahead of him the Tarleton cheering section was on its feet. The strains of the college Alma Mater rolled down across the field, and looking beyond the stadium, Kirk could see the spires of the campus buildings against the deep blue sky.

Beside him Brad Montana swallowed hard. He said huskily, "Quite a school, hey, Rog?"

Kirk nodded solemnly, "Our school, kid."



Cinder-Path Time

By Cliff Howe

Winning cinder laurels does not always depend on the champ who dons the spikes. For sometimes Fate steps in—and takes an unexpected turn around the track!



SON, why don't you try middle-distance running? You're wasting your time trying to be a miler." Old man

Nicholson was coach-

ing another Notre Dame track team, as he had for twenty long years. The stubby-legged youngster he gave this advice to was Greg Rice.

Greg had set his heart on being a miler, but the old coach pointed out: "Son, nature molded you for a distance man. Why, you've got the stuff to trim the Finns at their own game. You might be the first American to win an Olympic 5000-meter title. Just you listen to me."

The youngster did listen, and the two went to work. Old man Nicholson became the kid's coach, trainer and foster father. The kid would run his legs off for the old man. Things weren't too easy for him, he had to work his way through college. In the afternoons he'd practice running and at night he'd sell newspapers.

And then Greg Rice blossomed forth as a middle-distance runner. His performances were sensational. After each race old man Nicholson would smile and say: "That boy will really be good in about two more years."

When Paavo Nurmi, the famous Flying Finn, brought his protégé Taisto Maki to this country a special feature race was staged between the little Notre Dame bundle of flying dynamite, Greg Rice, and Taisto Maki, whom many regard as even greater than Master Nurmi was in his prime.

The gun barked and the two great runners were off! Perhaps Greg Rice was thinking of what old man Nicholson had said to him back in the dressing room. "Son, this is the night we've waited for! Show all the speed you've got, and if I never see another race in my life I'll still be happy if you run well tonight!"

The kid ran a race like none ever before seen on the indoor boards.

Some idea of the burning pace of that race is given by the fact that the first *three* runners to finish all cracked world's records, but topping them all was the mighty atom Greg Rice, who flashed across the finish line twenty yards ahead of his nearest opponent.

Thousands roared acclaim. Even Paavo Nurmi opened incredulous eyes and murmured: "That boy is the greatest runner in the world! I've never seen a runner like that American!"

Old man Nicholson stood there at the finish line, just nodding his head and smiling, for his boy had come home in the fastest time ever. A boy who might have been just another run-of-the-mill miler if the wise old coach hadn't changed the youngster's plans.

The old coach never did see his boy run again, for the next day he collapsed with a heart attack and died, happy in the knowledge that he had lived to see one of his pupils acclaimed as the greatest middle-distance runner of all time.

Though John Nicholson has gone off to the land of Valhalla. Greg Rice remains a living monument to the old coach, for as long as Greg runs the cinder path, there old man Nicholson will stand, stopwatch in hand, smiling his gentle smile

as he sees his boy come down the narrow lane to immortal sport fame.

You've heard of Gene Venzke. He's considered one of the great milers. Back in 1932 Venzke turned in a 4:10 mile, the fastest ever run by a human being, indoors or out, up to the time. And it all happened because of spooky footsteps.

Before that momentous record-breaking run Gene Venzke had been beaten out several times by last-minute dashes to the tape. He had been caught from behind so often he developed an illusion that someone was always right on his heels behind him. And so it was that night of 1932 they staged a mile run in Madison Square Garden.

Venzke was in great form. At the gun he jumped into the lead and held it against all opposition. Tearing down the homestretch he suddenly heard phantom footsteps drumming behind him. He crowded on more speed, but the faster he went the closer the footsteps seemed to tag along behind him.

Venzke hit the tape in a wild burst of speed, still pursued by those pounding footsteps. But it seemed his hearing had tricked him, for his nearest rival was forty yards behind! Thus, in beating a ghost, Venzke handed Father Time a trimming, too, for the clockers caught him in a new mile record.

