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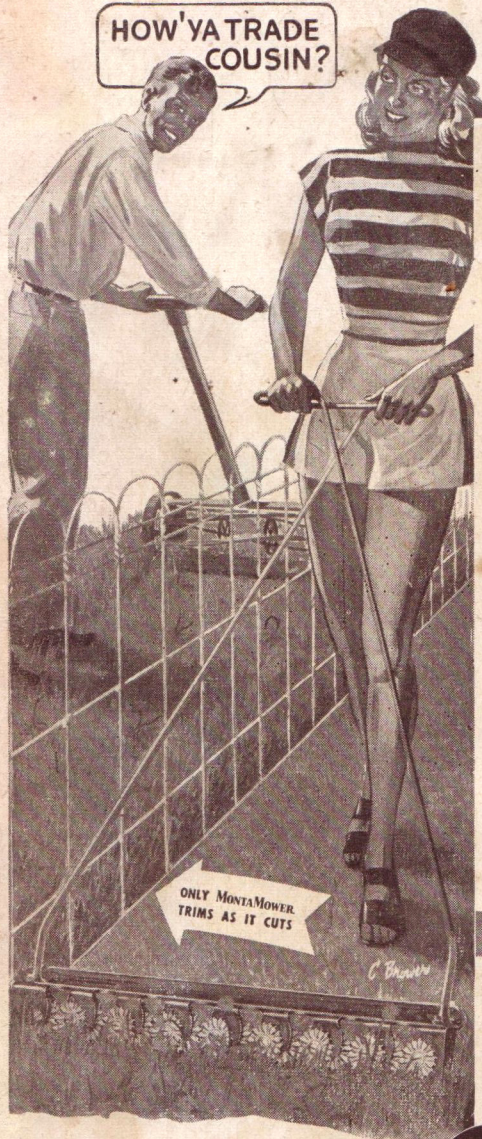
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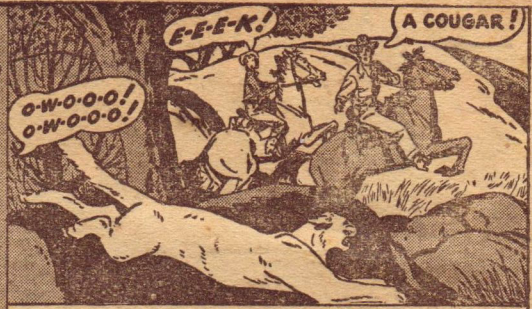
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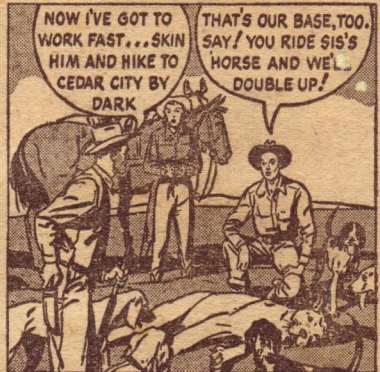
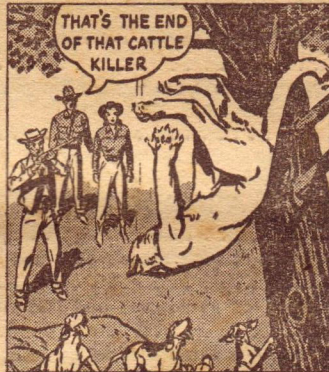
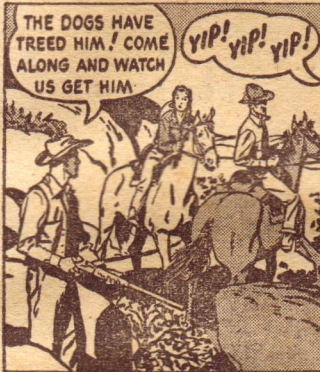
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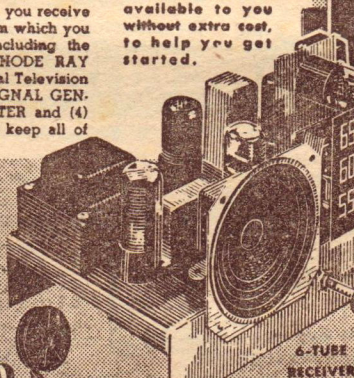
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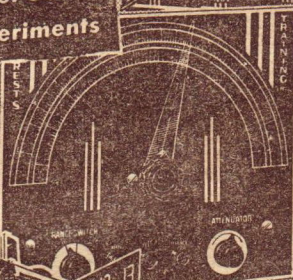
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**For Adventure:** "Scott of the Antarctic" with John Mills, Derek Bond, Harold Warender, James Justice and Reginald Beckwith (Eagle-Lion) Technicolor.



This is the true story of Robert Scott, an English naval officer, and his four companions whose expedition to the South Pole in 1909 ended in tragedy. Magnificently told, the picture follows the men from their homes in England, across the Great Ice Barrier of the Antarctic and on to the South Pole. Bitter with disappointment, they find that Amundsen's expedition has arrived at the Pole before them. On the way back from the Pole to their ship, the party fights the fierce Antarctic weather and terrain—to face an ironic tragedy when only eleven miles from safety. *A well-played, well-photographed chronicle.*

**For A Western:** "Stampede" with Rod Cameron, Gale Storm, Don Castle and Johnny Mack Brown (Allied Artists).



A dam on the ranch of Tim and Mike McCall (Don Castle and Rod Cameron) is cutting off the water supply from the grazing land of some new settlers. Connie (Gale Storm), one of the settlers' daughters, tries unsuccessfully to get them to open the dam but only succeeds in infatuating Tim. He is killed protecting the dam from dynamiting. On a second attempt to destroy the dam, the settlers stampede the McCall cattle. Mike McCall loses the cattle but saves the dam after a vicious gunfight. *A rootin', tootin' film.*

• • •

**For Mystery:** "Lust for Gold" with Ida Lupino and Glenn Ford (Columbia).



Four men have died in the last two years looking for the lost \$20,000,000 gold mine in the Superstition Mountains near Phoenix, Arizona. When Barry Storm is accused of murdering the last of these, he retraces his trail with the deputy sheriff to prove his innocence. From the deputy and a series of flashbacks he learns the history of the mine, which was first discovered by two Mexican brothers. Later a desert rat (Glenn Ford) comes into possession of the mine by killing off all contenders, including the scheming Julia Thomas (Ida Lupino). Back to the present, Storm discovers the murderer and the strange secret of the mine in the moonlight. *For all dramatic-detective fans—some real suspense and off the beaten mystery trail.*

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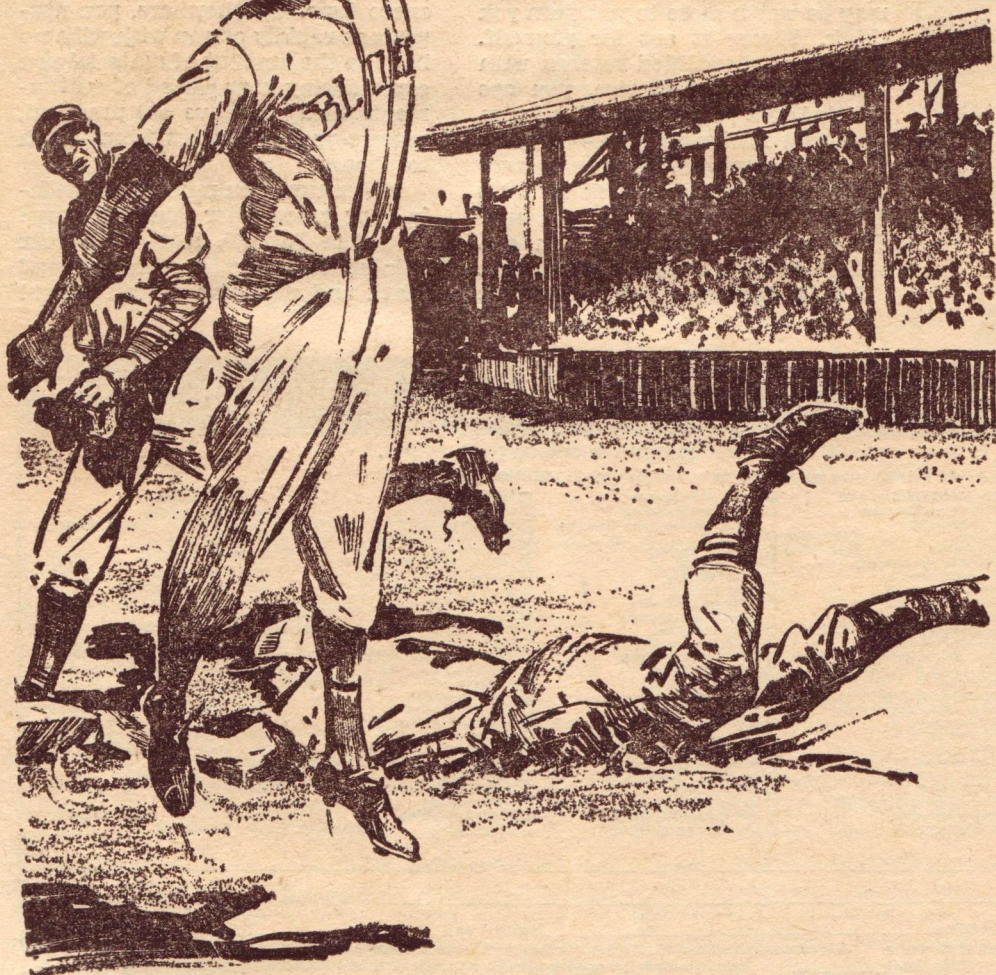


A NOVEL

# WAY

The ball came lobbing  
over, too late. . . .