Lou Zamperini is another fast lad who pounded the boards to fame. Funny thing about Lou, he's the original hard-luck guy of track. While there have been great runners who suffered accidents in their youth, Lou Zamperini made them all look like pikers. His record of injuries read like a full hospital report.

At three he severed a toe. At ten he ran an iron pipe into his thigh. At sixteen he tore the ligaments in his knee. At eighteen he ripped the muscles in his left leg in an auto accident, and at twenty he cracked an ankle in a ski jump. In spite of it all he's been running great races ever since he came back from the last Olympic games.

It was a hickory stick which actually made Lou Zamperini a great runner. He was a lazy kid and hated the grind of training. He had a brother who was a

bit of a miler in his own right, and this brother would arm himself with a hickory stick and chase Lou around the high school track during practice, whacking him across the shoulders whenever he got within striking distance.

To avoid getting hit, Lou Zamperini would run faster and faster until he developed such skill he could always keep ahead of his brother's hickory stick. That's one time it might be said a runner was actually bulldozed into producing results. . . .

Archie San Romani is a stumpy little Kansan who for years has been a mighty midget of the mile. Great runner that he was, he always lived in the shadow of a fellow Kansan, the great Glenn Cunningham. But Archie kept on plugging away, waiting for the day he'd thunder down the homestretch as the mile king.

Came the 1940 track season. Cunningham, the great Kansas Express, was definitely slowing up. This was the spot Archie San Romani had waited for. It would be his year. Yet try as he would, he just couldn't get along, and it was not he but Chuck Fenske who became the mile king.

Desperate in defeat Archie went to see a doctor. The doctor looked him over and said: "Young man, it isn't any wonder you've lost your speed. The miracle is that you're able to run at all. You have a serious internal ailment and should hang up your shoes right now!"

Ironic, isn't it, that when Glenn Cunningham faded from the picture his shadow, Archie San Romani, was also forced to quit the track.

How many remember the Kid from Kankakee? Twenty years ago he was the fanciest, most colorful runner of them all. A tough little egg from Chicago who climbed out from behind a taxi steering-wheel to become the darling of the track world. In his time he ran the mile under 4:20 forty-six times until he was finally stopped by none other than Paavo Nurmi himself. The Kid was through, washed up. But the Kid had a game heart, he tried his flying feet at marathon running.

One year he showed up for the grueling Boston Marathon. It was a cold, blustery day as a hundred of the best long-distance runners of America toed the mark. The Kid had never gone into a marathon before, and some of the veterans kidded him with: "Hey, Kid—you'll need your cab in this one. This isn't a mile but twenty-six times a mile. Or don't you know your arithmetic?"

"It's a cinch!" declared the Kid as the gun barked for the start. The Kid from Kankakee ran with a smooth graceful stride. Five miles, ten—twelve. He was tiring after less than the halfway mark. Maybe this marathon wasn't such a cinch. His feet burned under him.

"I won't quit!" mumbled the Kid to himself. Twenty, twenty-three miles and it was torture. His track shoes were broken, the soles completely worn through. He was a wretched, broken figure limping along but still stubbornly refusing to drop out.

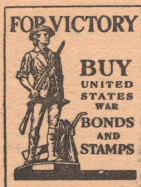
At last he stumbled across the finish line. The spectators roared tribute to his courage, but the Kid didn't hear; he had collapsed to the ground. They carried him to a dressing room, the doctor had to cut the shoes from his horribly swollen feet. He was warned to remain in bed for a month or he might never walk again. But the Kid from Kankakee just laughed and within a week was on his feet again and soon running in other marathons and placing in the money, too.

It wasn't until October, 1928, that the Kid from Kankakee finally hung up his running shoes, and all because of an orange. El Ouafi, the chunky little Algerian poilu who had won the Olympic marathon at Amsterdam, was brought to this country for a race against the Kid. Fifteen thousand jammed Madison Square Garden for this long-distance duel.

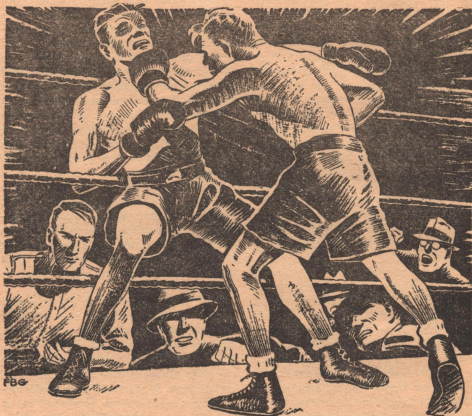
For twenty-two long miles the two figures ran as one man, locked together in even strides. But in the twenty-third mile the Kid made a fatal mistake. He stopped for an orange to moisten his parched throat. The Algerian broke loose and made his bid for victory, and in a few flying seconds had opened a gap of seventy-five yards.

The Kid from Kankakee took up the challenge, trying to close the gap. But it was in vain. In spite of an amazing exhibition of marathon running the Kid was beaten. So he closed his running career forever. He left the track world and tried out various ventures. None seemed to click.

The years went by. Now if you should wander by the smoky steel mills of Gary, Indiana, you'll find the Kid working there. And six miles east, on an eight-acre nursery you'll find the chesty little fellow spending his spare time among the plants and flowers. If you look close you'll recognize the Kid from Kankakee to be Joie Ray, once king of all milers and a marathon star to boot.



Fight Fever



By Hank Willard

Danny Cave was no mitt marvel, but he had plenty of fight fever. And even though he suffered a kayo treatment, it could not bring down his ring temperature.

DANNY CAVE sat in his restaurant on Broadway, smiling at the customers. He was a friendly guy, he liked to shake hands with strangers, and with the regulars who came into his place to eat. But that one guy—of course he'd had too much to drink, that probably accounted for it.

He was heading toward the door and

Danny grinned. Another customer said to Danny, "Howdy, champ."

The drunk swayed and gave Danny a bleary-eyed sneer. "Champ," he said, making it sound like an insult. "Who'd you ever lick? A stumblebum champion."

The drunk was hurried on outside and peace and quiet reigned again. But Danny had a frown between his blue eyes. The

restaurant suddenly lost its warmth. He hadn't had a fight since he'd won the title three months back. His manager, Sam Bradford, kept putting him off.

Sam drifted in and Danny called him over. Danny said, "I want to be a good champ. I don't want nobody yapping that Danny Cave sat on the title. Sam, I want a fight."

"Sure," Sam said. "But there's no rush. You're doing swell, aren't you? You're making money. Everything is fine. But I'll get you a match. I'll put you on with Foxy Lawson. Maybe in six weeks."

"Lawson," Danny said. "A has-been. He should have taken off his gloves two years ago. That's a laugh. I want a guy like—" He looked past Sam as someone made a noisy entrance. Three men came in. The one in the middle was slim and broad of shoulder, and his face bore the marks of the fight trade. He was Grid Gaynor, a middleweight sensation from the Coast.

Gaynor saw him and came across to the table. "Hello, Cave," he said. "Nice crib you got here."

"Sit," Danny invited. "Name your poison."

Gaynor sat down. He said, "You and me could do some business, Danny. In the ring."

Sam Bradford said, "Nothing doing. Go get yourself a rep."

Gaynor smiled at Cave. "Not scared of me, are you?" he said. "Haven't got a little yellow in you, have you, champ?"

Danny started forward and Sam said, "Cut it, Danny. It's a trick. I'll handle this fresh punk."

Danny said, "Don't worry. I won't swing on him here. But sign him up, Sam."

Gaynor's managers were like bees who had discovered honey. One of them yelled to a newspaper reporter across the room. Sam Bradford kept saying nothing doing, but finally he had to give in.

Gaynor rose and gave Danny a mock salute. "I'll be seeing you," he said. "I like this place. After we have our fight, I'll buy it from you. The new champ will take it over."

HE AND his handlers went outside and Sam said, "Well, you got it, boy. I been handling you four years. And now you get to running off at the mouth all by yourself. See what it gets you."

"It gets me a title fight," Danny said. "I been reading in the papers how they say I won't give anyone a chance. I guess this'll show 'em up."