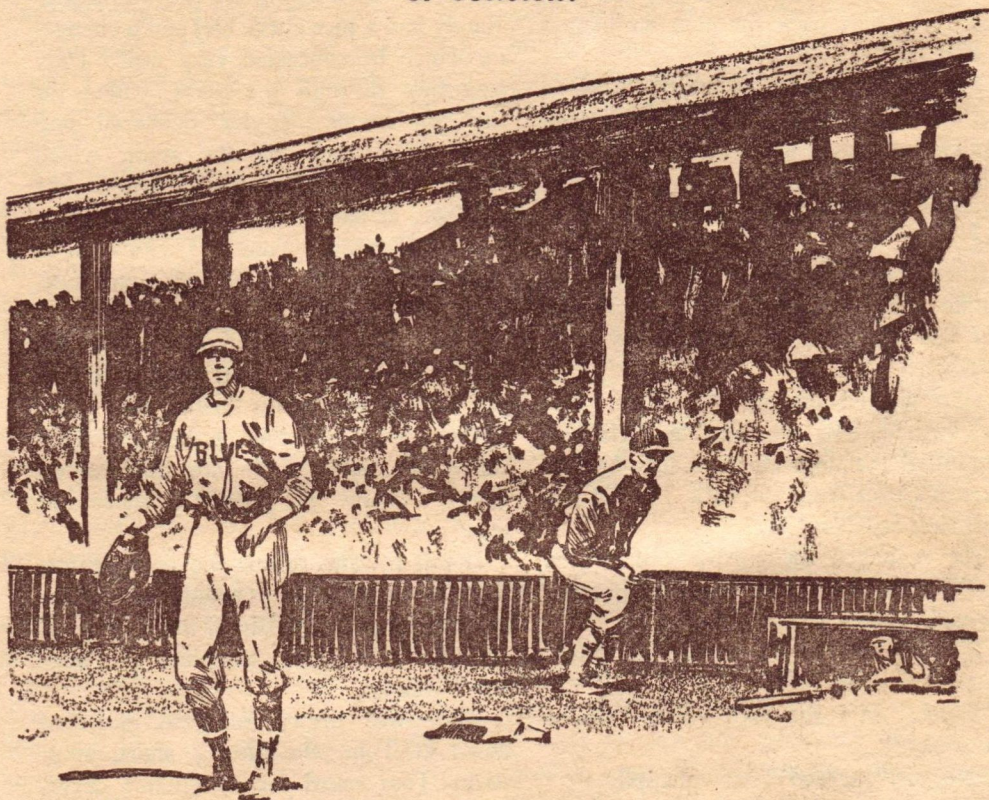
By  
**WILLIAM R.  
COX**





# OF THE MIGHTY

*A cellar team scrambling for a flag . . . a rookie with a heart too big for his pitches . . . and one last pulse-stopping inning, where a never-guy's desperate gamble pays off in glory—or oblivion!*



THE FLORIDA sun beamed down upon the young man with the bat.

He was a broad young man and he handled the bat as though it were a toothpick. His wrists were thick and strong, his forearms bulged; he was not a beautiful youth, but to certain members of the Sox baseball club he looked very pretty indeed. His name was Tom Lane and he was up to the big-league camp for a tryout as catcher.

Joe Peele was pitching for the Reg-

ulars. The first-string backstop, a veteran named Pudge Riley, crouched and snarled, "Show this busher the coive and let 'im go back to Oshkosh."

Joe Peele was almost ready. He threw the curve. Tom Lane reached out the big bat, exercised the reflexes and coordination of his muscles and the ball rifled over second base. Lane ran like a terrified cow, swung over first and dove into second, almost killing Abe Abelson when the shortstop tried to tag him.



Lane got up and wiped his sweaty face. He stared at the bench. A big, red-necked kid was waving his arms and yelling. Lane waved back. He was very happy. If Kid Hall could only get a break and Tom could catch him in an important exhibition game...like against the World Champion Blues from the other league . . . He took a modest lead off the bag. His eyes went back for just an instant to Kid Hall. . . .

There was a flurry of action. Abelson dug in behind him. Pudge Riley took a pitch-out from Peele and the ball came riding down. Tom dove frantically for the bag. The ball thunked into his short ribs.

Riley was bawling, "At's a way to handle them bushers! This club ain't *that* bad we need square haircuts from Oshkosh!"

Tom walked toward the bench. His ears burned. His eyes smarted. He had committed the unpardonable sin—he had taken his eyes from the ball. He did not dare look at Clam Carewe.

The manager sat on the end of the bench. His voice was low and precise. He said, "Lane, that was a nice hit."

Tom stammered, "I muffed the pitch. I wasn't watchin'—"

"Lane," said the cool voice, "you're not smart."

"No, sir," agreed Tom unhappily.

"There is very little future in baseball for an un-smart catcher," said Clam Carewe. "However, the Sox—" He shrugged. The Sox were just barely in the big leagues, he might have added. He went on, "I'm giving you a chance because you can hit and throw. Sunday you catch against the Blues."

Tom choked. "You . . . thanks, Mr. Carewe. Thanks!" He fell over a stray bat, getting to a seat on the bench.

The side was retired by Peele's stylish elbow-bending and Tom buckled on the gear and went back of the plate. Kid

Hall lounged in the shade, smiling contentedly. Tom wondered if he had not made a mistake when he quit pitching in the American Legion League days. Pitchers only work a couple of times a week at most. Catchers work like dogs all the time.

Randy Taylor, a recent acquisition of the Sox, was working for the Yannigans. Randy had a nice curve ball and a change-up which he concealed very well. Tom, squinting through the mask, called for the jug-handle. Taylor delivered and Tom rifled back for the swift, which Randy threw over the inside corner. Abe Abelson, at bat, missed both of them for a two and nothing count. Taylor obliged with the soft one as Abelson, over-anxious, lunged and went down swinging.

The ball went around the infield and Tom considered the next hitter. It was Jig Lahey, marvelous fielder but light-hitting second baseman of the Sox. Tom called for faster stuff with less tax on Randy's elbow. Jig popped to short center.

It was routine, calling the signs against these men he knew. It would be tougher against the puissant Blues, those murderers who were world champions. . . . Pudge Riley was up.

Riley was pretty fat. He glowered down at Tom, clutching a short, stout stick. Tom asked for an outside curve. Pudge couldn't get his portly frame unwound for it. He let it go by. He took two strikes, both on the outside corner.

Then he growled, "Get it in there. Dammit, throw it in!"

It was understandable about Riley. He was a ten-year man and about through. Nobody but the lowly Sox, those inevitable cellar occupants, would have carried him as first-string catcher. Pudge was over the hill—and he hated it. Of course he hated the young catcher coming up worse than anything.

Tom almost signaled for a good pitch.



But with a two and nothing count he had to keep Pudge unsettled. He asked for the downer, and Randy, winding up with care, threw it right into his glove. Riley swung and missed.

The game was over. Tom walked thoughtfully to the clubhouse. Clam Carewe was standing inside the door, waiting for him. Carewe said, "What did Taylor throw that inning?"

Tom said, "He chucked every ball where I asked for it. He didn't miss a sign or a spot, Mr. Carewe. Taylor's ready."

The manager was a lean, greyhound sort of man. He had been a great outfielder in his day. He had been up and down and around without any success as a manager, but his eyes were intelligent, his manager detached, cool. Tom Lane wondered about Clam Carewe, sometimes.

Tom had his shirt off when Kid Hall came close. Hall's eyes were hot. He said furiously, "I heard you. Tellin' Clam that Taylor was ready. Braggin' up that cookie! How the hell am I goin' to get a break if you keep yakkin' about other pitchers? I'm goin' to write Nancy about this! You're stoogin' for another guy!"

Tom said wearily, "Taylor is ready. The manager don't know if the catcher don't tell him. Carewe's got a right to know."

"Pah! I wish we hadn't ever signed with this busher team," snapped Kid Hall. "Last place is too good for these bums. I wish I hadn't listened to you..."

Tom said, "Take it easy, Kid. Everything'll be all right."

"Yahhh! You and your Sunday School stuff! Nuts!" The tall youth stalked off to the showers. Tom sighed and went on undressing. Sometimes it was difficult to remember that Kid was Nancy's brother. At those times it was easier to remember that Kid had almost landed in reform school before Tom got him interested in

baseball and off the street corners. . . .

Tom began thinking about the Blues' hitters. He had written down the weaknesses of most players in both leagues, gaining his information by questions, by listening to veterans like Joe Peele and Ace Dodd and Jig Lahey and Abe Abelson. . . .

Sunday would be the day. If he could only get Kid Hall in there for a three-inning hitch, and the Kid could burn through his high, hard one, Nancy might be made happy by the complete rejuvenation of her errant brother.

CLAM CAREWE sat quietly in the hotel room in St. Petersburg and listened. The two principal stockholders in the Sox were conferring. Clam Carewe was seething, but his demeanor did not show it.

Doc Browne, long-time president of the club, was saying, "If we could make a couple of sales and get some ball players besides, we could show a small profit."

Mac Maxwell, the new man, glanced at Carewe. He was a young man, quite rich, a sports fan. He said, "What about it, Clam?"

Browne said, "Oh, come, we can decide this without the manager. This is business. We know the Sox are not strong enough to win any pennant! Ha, ha! Money, my friend, makes the mare go. . . ."

Maxwell said, "I've got money. . . . What about it, Clam?"

Carewe said, "We could sell some old crutches like Pudge Riley. But you wouldn't make any money that way."

Browne snapped, "We can sell anyone. What about Taylor? What about that young catcher, Lane?"

Carewe said, "The Sox need them both. If we had two more like them, and a hard-hitting outfielder—"

Maxwell said, "I can get Con Murry from the Beagles for thirty thousand."



"Thirty—are you insane, Mac?" Doc Browne's sparse hair actually stood on end. "Spend money? Us? For ball players?"

Maxwell said, "Exactly. A novel idea, huh? I've offered twenty-nine thousand and a ball player—Pudge Riley for bullpen duty. The Beagles think they can win the pennant without Murry. They've got a new kid, a flash."

Browne howled, "You can't do this! You can't ruin us this way—"

Maxwell stood up. He said, "I bought into the Sox as a sporting proposition. A last-place club year after year—a nickel-nursing management which made its money trading ballplayers and the hell with the customers—it gave me something to work on. I got you to hire Carewe. I believe in him. I'm buying Murry—and you can take me to court or pay for him. The Sox fans deserve a break after all these years—what there are of them. And Browne—I don't like you very much, so don't push me too far." He nodded blandly and took Carewe's arm. They walked out together.

In the suite which Maxwell maintained, Carewe said, "He can raise an awful stink, Mac."

The young sportsman said, "He will, too. Are you sure you've got the nucleus of a ball club?"

"You can watch them play the Blues and make up your own mind. I'm starting Taylor and Lane will catch. We've got two rookie backstops planted. If this Hall boy gets control and we get Murry—" Carewe shrugged.

"First division?"

The manager's eyes burned. "I've been kicked around in baseball by such men as Browne. My ambition doesn't stop at gaining the first division—or even a pennant!"

Maxwell said, "Now, wait a minute, Clam—"

"You're giving me a chance," said

Carewe tensely. "I'm taking it. This is a deep, dark secret between you and me, Mac. I'm after a World Championship."

"The Sox never had one," gasped Maxwell. "You've got a patched-up ball club—kids and vets—"

"I've got pitchers—and a kid catcher." Carewe's jaw could be hard as iron. "I know baseball. The Beagles are fat cats. Trading Murry proves they're over-confident. The Blues—we'll take care of them if they win and we win."

Maxwell grinned. "Maybe we're both a party-line call from the whacky-house. But it sure is fun. Go ahead, Clam. I'll fight Browne."

Clam Carewe went down to the ball park. It was the turning point of his life, he knew. Failure now would bring ridicule upon him from every side. Doc Browne, a great hater, would attend to his future.

And all he had, he admitted to himself, was a hunch. A couple of pitchers, Peele and Taylor, a couple of rookie kids who might be morning glories—and a hunch.

Pudge Riley was growling in the clubhouse. He knew he was not to catch that day and the mean-tempered veteran was hot. He said loudly, "No dumb busher that gets caught off base can take my place. Lane won't hit two hundred when he gets against real pitchin'. This club ain't got a real first-class hurler and everybody knows it. . . ."

Carewe said in his steely, quiet voice, "Riley, I want to see you. Never mind putting on the uniform. This club isn't good enough for you. Step into my office."

Down behind a locker, out of sight, Tom Lane blinked. The words of the manager sank into his mind. He knew what they meant. Riley was through.

Tom Lane was to be first-string catcher for the Sox this season—if he made good. His chance had come.

Even Kid Hall was impressed. He



mumbled, "Now if I on'y get a chance in there today—Taylor's startin', then Peele. Will he use Ace? Or one of the others? If I on'y get a chance!"

**I**T WAS the beginning of the seventh. The Sox were at bat. The World Champion Blues were ahead, 2-1. Tom Lane, with two hits to his credit already that day, took his wagon-tongue bat to the plate. No one was on.

Matty Matthews, the great Blues pitcher, had never seen Lane before. Earlier hurlers had fed him low stuff, curves, change-ups, and he had displayed a keen eye for them all. Matthews, a courageous man with the frame of a wrestler, reared back and fogged his fast one across.

Tom, gritting his teeth, dug in. The bat flashed. His wrists tightened as he lashed into the ball. He felt the wood take hold of the leather, and began running.

He turned second, saw the sign flashed by Carewe from the third-base coaching spot. He kept coming into third with the throttle wide open. Tough Foxy Fallon crouched, reaching for the throw from Kioska in deep left. Tom slid as hard as he could.

Fallon slapped it to him. There was an explosion inside his head. Everything turned black. He heard Carewe's furious protest, heard Fallon say, "He shouldn't come in head-first. I didn't mean to crown him. I just took a stab."

Tom staggered up. His brain spun around once. He saw the sun again, heard Carewe's voice. Tom muttered, "Was I safe?"

Carewe said, "Yes. You want a runner?"

"No," said Tom sharply. "Hell, no."

"Okay . . . okay," said Carewe softly. "I got Bingo pinch-hitting. You can see the signs?"

"I'll be all right," said Tom.

Bingo Rickard, an old-timer with ice-

water nerves, was hitting for Peele. Both Taylor and Peele had pitched well. Now there would be a third man in the box. Tom looked at Carewe and said almost inaudibly, "I hope you use Hall. The kid's ready."

Bingo put his bat against the first ball pitched. Too late Tom realized there had been a sign from the hitter. He was supposed to be off at the touch of the push-hit.

He started far too late. The ball ran down to first and was picked up by Billy Poe, who rifled it home. Jerry Clancy put it on Tom for the second out.

Bingo came home when Mick Doney, Sox right fielder, nicked Matthews for a long double. But Tom Lane was unhappy on the bench. He got into his gear, keeping his head down. He heard Carewe's unruffled voice as Dan Clark made the third out.

"Get Hall in there."

Tom's head came up. The manager was regarding him thoughtfully. Had Carewe heard him, after all? Was Carewe really giving Kid his chance because Tom had asked—and thereby missed his sign?

Tom could never be sure about Carewe. The manager was all baseball and nobody's pal. But he was giving Hall a chance to make good with the score tied in the seventh against the great Blues.

Kid Hall came walking to the mound. His handsome head was up, his high color flamed in youthful cheeks. His long arms swung easily. Sloping shoulders gave proof of the power in him. He overshadowed the stocky Tom Lane in every way.

Tom met him. Tom said, "Throw for my glove. Remember that. Just keep chuckin'."

"I ain't scared," said Kid scornfully.

"I am," said Tom grimly.

He was thinking of Nancy. She loved the Kid. If he got sent back to the bushes and away from Tom's influence he might



do something bad again, something which would give pain to Nancy.

He thought hard about the hitters coming up for the Reds. It was the top of the list, Pug Zibole, Nate Klein, Fred Kioska. They were all killers with the willow. Tom took a deep breath and steadied to give Kid a target for his warm-up throws.

The first two came in easily. Kid had a side-arm motion, also an overhand swing for his hard one and a slight curve. Kid had a lot to learn about concealing his pitches, but he was young and strong. On the bench Clam Carewe sat like a statue, watching.

The third pitch smacked into Tom's glove. The fourth burned. The fifth split the plate and Tom turned ostentatiously and called to the bat boy, "Bring me my sponge. Kid's got it today."

Pug Zibola was listening, of course. The Blues shortstop came to bat watchfully, gripping a light stick. Tom called for an inside ball around the neck. Kid took a graceful wind-up and threw.

Zibola hit the dirt. He bounced up, bellowing rage. Tom was chuckling, tossing the ball back to Kid. The umpire said, "Stuh-ri-ke." There had been just enough wrinkle in the ball to jerk it over the inside corner. Zibola raved.

Tom signed. Kid threw. It was just plain throwing. But the ball caught the outside corner low for strike two. Zibola was beside himself. Kid took his full overhand shot. It cut the center of the plate as Zibola swung viciously—and too late.

Nate Klein, the Blues' great center-fielder, would not be fooled by such stuff, Tom knew. He made Kid waste one. Kid was obeying the signs. His control was suddenly on. He had rounded into form overnight, Tom thought exultantly. Klein took a strike over the outside edge.

The count went the full distance as Klein phlegmatically waited for the strong-arm Kid to lose control. Tom

signaled and Kid let fly. Klein came around on the heart pitch—the high, hard one. He got hold of it with part of the wood.

Tom shed mask and cap, spinning. It was almost into the stands. Tom ran, far faster than most catchers can run. He saw the ball curving, saw a fan reaching for it. He leaped and stabbed with his glove, balancing himself on the rail with his bare hand. The pellet fell into the soft pocket of the mitt.

**H**E DROPPED back, grinning, throwing the ball to Bib Carney on third for the pass-around. Bib was yipping, "That's the old ball game in there, Tommy-boy!"

Abelson took it up. Jig Lahey shook a defiant fist and crowed. Over on first Arnie Block, slow to take fire, was howling. Clam Carewe was clapping his hands.

Fred Kioska was up. Kioska hit anything, like Mort Bland, the home-run king who followed him. Tom wished the Kid had some soft stuff to keep low, to make these men hit to the infield. But he had to call for the wrinkle-ball and the swift. Kioska missed one, fouled one over the grandstand roof. Kid threw two wide ones.

Tom called for the downer. It wasn't much, but it had less speed on it. Kid pitched it. He had the control, all right. Kioska swung. The ball trickled down to Jig, who threw to first in plenty of time. The side was retired in order!

The Kid strolled in. He was smiling faintly, his eyes bright. He strutted to the bench and languidly lounged, his feet stretched out. He said audibly, "Are those the world champs?"

Clam Carewe was walking toward third. He paused, but did not speak to Kid. He said, "Get a run in there . . . Get a run."

It was amazing, but Block and Carney hit in succession and Abe Abelson singled and the Sox had two runs. Tom went up



with one out and hit a long fly to center which advanced Abe, but the Kid struck out.

Then the Kid went back to work. He did not miss a sign. He got Fallon, Poe and Crane in order.

In the ninth Clancy, the burly catcher, started the inning by getting a life off a fast pitch from the Kid. A pinch-hitter struck out. Pug Zibola came up again, breathing fire.

Again the Kid threw the beaner. The Blues were all yelling at the young pitcher now. Zibola got up from the dirt and promised vendetta, murder and whatnot. Tom signed for an outside ball.

The Kid promptly threw another close one. It almost hit Zibola and it got Tom out of position and made him jump for the ball. Pug wheeled and screamed, "And if you're callin' for those, I'll get you too, you busher soandso."

Tom said coolly enough, "Stand up and hit. You're not supposed to be yellow, Zibola!"

He walked out and said to Kid. "Don't do that again. Now you're in a hole."

"I just wanted to hear 'em yell," chortled Kid. "This chump's my meat. Watch!"

He went back to the box. He accepted Tom's sign. He reared back and threw without wind-up.

Tom gasped. The Kid's speed was phenomenal now. Zibola swung, and he missed by a foot. Tom threw the ball back. Before Zibola could get fairly set another hard one split the plate.

The third one seemed the size of a pea as Zibola, fuming, dabbed at it. The Kid called as he walked off the mound, "Any old time, Pug. You're just a cousin. Remember that!"

"I wish we played you all season," shouted Zibola. Other Blues joined in, big Mort Bland among them. "You'll be going back where the corn grows, busher. . . . Just another fresh square . . ."

But the Sox had won the ball game. It was only a spring training chore—but they had won impressively over the Blues. Mac Maxwell smiled in his box. He had a weapon now, to hold the minority stockholders in line. He was a fighter by instinct, a rich young man who wanted to prove he had brains and business acumen. They had laughed when he bought the Sox and brought in Clam Carewe, a man who had never won a pennant. Now he had the first advantage over Browne and the others.

Tom Lane was quietly exultant. But he kept worrying about the sign Kid had ignored, about the second duster the brash young man had thrown. Even success was not to be worn gracefully by Nancy's brother, he feared. He got out his little black book and entered a few things he had learned about the Blues that day. . . . Not that he figured to need them soon. Unless he was waived into the other league, he amended. He had no illusions about the Sox winning the pennant and meeting the Blues in the series. He was just happy to hang on as first-string catcher on a tail-end team at this time in his career.

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## 2

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### Cellar Champs

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IT WAS September. Like magic it was September. Tom Lane wiped sweat from his face with the sleeve of his shirt. He sat on the edge of the bench. Clam Carewe, thinner, more tanned, his face etched with deep lines, coached at third. Con Murry was up.

Murry, a blond man who had been used by the Beagles only against right-handed pitchers, was hitting .340 for the Sox as a regular. Arnie Block had twenty-eight homers to his credit. Bib Carney



was sporting a .310 average. Abe Abelson was going for .280, Jig Lahey for .268. Tom Lane had a neat .302 for himself so far.

The Sox, those lowly, miserable cast-offs and rookies, were in a tie for first with the Beagles.

Doc Browne had been forced to stop squawking for trades and sales. Mac Maxwell was the real boss, now. Clam Carewe had wheedled and driven his men through a tremendous season. They had won the first ten games of the schedule. They had put together other long streaks just when they seemed about to fall apart—with Randy Taylor, Joe Peele, Ace Dodd, and Kid Hall as starting hurlers. Tom Lane had caught every game of the summer.

Tom had made mistakes; Kid Hall had made plenty; but they were still in there. Tom humbly thought it was pretty lucky. He knew his faults. He was over-eager. He sometimes threw the ball into center field trying to get a speedy base runner. He hit at a lot of bad pitches. He knew, and he tried hard to overcome his faults. Amazingly, Carewe never scolded him, seldom offered suggestions. Carewe was mighty easy on him.