"You're gonna be a hero," Sam said sadly. "You're gonna get knocked right on your pants. You got a nice restaurant, you're making dough. Now you're gonna be a hero and lose everything you got."

Danny's wife, Ellen, came through the door, her arms filled with bundles. She gave Danny a kiss and said, "How do you like it?" She pivoted, turning her head this way and that way, showing him the new hat.

Sam said gloomily, "He's gonna fight Grid Gaynor. In six weeks."

"I want to be a good champion," Danny said stubbornly. "Besides, I'll beat the stuffing out of that Gaynor."

"Sure you will," Ellen said. "He won't have a chance."

She said it a little too fast. Danny could read her thoughts in her eyes and he felt very unhappy about it. Ellen loved him, but, like Sam, she thought he was nothing but a punk inside that ring, a prelim boy. But he was champ. The former champion had been thirty-three when he took on Danny Cave. His legs had held him up three rounds and Danny had won the title after four years of fighting around the country. No one gave Danny too much credit. They thought he was simply lucky.

"Well," Sam said, "you better start training tomorrow. See you at the gym."

He went out the door and Ellen said, "I'm proud of you, Danny. You're a fighting man."

Danny said, "I don't want to hang on to the title unless I know I've earned it. I'll whip this Gaynor and then they'll all know I'm good."

"They like you now," Ellen said, and that was true. Danny was a New York boy, he'd never left the big town except to fight. He grew up on the East Side and he had never had enough to eat as a

kid. He was small for a middleweight; he just did manage to get into the division. But he could hit and he was tough. The New York fans liked his spirit and his gameness.

Danny said, "Kid, we're on top of the world. This makes up for the lean years. And the good ones have just started."

Danny went into training the next day. He went at it hard. This was going to be his biggest fight. Grid Gaynor was a newcomer, but the reports on him coming through from the West labeled him as deadly. The odds were on him to cop the title. Danny was the sentimental favorite, but the wise money was on Gaynor.

Danny boxed daily in the gym. He was spotting Gaynor over eight pounds when they stepped on the commission scales, but he was not worried. He was ready to defend his title. He was a fighting champ.

He went back to his apartment after the weighing in and sat around with Ellen. She didn't take in any of his fights, they made her too nervous and she stayed at home to listen to the radio and tear up her best handkerchiefs.

"Take care of yourself, Danny," she said, when it came time for him to leave.

"Sure thing," he said. "I'm the champ, aren't I?"

He met Sam Bradford and they went down to the arena. In the dressing room Sam went over the plan of battle. He said, "This Gaynor is loaded. He'll use his weight. He's big and strong and you had better chop him down early in the game. You've got to hit and get away from him. He'll murder you in close."

A little later they walked down the aisle toward the distant cone of yellow light. They brought down the house for Danny Cave and it made him swell with pride.

He got up in the ring and Gaynor sat across from him. They met in the center and Gaynor said, "Too bad, Cave. How much do you want for that hash house?"

DANNY said nothing. He went back and shuffled his feet in the resin and went out at the bell. He went out fast and walked into a straight left of Gaynor's.

He took it and kept going. He threw his right hand at Gaynor's chin. He pumped the left and then the right again. He fought standing up, going forward all the time, and punching with both hands.

He called his shots. He drove lefts and rights to Gaynor's jaw and the challenger was hurt. He covered up and came in close to hang on. He hung all his weight on Danny Cave. Danny shoved him off and drove another left hand to the side of the head. Gaynor smashed a right hand to the mouth and Danny tasted blood. This was it, he thought, and he loved it. This was his trade and he was giving everything he had.

The bell rang and Sam said, "You're doing fine, but don't let him get close. You got too many pounds to give away and eleven more rounds to go."

Danny nodded, his head very clear. It was going to be a real battle this time. If he won tonight he was worthy of the championship. There would be no fluke about it. Grid Gaynor was a very good man in there.

The second round began and Gaynor came at him fast. He wanted to get in close and bury his hooks to the body. Danny tagged him with a looping right and moved back out of range. He didn't like to take a backward step; it wasn't his style to retreat. He rebelled suddenly and went in close to trade punches.