Not so with the others. Carewe's tongue grew sharper as the race grew tighter. He lashed at Kid Hall often. He bawled them out privately and publicly, as the chips fell. And he was always right.

It's harder to forgive a martinet when he is eminently correct every time, Tom was beginning to learn. The men on the team, taut with the strain of playing over their heads all season, were beginning to crack a little. The fighting Beagles, aware of their error in parting with Con Murry, were riding them hard.

This was the game. This would put the Sox ahead. Taylor and Peele were rested for the next pair—from there it was a shoo-in, as the schedule favored the Sox and pitted the Blues against the first di-

vision teams who could win from them.

This was Kid Hall's game. The score in the sixth was 2-1 in favor of the Beagles.

Clam was snapping at Con Murry, urging him to get a life. Tom fingered the snaps of his shin guards. Murry didn't need driving. Still, Clam couldn't help it. Everybody was tightened up.

Kid Hall muttered, "Next time he snarls at me I'm gonna—"

"You're goin' to do nothin'," said Tom. "He's nervous, that's all. And stop throwin' off my signs. You gave Holder a good ball and they got two runs."

Hall said, "You don't know it all, Tom. Holder don't like that curve. He got lucky, that's all."

"Your bum curve didn't break," Tom said sharply. Then he realized that his voice was snarling, that he was getting as bad as the rest. He said quietly, "Just take it easy, Kid, and we'll be all right. I know the hitters. Throw that sweet control ball. They can't beat you."

"They can if we don't get a run," fretted Kid.

Con Murry rifled the first pitched ball right through the pitcher's box and into center field. He pulled up at first.

The Sox burst into staccato cheers. Clam Carewe touched his shirt, then his cap. Arnie Block, home-run hitter, laid down a perfect bunt. Murry made second easily while Arnie was thrown out.

Bib Carney was the goat. Con was in scoring position, and Bib had to hit. The Beagles pitcher worked on every ball with huge care. The count ran full.

Bib had to hit the good ball. It was a low one, and Bib ran it down the third-base line. The fielder stabbed for it; the hard-hit ball caromed off his glove. Tom came off the bench with the others, howling.

Abe Abelson walked, filling the sacks. But poor Jig struck out. Tom took his huge bat and walked to the plate. He



hauled at his cap, hitched at his belt. Three on, two down, two runs needed. How many times had he been up in clutches? The Sox always came from behind.

He heard Clam barking at him. He heard the boys on the bench pleading. He watched the first pitch, a dipsy do, come straggling over for a strike. Now, if the pitcher was smart, he'd use a change-up, some kind of fancy fast pitch to make Tom swing. . . .

He never tried to outguess a pitcher—or catcher—but he was set. The throw was very game, a sneaker for the outside corner. Tom twirled the bat in his powerful grip.

He felt it smack against the wood. It was a pretty good feel, not the best, but a good every-day, workmanlike blow. He ran.

He was not as swift as the rookie who had broken in down in Florida. His legs had been cut with spikes and the getting up and down had built thicker muscles. But he made good speed, getting to first. He saw the coach jumping and waving. He turned and caught a glimpse of the ball in right field, bouncing. He had pushed it a bit, he thought, racing down and throwing himself at second base. He felt the ball in his ribs, but he was safe. He got up and looked around. Yep . . . two men were in. . . .

**T**HE STANDS were going mad. The customers had returned to Sox Park in droves. The coterie behind the screen in back of home plate were standing, howling. They were Tom's little parcel of personal fans.

Clam Carewe was motionless. He was staring out at Tom, shading his eyes from the lowering sun. He said nothing, but some of the lines in his face lessened.

Kid Hall, wearing a batting average of .102, struck out.

That was the ball game. Kid did not

give them another run. It ended, 3-2.

In the dressing room Tom wearily removed his uniform. He trudged into the showers. He found Clam Carewe beside him, naked, lean, keen-faced. Carewe said, "If we get it in the sack I'm giving you a rest, Tom. You can go home—anything you like."

Tom said, "A rest? Why, I'll be fine in the morning. I don't need any rest, Clam. I wouldn't leave the team. Shoot, I'm strong as a bull. You know what? I think Holder is a sucker for a curve ball."

Carewe said, "Wasn't that an alleged curve Hall threw him? And didn't you sign for the swift?"

"Sure," said Tom. "But a good curve he would miss. Randy'll get him every time with that classy jug-handle of his."

Carewe nodded, letting the water cascade off his shoulders. "All right, Tom. You try it. You try it your way. . . . If I can only hold the rest of them up. . . ." His remaining words were lost in the noise of the rushing water. Carewe looked old and tired again. Today's game was over, but there was tomorrow and tomorrow.

The manager went out and Kid Hall came in, glowering at the departing narrow back of his boss. Hall was maturing, too, but Tom worried about the difficult temperament of his girl's brother.

Kid said, "I'm gonna say somethin' to that guy some day. He bawled me out! I win the game and he crabs at me for throwin' off a sign!"

Tom turned off the shower. "Look, Kid. You're a winnin' pitcher on a league-leadin' team. Last year you were with Osceola in the Florida League. Next year you'll get anyway twelve thousand bucks. And we're pretty sure of a World Series cut. Why can't a man jaw you for a mistake you made? Why can't you be reasonable?"

"You too!" snapped Kid. "You tipped him I crossed you onna sign. You're too



big for your britches, smart guy. I'm gettin' sick of it."

Tom stuffed the towel in his mouth and went out into the dressing room.

Jig Lahey, who had gone hitless and wasn't feeling well about it, remarked, "That pop-off Kid of yours is due for a bust in the nose. He claims I played the hitter wrong when he chucked that wonder curve to Holder."

"You were right. I called for the swift," said Tom wearily.

Jig was mollified. "I never miss a sign. You're all right, pal. You win this one for us. Not that big-mouth swell-head. Your double win it and we all know it."

"Shucks, I've been lucky in those clutches," said Tom. "I'm so scared every time I'm hittin' from hunger. This ball club is playing for keeps, that's the thing."

Arnie Block lumbered over. "You think we can win now, Tom?"

Tom was honestly shocked. "You're askin' me? Shoot, Arnie, I'm just a green busher. All I know, we keep tryin'—and winnin' the close ones. You know more'n me about it."

Block considered. "Well . . . I reckon we'll win."

Lahey took a deep breath. "If anyone had told me— Whew! A last-place club!"

Tom said diffidently, "I wasn't with it when the club was last. To me it's a winning ball team."

"Yeah," nodded Arnie gravely. "An' that's it." He winked heavily at Jig. The two were roomies and pals. They wandered off together.

Tom went to his hotel room to write a letter to Nancy. He always wrote in glowing terms of Kid's progress. Today he could tell her how her brother won the most important game of the season. It was easy to write this one, forgetting about the curve ball to Holder.

After dinner he was not weary any

more. He was as strong as a bull and his recuperative powers were tremendous. He looked for Kid, but did not find him. He went to a movie. When he came home Carewe's stooge was checking the rooms to see that everyone was in. Tom answered for Kid. He wished Carewe wouldn't do that; the ball players resented checking. But Carewe was so anxious to win that he could not help overdoing it. He was a great manager on the field, a fine fellow, Tom thought, but too officious with his men.

Still, they were playing ball for him. And for Mac Maxwell. There had been some awful nice presents when they won an important game.

He went to sleep dreaming of Nancy. The Kid was not in bed yet.

Well, the Kid wouldn't work for six days now. After they cleaned the Beagles they went on the road and that gave Kid an extra two days off. He had to have some fun; he was that kind. Carewe would never understand, but Tom did. . .

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### 3

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#### Hell Behind the Plate

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THE Blues came through as usual, ten games in front. The Sox won by two full games. The World Series was set.

Bo Slidell, manager of the Blues, gave out a statement to the press. He said, "The Sox did a fine job in winning the flag. Carewe proved himself a big-league manager. Of course we expect to win. Not more than five games, I should say. But the Sox are a game club and deserve all the credit in the world."

Clam pasted that on the wall of the dressing room. He got six copies and put them where every Sox player could see them.



Tom Lane was deliriously happy. He had finished the season batting .307, Maxwell had promised him a fine raise—and Nancy was coming on for at least the third game of the series. It was like a dream come true.

Clam Carewe called him into a meeting the day before the series opened. The coaches were there and Jig Lahey, who had been appointed field captain. Clam said, "I'm starting Taylor. Then Peele, then Ace Dodd. Then, considering the rest he'll get, Taylor again. This is absolutely secret, you understand. If they knew who we were going with it would be a great advantage to them."

Everyone nodded. Tom sat, stunned. Clam was not considering Kid Hall in his plans for the series. Yet Kid had won twenty games. . . .

As if divining Tom's thoughts, Clam said, "Hall may be used in relief. But his speed is meat for the Blues. Those big

hitters like speed—and Kid has no curve, very little change-up. He might be okay if Ace's soft stuff gets bombed, but as a starter—" Clam shook his head.

Jig said, "You're plumb right, boss."

Tom said nothing. Nancy was coming on and her brother was not going to pitch.

Carewe said, "Of course I'll have Hall warming up every day as a threat. They'll expect to meet him—but we'll give them curves and soft stuff. Now, about the hitters, Tom—"

They went over them from Zibola—the fiery shortstop to Clancy the redoubtable catcher. Tom knew them by heart. His little black book held notes made last spring. Carewe nodded, satisfied at the quiz. The meeting broke up.

WHEN Carewe was alone Mac Maxwell barged in. Carewe detailed the plans. Doc Browne pussy-footed into the room and again they

# Country Doctor

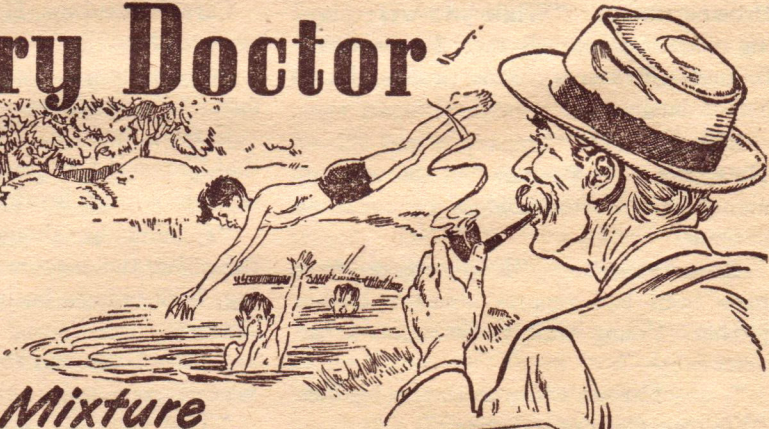
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went over it. Maxwell was satisfied. He said, "Even if we don't win, it'll go over five games. Slidell stuck his neck out."

Doc Browne said, "Harrumph. The stockholders have been meeting. Unofficially of course. I presume you are aware the team has not come out of the red this season."

Maxwell said, "In one season this club could never get in the black."

"H'mmm," said Browne. "We won the pennant. Still, we lose money."

"We made plenty," Maxwell protested. "Those old debts—"

"The stockholders," said Browne triumphantly, "want results. We all know this was a fluke season. I have enough votes. If we do not win this series, we will sell certain players and put the Sox on the right side of the ledgers for the first time in twenty years!"

"You'll what? Break up our team?" roared Maxwell.

"I have the necessary votes," said Browne smugly. "While you were playing with the baseball men I was doing business. Business means profits. Baseball is business."

Maxwell said, "You try it and I'll—" He stopped. If Browne had the votes of money-hungry stockholders he could do nothing.

Brown said flatly, "Furthermore, there have been bad reports about a certain pitcher. Young Hall, to be exact. I had detectives—"

It was Carewe's turn to leap to his feet. "You put dicks on my men?"

"I aim to learn everything about men under contract to us," said Browne. "The night Hall won the crucial game over the Beagles he was out until four, drinking and carousing with certain underworld characters who are known to me. We do not wish a public scandal, of course. The report is secret. But you cannot use Hall in the series. And he must be sold at once. A twenty-game winner brings a

nice price, you know!" He folded his arms.

Mac Maxwell sank back in his chair. Carewe's face was white.

Browne went on, "Lane, your catcher, covered up for Hall. He must go, too. We should get a fat sum for the pair of them. I can buy four minor-league players to replace them—and show a profit!"

He smirked at them and left the room.

It was moments before Maxwell spoke. Then he said, "Bargain-basement baseball. I've heard of it all my life but this is the first time I ever saw how it works."

"I've been a victim of it before," said Carewe. "This time I thought we had it beat."

Maxwell said, "How about Hall?"

"Maybe he was out celebrating. He's a hard case, but I'll swear he isn't crooked. He's just a sulky, wild boy. Lane keeps him in line. Lane—there's a boy."

Maxwell said, "Lane made our team. I know it, you know it. Everyone knows it—except Lane."

Carewe stood up. He said, "How game are you, Mac?"

"Game enough," said the young sportsman. "I'll go all the way."

Carewe nodded. "Okay. You agree that Brown is a disgrace to baseball? That we owe him no loyalty?"

"I think he should be run out of the game, the sanctimonious, nickel-nursing, back-biting—businessman!" snapped Maxwell.

"Then I can run this series the way I want?"

"That you can," said Maxwell heartily.

Carewe said, "It may not work. But I'll try. And—thanks, Mac. You've been swell all the way."

**R**ANDY TAYLOR won his game. Slidell, fuming, started Jim Healey in the second, out of turn. Carewe came back with Joe Peele.

Joe Peele won his game.

Ace Dodd had to go for the Sox next.



He had slow stuff galore. He kept feeding it to them on the corners, mixing it up. He gave them only three hits and one run.

But Pat Cannon pitched a classic shut-out for the Blues and gave the Sox no runs.

Then Rigger Sabosky elbowed the Blues to another win, a free-hitting contest, this one, with Taylor taking his bumps and three relief hurlers failing for the Sox when the Blues made six in the eighth.

So the series was evened and Slidell was again giving out confident interviews about what the Blues would do to Joe Peele this time. The fifth game, he said, was the game to win. Everyone knew that. The Blues would beat Peele, and then who would start for the Sox?

Tom Lane was not getting his hits. He was not getting too many base stealers out, either. And Nancy had not shown up. Illness in the family had prevented her coming on and he felt like a boy deprived of his Christmas toys.

Kid Hall had not appeared except in the bull pen. Everyone appeared to have forgotten the boy except a few home-town sports writers who kept demanding that he be used—or that the reason for ignoring him be published. Rumors were rife, and Doc Browne was fostering them.

The team, which had stuck along with Carewe despite his dictatorial practices, was beginning to growl and grumble. Tom felt it. The collapse which had not taken place during the regular season was imminent.

Kid Hall was no help. Every day he thought he would get to work. When he did not, his complaints were long and loud. Openly, in the locker room, he accused Carewe of favoritism, prejudice and just plain lack of brains.

Before the team took the field for the all-important fifth game Kid was sounding off. "I'd like to know what he thinks I am. Workin' like a horse all season.

Winnin' twenty games. Then not even a relief chance in the series. Whatinell kind of treatment is that? I wish I'd be traded off this sooner club. I wish—"

Carewe stepped out of his office. His voice was cold and deadly. "You may get your wish, Hall. The front office agrees with you."

Silence fell. Tom Lane felt sick. Clam had overhead, all right. Now Kid was in for it.

The manager said, "There was a certain night after you won a game which we needed. You went on the town. Lane covered for you. You got drunk and reported into your room at four A.M."

Hall's mouth opened. "I—I was only havin' a li'l fun—"

"You were seen with certain gamblers," said Carewe inexorably. "I have been warned not to use you in this series. You asked for it, and I'm telling you the truth."

Kid's face went red, then white. "Am I—am I blacklisted?"

"You could be," said Carewe. He carefully did not add that Browne would never blacklist a player who could be sold for considerable money. He said, "You could be run out of the game. You have acted in the worst possible manner all season. You have won games on main strength—and the ability of your catcher to hold you up."

For once Kid said nothing. Tom stared at the handsome, florid face of Nancy's brother. He knew then that despite his brash talk the game meant everything to the boy. Sympathy flowed from him for the Kid.

Carewe said, lowering his voice, "I know there is some feeling against me on this team. Perhaps it is earned . . . I've tried very hard to make good and maybe I've overstepped. If so, I apologize."

Feet shuffled. Men stared at the floor. Carewe waited, then went on, lifting his voice again, "Anyway, that's the past.



Today is the present. We've *got* to win this game. And if we do, I know Joe and Randy can come back again and sew it up between them . . . I *know* they can."

There was a breath-taking moment when everyone knew what the manager had in mind before he spoke. His voice rang out, "Hall—you go today!"

Kid Hall choked. He stood and looked at Carewe, then at Tom Lane. His mouth worked. A tear ran down his cheek. He whispered, "If—if I can on'y get it past them. . . . Oh, Tom—if it'll on'y go past 'em."

Tom said, "Throw it to my glove, Kid. Just throw it." His heart was pounding. He walked out, his spikes crunching. He held Kid by the left arm and shoved him toward the warm-up lane. He turned toward the box where he had arranged for Nancy to sit with the wives of some of the players.

A graceful arm waved. He rubbed his hand across his eyes and looked again. Nancy had a scarlet kerchief and was waving it. The rules prevented him from going to her. He just stood and stared.

A boy came into the dugout with a yellow telegram. Tom took it and read, "Mother well now. Am here by plane. Love. Win. Nancy."

His cup was running over. The dream had come true. Nancy was here, Kid was pitching to him.

There was only one more thing. The Blues murdered speed when they got onto it. Kid had only pitched three innings against them in Florida. Now they were raring to go, this was a crucial World Series game, not a training camp romp . . . and they hated Kid Hall for his bean-ball tactics last spring.

Tom Lane girded himself with protector, guards and mask. He had been no ball of fire in the series, he knew. He was just a freshman catcher, doing the best he could.

But today he would have to do better

than his best. Kid Hall was on a terrific spot. If he blew today, there would always be those rumors that he'd sold out. Carewe had put Hall in this fix—and had put himself in it right along with the Kid by pitching the young hurler. And in another way Tom Lane, Kid's roommate who had covered for him, was in the soup with the rest of them.

The preliminaries were over. The Sox were first at bat. Tom relaxed, watching. It was Matty Matthews for the Blues of course, the ace pitcher of the World Champions against the rookie battery of the daring challengers. The enemy crowd in the Blues park yowled defiance.

Matty squared off. He was rested and in shape. He struck out Mick Doney. He made Dan Clark ground out. He got Con Murry on a long fly. Tom could detect no flaw in Matty's delivery.

Kid Hall took the mound. Tom stood to receive the practice pitches. Kid was cold. He kept throwing them wild. He did not get one of the five over. Tom carried the ball out to him and said, "You've got to steady down. You've got to get tough today. Not with your mouth, Kid. With your mind and your muscles."

"If I can on'y get it past 'em," Kid muttered.

"Throw to me," Tom urged. "And snap your wrist on the curve."

He went back to the plate. Zibola sneered, "Not so smart now, huh, busher? You and that cluck in the box. If he throws one duster—"

Inspiration crowned Tom. He signaled for the high, close one. Kid gulped out there. He reared back, threw up one big foot. He whipped back his arm and threw.

Zibola hit the dirt. Tom caught the ball and said, "Darin' us, huh, you shrimp-sized no-hit champ? Get up and take it."

Zibola was red as a turkey neck. He gasped, "I'll kill—"

Kid was working fast. The second one whipped close but caught the corner. It



was one and one, and Zibola was very sore.

Tom squatted, thinking fast and furiously. It would take them time to get on to Kid's speed. He called for a low one, again inside. Zibola sprang back, furious. The ball cut in. It was a strike.

Tom said in Zibola's ear, "Can't you stand up to a li'l speed?"

Zibola settled himself, speechless with rage. His bat waggled like the whiskers of an angry cat. Tom signaled. Kid threw.

It was the Kid's not-too-good change-up ball. It worked better today than Tom had ever seen it. It would have missed the platter, by six inches. But Zibola swung for it.

The ball wandered down to the box. Kid picked it up and threw out Zibola by four steps.

Nate Klein was more redoubtable in Tom's eyes. He made Kid work slower on the center fielder. They got a two and two count and Tom signed for the low swift.

Kid fired it gamely. It was a bit too good. Klein smacked it. The ball went on a line. It went into the hands of Abelson at short.

Kioska was next. Kid threw a strike right past him. Kioska squinted at the fast ball and smiled. Kid threw another.

Kioska nailed it. On one hop it went to Jig, who ended the inning with his throw to first.

Three up, three down . . . but everyone had hit the ball. The Blues liked that fast one. Tom went in and sat down, his mind working. He had forgotten Nancy, forgotten everyone, everything except the ball game. He saw Kid Hall's solemn face and knew the Kid realized the danger.

It was the big game—the pay-off game. . . .

**M**ATTY went well. Arnie got a life in the second, but died. Tom got a hit and a walk in two times at bat. Neither time could he advance.

In the owner's box a terrific row was going on. Browne was denouncing Carewe for starting Kid, Mac was defending his manager. Nancy was sitting hunched over, watching her brother.

Ending the fifth Kid Hall had not given up a hit. Neither had he struck out one man. The tight-fielding Sox had accepted every chance with perfection, and Tom had been calling for the best mixture Kid could provide. Kid had not yet turned loose his full speed, because Tom had him harnessed.

But to lead off the fifth for the Blues

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the mighty Mort Bland shortened his swing and dumped a single into right. Slidell and the Blues broke into pandemonium. Foxy Fallon came up and bunted and was chucked out while Bland advanced.