Danny came to on his pants at the count of five. He got up on wobbly legs and back-pedaled for the rest of the round. Sam Bradford said, "Why should I give you advice. You know it all yourself. I say stay away and you move in close."

Danny grinned, "You were right, Sam."

He went out to stab and run. He poured leather at Grid Gaynor from long range. And steadily the challenger stalked him. Once near the end of the round he caught Danny in a corner. His hands buried themselves at the belt line of Danny's trunks.

It went on that way for two more rounds. Danny was piling up the points. But his stomach was red as raw beef-steak and he could feel the strength

draining out of his legs. They still functioned, but there was the difference of a second's fraction in their speed. It wasn't much, but Gaynor was fast himself.

They went out for the sixth round and Gaynor came after him hard. Danny tried to get out of the corner and Gaynor shifted and brought a right hand up to the chin. It hurt and Danny knew he could no longer move away. He came down on his heels and started punching. He cracked Gaynor's jaw twice with everything he had.

The challenger's knees wavered but he stayed upright. He shook the fog out of his eyes and came boring back in. Left and right. Danny dropped into a clinch, hanging on, waiting for the fuzziness to leave him. Gaynor backed away, hitting as he went. He wasn't a clean fighter. The back of his glove raked across Danny's mouth, his elbow dug into Danny's side.

Danny could see it coming. He pulled his head back from the punch and threw one last wallop. He felt it hit, but it was high and Gaynor took the blow and moved inside. His right hand came off his chest.

The ropes hit Danny's back. He slid down to the floor and automatically started to climb up. The referee had him by the arms. He said, "That's all, Danny. That's all."

"I'm a champ," Danny mumbled through smashed lips. "I lose like a champ."

He got on both pins again and gave Grid Gaynor a bloody, fighting grin. He waved one hand and snarled, "C'mon, bum."

GAYNOR came in cold as ice, his narrowed eyes studying the staggering champion. Gaynor flipped out a left. It straightened Danny up. His hands began to drop and Gaynor fired the punch while the fans were shouting to the referee to stop it.

Danny went over on the canvas and halfway through the ropes, his head hanging in a reporter's lap. That was it, the end, and in an apartment across town Danny's wife, Ellen, snapped off the radio. "It's all right, Danny," she whispered.

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Danny had been walloped, but he had grown up in a tough world on New York's East Side. Twenty minutes later he was all right except for a few bruises and bumps that would take time to heal.

"Well, Sam," he said, "you were right."

Sam shook his head. "You were belted, Danny, but you have a lot of heart. You went good in there until he caught up with you."

"I got some angles," Danny said. "When I get the return bout I'll take him."

Sam said, "What return?"

"Why, the sixty-day clause," Danny said. "It's standard for a champ. If he gets knocked off for the title he gets a rematch within sixty days. You're a smart manager. You put it in the contract."

Sam said flatly, "Danny, I left it out."

Danny raged. He said that one of the punchies who walked on his heels and shadow-boxed all day would make a better manager than Sam. He said a lot of other things and Sam listened patiently until he was done.

"I did it for your own good," Sam said. "Because I like you, Danny. I don't want to see you wind up back of the eight ball like a lot of other fighters. You got color, Danny, and a fair to middling wallop. You got heart, and you can box a little, but you haven't shown enough to be up top. If you want any more fights they'll be run-of-the-mill. With the boys who ain't so good."

Danny said, "I ain't so good either, am I?"

"I know how you feel," Sam said, "but you shouldn't let it get you down. You were the champ three months. You made some dough. You got that nice restaurant. Hang up the gloves. Enjoy yourself. You're happily married, you got a paying business. What else can a guy ask for?"

Danny went home and Ellen was very nice. It was understood that Danny would hang up the gloves. If he kept fighting now he might get badly hurt. He should know when to quit. He forgot the business of fighting. Days he sat in his restaurant. He didn't do too bad, but he didn't

do good either. He was no longer the champ and that made a difference. He just about broke even and that wasn't getting anywhere.

He wasn't happy either. He sat at a table by himself and saw a picture in his mind. It was a picture that had been in all the papers the day after the Gaynor fight. A picture of Danny flat on his back with his feet sticking up over the canvas and his head in a reporter's lap.

Grid Gaynor came in the restaurant one afternoon. He stood at Danny's table. He said, "What's the matter, pal? How come no customers? Is the joint haunted? You got a ghost around the place?"

"Sit down," Danny said. "Order anything you like. I'll have the chef season it with arsenic."

Gaynor said, "I'll buy it from you, has-been. I'm giving you a break."

Danny told him where he could go and Gaynor grinned and drifted on out. Ellen came in and sat beside him. She said, "Maybe you should sell it, Danny. I think you ought to get away from New York. Besides, running a restaurant isn't a job for a man like you. You need activity. You remember the time we went up into New England to fight Kryley. It was the first time you'd ever been away from New York. Remember how beautiful you thought the country was? Why don't we sell the restaurant, Danny, and buy a farm?"

"Me on a farm?" Danny said. "A guy who grew up on the pavements? Honey, maybe you're getting a little punchy yourself."

"You'd get away from all of this," Ellen said. "All the people and the sights that remind you of fighting."

He thought of peaceful hills and a cozy white house with smoke drifting upward from a chimney. And two days later he sold the restaurant to Grid Gaynor and bought a farm.

He bought it sight unseen, from photographs in a real estate office. And a week later, bag and baggage, he and Ellen moved in. The house was sprawling, unpretentious but comfortable. There was a view across rolling hills. Danny stood at the window looking out.

He said, "Quiet as a morgue. I'll go nuts. How can I run a farm? I ain't even sure what a cow looks like."

HE FOUND a man to run the farm and worked out a salary and percentage basis with him. The days went by and Danny surprised himself. There was plenty to do. He got up early in the mornings and worked outdoors all day. There were always chores and it was fine to be out in the open air. Danny had always done his training in a gym, breathing in stale cigar smoke as he worked. Now he sawed wood or worked on the land, with clean air going into his lungs. His skin grew pinker, he began to fill out a little and his appetite was no longer finicky.

After two months of it he knew just where he stood. He liked this life. He was very happy except for one thing. He had discovered that a man cannot run away from himself. He would love this life if things had been a trifle different. But he had been born with a desire to fight, and at that he had flopped. The bitterness was still within him. He didn't see fighters or men of the trade now, but everything was still there in his mind. He couldn't get away from that. It was the only fly in the ointment, the one black shadow across his happiness.

He didn't say anything to Ellen about it, but she watched him; she knew him better than he knew himself. One evening she said casually, "You'd better put the gloves on tomorrow. Find a boy to spar with for a round or so. You're putting on a fight next week."

Danny looked up from his paper. "Don't kid me about fighting."

"It's all arranged," Ellen said. "There's an army camp near here, you know. I was over this morning. The officer in charge knew you were staying here. He wanted to know if you'd put on an exhibition at the camp next week. They have a middleweight there you'll remember. Joe Bronson. You're going three rounds with him. Just to put on a little show for the boys."

Danny dug out some gloves from a trunk the next day. He got hold of a strapping kid who'd done a little boxing



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and they went out to the barn for a workout. The gloves were pillows and they stepped around fast, Danny not trying hard, just getting back his timing. They stepped around fast, and at the end of the workout Danny wasn't breathing hard.

"I'm rusty," Danny said, "but I'm in good shape. I don't want to look too bad in front of those soldiers. I'll probably be at that camp myself in a few months and I want them to give me a glad hand, not a boot."

A week later he stepped into a make-shift ring with Joe Bronson. There had been a dozen inter-camp bouts and this was the final one, an exhibition. Bronson shook hands. He said, "I got a lot of weight on you, Danny. I won't be trying for a knockout. But let's give 'em some fancy action, hey?"

"I'm with you," Danny said.

They went out there and stepped around fast and fancy, shooting a lot of left hands. Danny thought it was great fun to be in there again, even though it wasn't serious and no decision was even to be made on this bout. They finished two rounds and then they heard a few boos from the audience. It seemed that Joe Bronson was a sergeant and the boys began to pan him.