Billy Poe, hard-hitting first sacker, was next. Poe was a hard man to fool. With a runner on second, Tom decided to try to get the ball past a hitter at last.

He turned Kid loose. He signaled for the swift. Kid took a deep breath and exercised his limber arm.

The ball came in the size of a bullet and close. Poe, startled, swung away, trying to duck. The hop of the ball caught his bat. The horsehide took a blooper glide over second.

By the time Jig could retrieve it, Poe was on first and Bland on third. There was one out and hell was to pay, Tom knew.

Yet the tightness of the situation left him cold and alert. He had been pressing too hard before now in this series. But at this moment his head stayed clear, his nerves steadier than they had been. This was the real clutch, he recognized. The Blues could hammer Kid from the box and the Sox could fall apart.

He went out to meet Kid Hall. He looked into the eyes of the bigger young man. He said, "That was a bad break."

"I don't mind that," said Kid. "Just get me past this Crane. Just get me two out, so he can't score on a fly ball."

"Don't lose Crane. He ain't much, but Clancy's murder," said Tom. "And—watch the signs, Kid. I smell somethin'. We're rookies, you know."

"I'll do anything," said Kid. "Get us outa this somehow." He was pleading. He was no longer the sound-off Kid.

It's great what a clutch will do to a man sometimes, Tom thought, returning to position. Crane, the second baseman, was crowding the plate. He needed a duster to shove him back. Something clicked in

Tom's mind. Poe on first . . . Bland on third. . . .

He gave the sign. Kid took it. Tom gave another sign. Abe Abelson started slightly, receiving it.

Kid made his motion. He threw. It was a pitch-out.

Poe broke for second. Tom whipped back his arm as though he had forgotten all about Bland on third. The ball sang toward second.

Bland raced for home, already laughing with glee.

Abe Abelson, agile as a monkey, leaped into the path of the ball. No one could beat Abe on the cut-off play. His arm whipped, the ball came in to Tom.

Kneeling, Tom took the full brunt of Bland's sliding charge. He tagged up the center fielder and came erect, looking for Poe. He whanged the ball down to second and Poe slid back. The umpire called Poe safe and Jig Lahey rhubarbed to high heaven about it.

Order restored, Crane hit a long fly which would have scored Bland had he been available with one out on third base.

The Sox could do nothing in the sixth. Matthews was going his best. Tom went back to work and considered Clancy. There was little to do with the huge Blues catcher except pitch and pray. Clancy was a real hitter.

Kid got him two and two. Tom called for a corner. Kid wound up and gave all he had. The ball slipped in his hand a little. It came in fast.

Clancy hit one into the left-field bleachers. The Blues had their run to work on.

With none out up came Matthews, then Zibola and the Murderers. Kid Hall's face tightened. He did not look so young any more. He struck out Matthews.

Zibola bellowed, "We'll gitcha out there now, busher."

Kid almost did hit him then. Zibola was still raging when Kid made him ground out to Abe. Nate Klein hit an easy fly to



Murry, and the bad inning was over.

Kid came to the bench. He said directly to Clam Carèwe, "I gave Clancy a good ball. It got away from me. I could kill myself."

Carewe looked queerly at him. "And ruin a good pitcher?"

Kid flushed and sat down as Clam went quietly to the coaching line. Tom watched Arnie and Bib go down. Then Matty weakened for a moment and lost Abe Abelson. The Sox whooped it up. Jig came through with a single.

Tom took his big bat up there. This was the spot he wanted.

The Blues cannily walked Tom Lane to fill the bags with two out—and to get at Kid. Tom went down to first looking over his shoulder at Carewe.

The manager could put in a pinch hitter and take them all off the spot. He did not have anyone to use in relief except his two aces . . . but no one could blame him for trying it. The Blues were ahead and Kid was batting .102.

Kid went up with the bat in his hand. He swung desperately, almost killing himself. He struck out.

Carewe had elected to play it out with his rookies. This could easily not only cost him his job, but his future in baseball. Tom knew. Tom went in and put on his gear with awe in his heart at the gameness of the manager who had strung along with him all season.

Kid Hall had not missed the significance of it. Red with mortification at his failure to hit, he strode to the box. He faced Fred Kioska, a tough man always. Tom gave him the signal for a low one outside. He wanted to set Fred up for the curve ball inside.

Kid pitched. It was a perfect strike. It was so fast Tom scarcely saw it. Kioska blinked, scowling.

Tom shouted, "So they like speed, huh? Chuck it, Kid!"

The Kid was actually faster than he

had ever been. He pitched two more at Kioska. The left fielder went down swinging at a ball he never saw.

Bland came up. Bland was real murderer. Kid rared back and threw. There was a hop on his swift. It came whizzing in and Tom had to brace himself to hold the spinning speed. Bland struck out.

Fallon was next. He wiggled and waggled in the batter's box, looking for a good one. He got it. He got three of them. He took the third with his bat on his shoulder and Tom hooted, "Speed, huh? We'll show you speed—with hair on it!"

He put his arm around the Kid, a rare gesture. He looked toward the box where Nancy sat, grinning. He peeked at the owner's box and Mac Maxwell was cheering like a wild man. The enemy fans were silent. Not many rookies strike out the side in the seventh inning of a World Series.

The Sox seemed to be getting to Matthews. Doney walked, Clark and Murry singled to start the eighth. But Matty, great in the pinches, kayoed Block and made Bib hit into a double play.

Kid went back to the box. He was silent, intent, now. He just threw with his new-found strength, throwing for Tom's glove. The ball came in no larger than a nut. He got Poe, Crane and looked at Clancy.

Clancy was great. The Kid tried to get one past him and the big catcher leaned on it. It went sky-high. It went foul and toward the Blues dugout.

Tom never looked at his footing. He just ran, eyes on the ball. He saw it coming down beyond his reach. He stretched out, racing. He hit something, he heard cries of "You can't get it! Mugg it, you busher!" He dove under the falling sphere. It hit his glove. He went head first into the Blues bench.

He sat up. He was dazed. He looked at his soft mitt. The ball was still in it. Pug Zibola was staring at him.



Tom said, "Hello, Pug. Nice ball game, huh?" He got up and wobbled out onto the field. He went to the bench and took off his gear.

**K**ID HALL could scarcely let him alone. "That Clancy. He scares me. He's one guy can hit me always—and you got him! What a ketch! Tom, what a ketch!"

"Let's get a run," said Tom thickly. His head still spun. Abe was up—Tom was due for a rap that inning. He rubbed his skull. There was a knot on it where he had hit the bench.

Abe waited on Matty, got a good one. He socked it into right field. He got to first and stood howling for action. Clam Carewe gave a sign and the Blues infield pulled in, expecting a bunt. Jig Lahey tried to snap a single past short on the hit and run. Abe had a good start and made it, but Jig was thrown out.

Tom took his bat up there. He was still rubbing his head. He looked down at Clancy. The catcher was grim and expressionless. Abe was on second with the tying run.

Matty had heart. He pitched carefully to Tom. With one out he did not want to walk him and catch a pinch-hitter and then the head of the list. Tom had worked no wonders at bat before this game. Today he'd had a perfect day, but no runs had scored.

Matty had a world of stuff, soft and swift, with a curve which did tricks. He worked to the full count. Tom stood, his head clearing gradually. There had been no sign from Carewe. He was on his own. Clam was a great hunch player despite his strictness in other matters. There was only one thing that mattered now—get Abe around.

Matty took a look at Abe. He gazed off into the distance. He fiddled with the ball. He peered at Clancy, seemed to debate the signal. He picked up the resin bag

and played with it. All this was old trickery designed to work the batter into a lather, particularly a freshman like Tom Lane.

But it only served to let Tom's addled head clear a bit more. He could feel the lump on his cranium beneath the cap. He settled himself, wishing Matthews would take even more time.

Clam's voice came across the diamond, "Sit down, Tom, sit down."

Tom fell out of the batter's box. The umpire called time and brushed the plate. Tom knocked the dirt out of his spikes. He carefully adjusted the cap over his lump. He undid his belt and rebuckled it.

Matthews played with the stitches of the ball. The Sox were beginning to thump out a funeral-march rhythm from the dug-out. The fans were restless but silent.

Nancy bit at the red kerchief. Mac Maxwell clenched his hands. Doc Browne mopped his brow and looked indignant, his normal expression. All the stockholders in the Sox waited with bated breath. . . .

Tom stepped back, smiling ingenuously at Matty. The Blues' star pitcher toed the mound. He motioned at Abe, who impudently increased his lead.

Matty turned and suddenly exploded the ball toward the plate. It was his Sunday hook. It was designed to break out against a right-handed hitter, catching the extreme edge of the plate.

Tom's keen eyes followed the ball. His bat was already coming around, sensing a good pitch. He traced the curve, saw that it would be sharp and true. He strode into it.

Never had his thick wrists clicked into position with greater timing or speed. He put the solid, thick end of the wood where he wanted it. He followed through like a golfer, his wide, square shoulders turning in beautiful coordination.

There was a solid thunk of sound. In deep center field Nate Klein turned and ran as only Nate could run. The Sox



stood, breathless. A bit to the right or a bit to the left and there would have been no doubt about that hit. But the Blues park had a deep slot in center. Nate had caught balls in there before.

Abe ran to third, never taking his eyes off the ball. Tom turned second and slowed down. If Nate caught it—

There was a sharp, distinct noise. Abe let out a yip. He raced for home. Tom went in behind him. The ball had hit the fence.

Abe went over the plate. Tom slid in. Clancy, reaching, caught the ball.

The umpire said, "Safe!"

Tom got up. He picked up his gear and the Kid was watching him. Tom said, "Kid, can you do it?"

Kid said in a small voice, "I hope so, Tom. With you in there—I sure oughta!"

He went to the mound. He got the pinch hitter they sent in for Matty. He made Pug Zibola mad again and he grounded out. He struck out Nate Klein. . . .

The game was over.

**A**FTER the series, when the Sox had rolled with Taylor and Peele taking half the game each to a resounding victory, there was another meeting. Mac Maxwell was in charge.

Mac said, in part, "No player will be sold or traded. This team goes as is for another year, win or lose. Doc Browne

has agreed to sell his stock to my friends and me. Carewe gets a five-year contract. Are there any questions?"

Kid Hall got up. He said, "I wanna admit I did get drunk. I didn't know I was with gamblers. I just got stiff. I was a jerk. Tom Lane carried me through and he toted me through the fight game of the series, too. I wanta say that Carewe treated me right, that everybody on this ball club was better t' me than I deserved. And if I was traded . . . I'd set down and cry!"

Carewe said, "It's just a matter of growing up. And I have got one thing to say. Tom Lane carried the club, not only Hall. That kid learned more baseball than most people ever learn—in one season. I never had to speak to him because he never repeated a mistake. If he doesn't get the rookie of the year plus the most valuable player awards there is no justice."

Mac said, "I want to give him something—where is he, anyway? Why isn't he here?"