"Hey, Sarge," they yelled, "you scared of that shrimp in there? We thought you had a punch. Oh, you cream puff."

Sergeant Bronson began to get a little red around the ears. He didn't like the ribbing and Danny did not blame him. The sergeant had a reputation to uphold.

They went out for the third and final round and Danny was prepared to box once more. He stepped in, shooting out the left hand and Bronson dug in close. Bronson threw a punch from his shoe-tops and Danny went three feet off the floor and dug a divot in the canvas with his chin.

He got up at seven and Bronson moved in and clinched. "Sorry, Danny boy," Bronson said, "but I had to do that or these lugs would run me outa camp. You know how it is."

"Sure," Danny said politely. "I understand."

He smiled pleasantly at Joe Bronson. He smiled and fired his left hand. A stream of claret dripped from Bronson's handsome nose. The sergeant started swinging with both fists as though it were an alley brawl. Danny took it and went back for more. They stood there, flatfooted, firing punches at each other. The bell rang and neither of them heard it. They kept on swinging until the referee pried them apart.

Bronson dropped his arms and walked very carefully to the ropes, his feet getting a little tangled as he walked. Danny trailed after him, stumbling in his wake.

Bronson said, "It was a nice fight, Danny. Thanks for coming up."

"It was a swell fight," Danny said.

He went down and met Ellen. He saw a figure moving through the crowd, and for a moment he thought it was Sam Bradford. But Sam wouldn't be up here in the hills. Sam would be back in the big town, somewhere along Jacobs' Beach.

"That was fine," Danny said. "That'll hold me for a while."

THEY went back to the farm and Danny settled down to work. He tried to reason things out. He wasn't really big time. It was just one of those things. He had to face it. Some fighters were destined to be champs and others to be mediocrities. There was nothing he could do about it.

He worked hard, and then one day he went back to the farmhouse and Sam Bradford was there. Sam seemed embarrassed. He said, "Danny, I'm in a jam. I'm flat. I had a couple fighters since you left and they were strictly punks. The thing is this. I hate to ask you for a favor, but I need some dough. I need it to pay my income tax. You wouldn't want to see your manager go to jail, would you, Danny?"

Danny said, "We make a profit here, we live fine, but we don't have much cash. You're welcome to what I got, of course—"

"I wasn't thinking of making a touch," Sam said. "I had a different angle. Grid Caynor is looking for a fight. He's knocked over all the boys in his class; he wants

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another bout. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind going against him once more. You'd get a nice purse and I'd take my manager's slice."

Danny thought of Gaynor's smashing fists and then remembered how it had ended last time. He wasn't great, but maybe he could do better. Maybe he could walk out of that ring when it was over.

He said, "I'd do it, Sam, but Ellen wouldn't let me. I promised her."

"I'll talk to Ellen," Sam said. "Let me try it."

He went into the kitchen where Ellen was cooking dinner, and much to Danny Cave's surprise, his wife assented. Sam stayed to eat and then went back to the city. He wasn't gone for long. Two days later he returned with the fight papers and a couple of sparring partners. Danny stayed there at the farm, getting in shape, prepared to give his best.

The fight was six weeks away and the days went fast. Danny went to New York again; the place no longer seemed like home to him. He felt like a hick tourist staring at the skyscrapers.

He got on the scales and Grid Gaynor said, "One hundred fifty-seven pounds. You're getting fat, Cave."

The reporters couldn't see any fat. Danny's shoulders were a little more solid from long hours of swinging an axe. His chest had filled out. He looked in fine shape, but the odds were eleven to five against him and plungers were scarce.

Danny went down to the ring, Sam Bradford at his side. Ellen was back at the hotel, the radio turned on. Danny listened to the noisy yells that greeted him. They still liked him even though he was a bum and Gaynor was not a popular champion although a great fighting machine.

"You haven't given me any strategy," Danny said. "How do I fight this guy this time?"

"What's the use?" Sam said, shrugging his shoulders. "It's a nice gate, anyway. I'll tell you what to do. Get out and knock his block off. Maybe you'll land a lucky punch."

Danny nodded. He went out to meet the champ and they didn't attempt to

touch gloves. Gaynor said, "Seven rounds last time. Let's make this one fast. I'll send you back to that hick farm of yours in time to get the cows milked."

Danny went back to his corner. He heard the bell and he came out fast. Grid Gaynor was right there in the center of the ring to meet him. Danny belted him across the chops and Gaynor got in close and hammered at the midsection. Danny grunted, but he didn't move away. He stayed in there, working on Gaynor's right eye.

At the end of the round he sat back on the stool. Sam said mournfully, "You took a lot of punishment down there, Danny."

"It was an experiment," Danny said. "I'm going to give this Gaynor a chance to show me all he has."

Gaynor had plenty. Danny held back and let Gaynor force the fighting. He took it for five rounds and Gaynor was working hard. He could hit and Danny felt the punches, but he wasn't going down under them. He was still in there and his legs were sturdy as oak logs.

He said to Sam, "This is where I show my stuff. I'm entitled to one round. I ought to get one pot shot at this guy."

He stepped out fast and let Gaynor come to meet him once again. Gaynor was working hard, he was a little peeved that Danny was still around. Danny took a punch and then threw his right hand for the head. He went into action fast, moving forward, following the right with a hard left. He fired another right and Gaynor went against the ropes. He came off them fast, and he came out fighting hard.

Danny sighted and met him with a straight hard left. Gaynor dropped into a crouch and an uppercut straightened him up again. He fell into a clinch, shook his head, then started swinging.

They stood there toe to toe. Danny took the blows and fired back, a joyous grin on his face. He was walking steadily forward and driving Gaynor ahead of him while the fans howled to the skies.

A right hand sent Gaynor spinning

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into the ropes. Danny drilled a sharp left hand high and Gaynor went down. He took a count of nine and came up to start backing away. There was a minute to go in the round and Danny was anxious to get back to his farm.

He moved forward and threw a looping right hand. It landed just below Grid Gaynor's ear and everything that Danny had was back of the blow. Gaynor spun like a top. Danny started a left and then held it. Gaynor was lying on the floor. He twitched once and then was still. The referee looked astonished and then recovered and raised Danny's hand.

They yelled for him out there. They called him champ, and this time Danny knew that it was real.

He went back to the dressing room, and when he came out of the shower, his faded blue bathrobe draped about him, Ellen was there. She and Sam were grinning about something.

Danny said, "I'm not so dumb as you both think. I can put two and two together like any other guy. In the first place, you're a very careful guy with a nickel, Sam, you'll never go broke. You saw that army bout, I thought I recognized you and then I knew you'd been there when you came up to the farm to schedule this fight."

Sam, smiling back, said, "Ellen called me up to take in that army fight. She talked the general at the camp into making the bout. She'd seen what the country had done for you, Danny. You were always a good fighter, but you were a little short on stamina and didn't pack enough weight. That farm made you a champ. You had the heart, and it gave you the rest.

Danny sat there, drinking it in, and this time there was nothing to regret. Then suddenly he saw a clock and started to his feet.

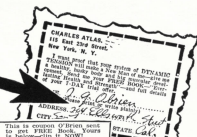
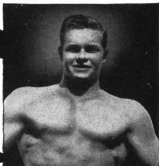
"Hey, Ellen," he said, "we got just time to make the last train back. You stay here, Sam, you schedule another bout. I got to milk those cows that Gaynor talked about. But I'll be back to fight."

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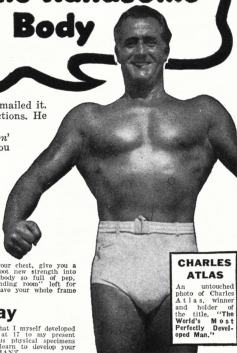
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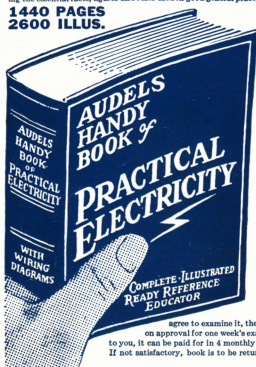
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