Kid Hall said, "He asked me to tell you—he couldn't come. He's gettin' married in half an hour. I gotta go stand up with him." The Kid got all the way to the door. Then he drew himself up proudly. "He is marryin' my sister!"

Mac Maxwell said, "What are we all waiting for?"

The entire ball club got there. It was quite a wedding.

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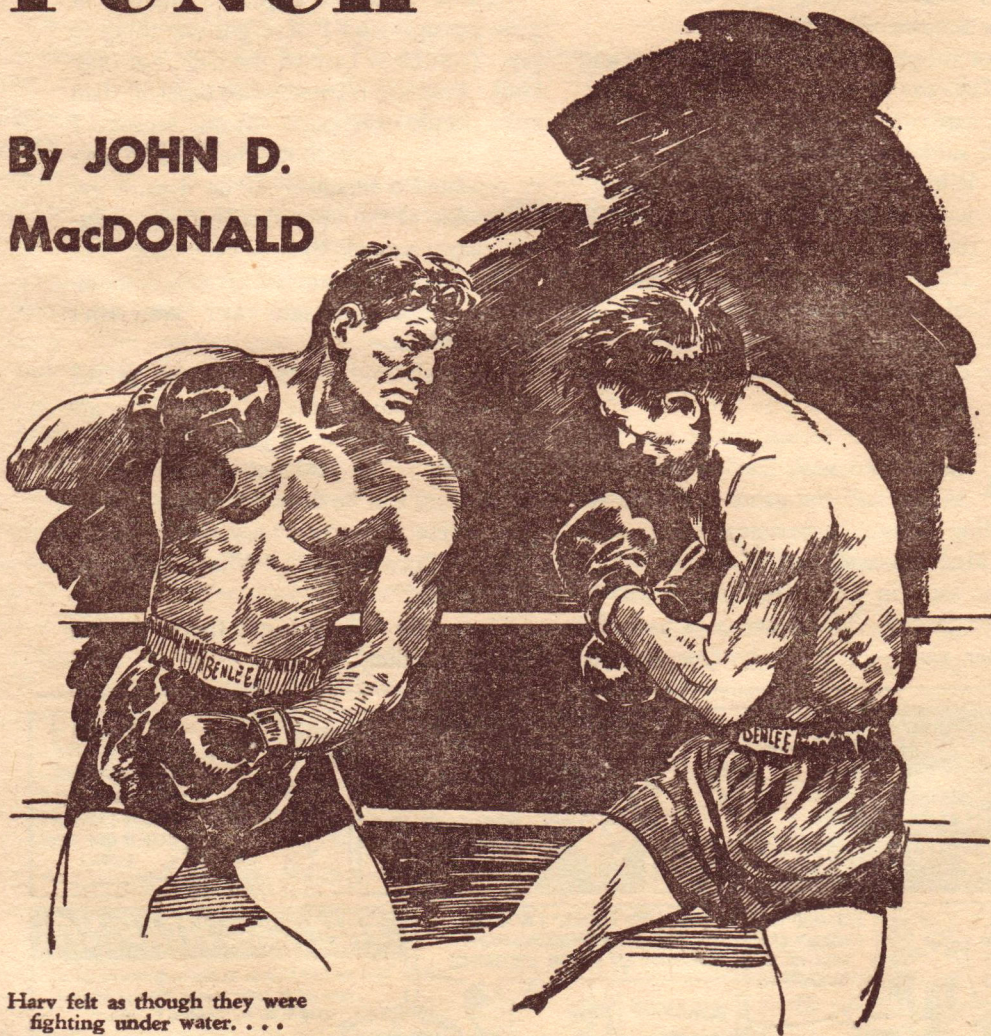
# THE GLORY PUNCH

By JOHN D.  
MacDONALD

KLEES followed Harvey "The Doctor" Westa down between the rows of booths and Harv picked one in the back corner where he could see who was coming in.

Harv watched Klees wedge himself in on the other side of the booth. "You saw him?" Harv asked.

Klees smiled wanly. "Yeah. Every



Harv felt as though they were fighting under water. . . .



time I see him he looks stronger. How he can come in on the weight with those shoulders . . ."

"Just a strong boy, Joe. And you always worry. Cheese blintz for you too?"

"On me it shows, but I'll take it. Maybe you ought to have more than one, Harv. You're giving him three pounds."

They ate in silence for a few moments, two men who had learned to know each other over seven years. Klees was small and pot-bellied and asthmatic, with the face of a worried owl.

The Doctor always looked the same. Blue-white skin, heavy planes in his face, abrupt angles. He had always looked as though he'd cut easily, but his skin was amazingly tough. The ring years hadn't coarsened or brutalized his face. They had just thickened a few of the lines. His voice was a soft rasp—had been ever since Curtis had hooked him in the throat in Cleveland.

"How can you do it?" Klees asked.

"Do what, Joe?"

"I mean one of these strong boys is going to take you, Harv. Sooner or later one of them is going to get to you. How long can you go on brains?"

Joe had expressed the thought that had been a tiny irritant in the back of Harv Westa's mind for the last two months of training.

"Not that strong boy, Joe. Not Buddy Mace." The words were soft and sure, but Harv thought that maybe it would be Buddy Mace. Maybe this would be it.

Joe shrugged. "It better not be. Not this time, anyway."

Harv knew what he meant. Things had gone a little sour. The club had died of snow-blindness and that had taken a cut of the roll and it had also taken two of the annuities cashed in to meet the obligations. Then the court had been too generous with Mag. An additional two hundred a month for her and the kids. Joe had booked an exhibition tour, but there

would be no tour if Mace caught him with that sledge-hammer right. And Mace had to be dealt out of the running. The columns had given Buddy Mace a big play and the questions had gotten so insistent that the fight had to be booked. He needed the cash from the tour. Needed it badly.

"How were the kids?" Joe asked, his voice growing rough as it always did when he spoke of Harv's kids. Joe would never forgive Mag.

Harv grinned. "The little guy was showing me the right hook he's been working on. He starts it way back in left field and I showed him how to shorten it up. He told me his mom won't let him practice. After the fight I can have them for two whole days."

"How's my girl?"

"Cute like a bug. She kept saying, 'Where's Joey? Where's Joey?' I promised her the four of us would do the zoo day after tomorrow."

"You turn 'em back to Mag?"

"In the hotel lobby. She shook hands with me and gave me the frozen puss. Nice to see you, Hahvee. I trust the children were well behaved."

"Jesus, Harv. A woman like that. It had to be a woman like that."

"Mag's okay. Lots of people don't get along."

"Who could get along with her?"

"Break it off, Joe." The soft rasp had turned cool.

"Still a torch-boy. I give up."

At that point Stew Baltimore, the sportswriter, came up to the booth. "Any room here for the working press?"

"Sit down, inkpot," Joe said sourly. But there was good humor behind the words. Baltimore had always been fair, always reasonable. And he knew the game. Once upon a time he had been a promising amateur until he found out the bones in his hands were too brittle. Joe moved over and Stew sat beside him, facing Harv.



Harv saw the speculative look in Stew's eyes. "Measuring me for Mace's right?" Harv asked.

"It's fifteen rounds, Harv," Stew said. "And I saw Louie bounce four of his best lefts off that kid's chin and the kid came back to take him. The fight goes the full fifteen."

"It could and then again it might not."

"What are you going to hit him with? The stool? Those arms of his are big and solid and he's smart enough to punch for your arms, Harv. By the tenth you'll feel like you're fighting with two socks full of wet putty."

"And then what?"

"And then maybe the Doctor gets too tired to slip and roll and feint and tie him up and maybe he nails you."

"What's the matter with you?" Joe asked. "You trying to spoil Harv's morale? Don't you know the odds?"

Stew grinned. "Sure. Doc's the favorite. Seven to five. But those odds come from a myth, Joe. A big public myth. Harv has been in there for years, chopping down the promising boys the way a Canuck chops down the pine trees. They never see him with his hair mussed and they never see anybody land solidly on him and so they think he goes on forever like Boulder Dam."

"And why not?" Joe asked.

Stew lost his air of banter. He looked steadily at Harv. He said, "Don't grandstand tomorrow night, Harv. If he nails you, stay down. You're thirty-three. You take that right hand of his too much and he could kill you. But if you want to know what I really think will happen, I put a C bill on you yesterday."

"Doesn't care what he does with his money, Joe," Harv said.

"He's smart, Harv. He knows that left. You'll stab the kid silly."

"Sure, sure," Harv said softly. "I'll nibble him down."

And he thought of the kids and he saw

that wild swing that came from left field and he saw himself taking the kids back to Mag in the hotel lobby where they stood and talked like polite strangers. And he saw the two empty envelopes in the safety deposit box, envelopes that had contained the annuity policies.

He was suddenly very tired. He yawned. "They tell the kids that champions sleep ten hours a night. I feel like I could do that. Be good, Stew. Let's roll it, Joe."

They went down between the booths. Buddy Mace, at the big booth crammed with people, said loudly, "There goes the champ." He said it wryly enough so that it got a laugh from his crowd.

Joe clutched at Harv's arm, but Harv turned and walked back to the big booth. The crowd there was silent, expectant. Harv smiled sadly down at the square, ruddy face of Buddy Mace. Mace tried to stare him down.

"Look, kid," Harv said in his gentle rasping voice, "take good care of yourself between now and tomorrow night. Get lots of sleep. I don't want it to look too easy. You know what I mean."

Mace flushed and tried to struggle up, saying, "Why you broken-down—"

Harv turned and walked away. He heard Mace's friends quieting him, telling him to pay no attention.

On the street Joe picked his teeth, said, "He'll come out sore, maybe."

"So let him shoot it all while I've got legs."

"And if he can keep shooting for fifteen rounds?"

"Then, Joe boy, we have a bad evening. A very rugged evening."

**H**ARV WESTA rubbed his feet in the rosin box, supporting himself with a taped hand on the top rope, and listened to the low grumbling roar of the crowd. It was a good crowd, a tough crowd. Harv had become an expert in crowds. He knew by the pre-fight sound



that this crowd would be yelling for blood. It was like a vast, restless, hungry animal. There would be women who screamed from ringside with something feral and ugly about their faces. And there would be men who, with shifting shoulders, with teeth clamped tight on their cigars, followed every move in the ring, their eyes steady and glowing.

But he knew that once the fight started, he would fight in a vacuum in which there were no crowd noises, in which nothing existed except a pretty and deadly game of move and countermove, feint, thrust, roll, slip, waiting for the tiny openings, open but a fraction of a second, little alleys down which a hard fist could travel.

Gus had broken out the new gloves. The tape had been inspected. While various notables bounded into the ring and waved clasped hands at the crowd, Gus tightened the laces and Harv molded the padding across the back of his hand, breaking it enough to give the hard knuckles free play, but not so much as to invite a broken hand.

He stood up and turned around once, hands high, acknowledging his introduction. Lanny Morr, the referee, gave them the standard instructions. As yet, Harv had kept from looking directly at Buddy Mace. But, in the center of the ring, he stared at Buddy's taut brown diaphragm, at the moist hair, at the steady breathing. Indeed, a very strong young man. A

rugged young man. The pictures had shown that. Strong and fast, with a punch in either hand, providing he could get his feet set. Off balance, the pictures had shown punches that pawed rather than struck.

He went back to the corner while Gus grabbed the robe, poked the white rubber guard between his teeth. Harv adjusted the guard with the tip of his glove, yanked twice on the top ropes, turned and came out at the bell, moving up onto his toes as he touched gloves with the durable young man who was his business objective of the evening. For it was a business, just like the accountant with his ledgers, or the plumber with his wrenches. A cold, hard practical business, well-rewarded.

Mace, in spite of his slim legs and narrow feet, moved slowly and solidly, flat-footed and set. Harv felt disappointment as Mace didn't rush him. Mace's handlers had cooled him off and warned him against losing his head, no doubt.

They both had the wary, expressionless look of the professional, both moving with the coiled consciousness of being able to inflict sudden hurt.

Harv circled to the right, left out almost daintily, left shoulder hunched, his chin tucked behind the shoulder, right hand cocked and ready.

The pattern of the fight was yet to be set. It was like a dance which had to be improvised. One would become the agres-

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sor. Mace could not counterpunch effectively, as counterpunching demands the ability to hit hard from an off-balance position. And yet he was too cautious to rush in.

The gallery began to stomp. The sound ceased suddenly as Harv moved back, then in quickly, weight behind a left jab which rocked Mace's head back. As Mace, off balance, stepped back, Harv went in with another high jab to the eyes, to screen the right. The right hit solidly, but too high on the face. Mace shook the punch off, moved into another left, threw his own left and right, missing with both.

Harv felt the tension leave him. This was work he understood. He made Mace pay the fee of hard left jabs to force him into a corner. Then Harv moved lightly inside the right, clinched to spin out of the box.

In the clinch he felt the enormous power of Mace, the strength in those big arms and shoulders. He tried to tie Mace up, but the boy pulled his left loose, chopped Harv twice over the kidneys. It was like being stabbed with a hot silver knife. It took some of his wind. They broke clean and Harv went in with two hard left jabs, a right which Mace blocked with a forearm as hard as a stone.

At five seconds to go, Harv fed him two lefts to the mouth, the second one more of a hook than a jab, following it with a solid right under the heart at the bell.

Back in the corner he was breathing easily. Gus said, lips to his ear, "Watch the clinches, Doc. When he gets loose, signal for the break."

Harv nodded. In a ledger in his mind there was a ruled balance sheet. In one column he recorded the rounds won, as the first had been; in the other, the rounds lost and tied. For the last three years there had been another balance—the available energy to get through the fight, if it went the limit. That energy had to be conserved. There could be no careless

wastage of it. Available energy divided by fifteen. If, by some mistake, it were divided by fourteen, then there would be nothing left for the last round, and the fight would be lost.

The second round followed the pattern of the first. He opened a tiny cut under Mace's eye and, since it was under the eye, it was not worth working on. Once Mace's right hit him high on the head, over the ear, and the power of it frightened him. It dulled him for a fraction of a second and he knew that if the right had hit lower, closer to the nerve centers, that dullness might have lasted long enough to enable Mace to get another right through. And two would be enough.

He scored with two crisp rights to the jaw and a full score of left jabs in the second round, floated into clinches both times that Mace cornered him, signaled with arms wide for the break when Mace tore free.

On the stool he measured his strength and was satisfied.

The crowd had settled to an almost taut silence, recognizing what was going on. They saw how closely Westa was avoiding the sledge blows and they knew that this fight could not go on in this way for the full fifteen rounds.

In the third he was slow in the clinch and the big pawing right hand of Mace boomed off his left side, and when Morr broke them, Harv danced away, carrying pain like a torch held against his flesh.

Pain made him less wary; a desperate block softened a whistling right hook, but his left forearm was momentarily numbed by the impact.

In the last few seconds before the bell he stabbed twice with the scalpel left, feinted with the right, caught Mac flush in the mouth with a good left hook that brought a high roar from the crowd.

Back in the corner Harv knew that he was no longer breathing right. Mace's sledge-work on his sides had taken its toll.



Gus held the waistband of the shorts out to make breathing easier. Joe knelt on the ring apron and said, lips touching Harv's ear, "Three for you, kid. But it looks like it's costing. Try to ride the next two even and rest when you can."

Harv knew the strategy. Don't draw on the bank for two rounds, then work a little harder in the sixth.

In the fourth round it worked. The gallery started to stomp again, heavy feet in cadence.

Mace kept boring in: heavy, stolid, wickedly strong. It was a constant effort not to be trapped. He pulled all the old tricks, like dropping his arms and walking away as though discouraged with trying to make Mace fight. Once, nearly trapped, he spun out along the ropes, burning his skin, whirling, hitting Mace solidly under the ear as the younger, stronger man turned.

In the fifth it didn't work so well. His breathing was labored and his left arm was weary. Normally it would have lasted nicely, but Mace's piston-stroke blows had pulped the muscles.

He caught a punishing right on his elbow and tried to move inside the left hook to the middle. But it caught him in the side and he felt his lips pull away from his teeth in an anguished grin.

Mace seemed to be getting stronger and faster but Harv knew that it was only because he was tiring under the constant battering against his arms, the fire-hot pawing at his middle. Once he tied Mace up properly and took a long ride in the clinch while Morr cursed and struggled to part them. When they broke the crowd was booing.

After the sixth, his ears still ringing from a right that, in looping around his neck, had nearly knocked him down, Harv turned to Joe Klees as Joe came up onto the apron. He said, "I got to try the other way, Joe."

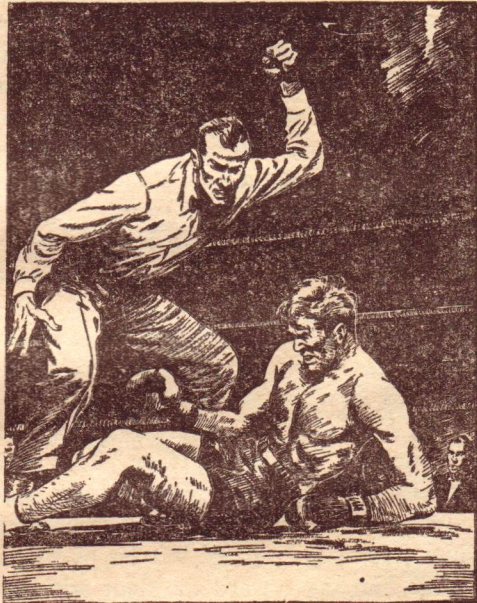
"He's going to kill you."

"Keep it going this way and he's going

to kill me anyway. Maybe he can be touched. He's waiting for hit-and-run and he's holding it, waiting for me to slow down some more."

"You're the Doctor," Joe said, and he looked about to cry.

Harv went out, slower than before. He knew where and how to take his shot. Those high left jabs made Mace lift his own left a shade too high. Two fast left



At seven Mace pushed himself up. . . .

jabs and then the right under the heart would bring both arms down long enough . . .

And it had to be quick. Mace was coming in faster, with a shade more confidence.

**H**ARV fainted, lanced the jab at Mace's eyes, bouncing it twice with the old jolt. Then, with a full pivot he planted the right under Mace's heart, solidly. The opening was there for a fraction of a second. He hooked Mace flush in the jaw, felt the man slacken, followed it up with a straight



right to the jaw and another left. The sawdust had run out of Mace. He pawed, off balance and Harv, plodding in, down on the floor now, heels and toes, slammed left, right, left—measured the husky kid and bounced the right off the button.

He danced back to the neutral corner, suddenly conscious of the high-pitched scream from thousands of throats. Morr picked up the count at four. Mace lay like an abandoned doll. But at five he quivered. Harv, with sudden fear, leaned heavily on the ropes, sucking the air deep into his lungs. At seven Mace pushed himself up, got his knees under him. At nine he was on one knee, shaking his head. At ten he came up like a dazed bear, standing stupidly with his hands at his sides.

He got his hands up as Harv came in. Harv brushed his gloves aside, drove a straight right down the middle. It didn't hit properly, but it knocked Mace down. Mace was on his knee at seven, still shaking his head, a shade stronger.

As Harv came in again, Mace stumbled to one side, pawing at Harv. This time it had to be perfect. Mace moved back against the ropes. Harv Westa measured him, summoned up the last bit of steam, made him sag toward the floor with the left under the ear, then brought a right up through the middle. The mouthguard flew out in a fine bloody spray and Mace dropped heavily onto his face.

At eight he hadn't stirred. The bell rang at the count of nine.

Harv sat, limp and spent, on the stool. Gus said, his voice breaking. "He'll never come out. He'll never come out."

Harv watched Mace, watched the drunken way he lolled on the stool, watched him stiffen as the salts were held under his nose, watched the beginnings of coordination as they slapped his face and doused him with water.

As the bell rang, they pushed him to his feet. He was still shaking his big head. Harv came over fast, put his last hopes

into a right hook to the jaw that landed with the impact of a bullet hitting wet concrete.

He went over to the neutral corner and he knew that Mace would, incredibly, impossibly, get back up onto his feet.

At ten, Mace was up and moving doggedly forward. Harv tried desperately to avoid the clinch, but the stronger man fell against him, hugged him tight, found from some inner store of instinct the ability to whale his heavy right hand against Harv's aching side.

Morr separated them and Harv clipped Mace with a left hook to the mouth before Mace fell into the clinch again.

After the clinch, when he tried to go in again, the big whistling right appeared out of nowhere and Harv stumbled back, dulled with the impact, fighting for control. And then Mace was grinning at him, moving doggedly forward, and Harv knew that the fight was over. Maybe the fans didn't know it yet. But he knew it and Mace knew it.

He tapped Mace with two feeble jabs, collected a right thump under the heart at the bell.

"Take Stew's advice," Joe yelled into his ear.

Stew's advice. Once he clips you, stay down.

The bell rang for the ninth. Mace came over fast, almost to Harv's corner, suddenly eager, strong in his recovery, in his knowledge that this was the time. Harv forced weary muscles to obey commands born of years in the ring. Roll with that one, get inside the right, hang on, move around him, reverse, back up, step in and jab, then weather the storm. Rock and roll, slip and turn, threaten with a right that you know is dead, but maybe Mace doesn't know it. Hang on in the clinch. Sag against him and stay loose for those pawing blows that tear you apart.

Move away from the left, and inside the right. Duck your head into that one. move



to the right, always to the right to take the sting out of that enormous right hand of his. Cotton in your mouth, a running pain in your side, and you can't stay up on your toes because the tendons in your legs have turned to red-hot wires. But you stay up on your toes and you grin and you cuff him with your dead arms and it is like being in a phone booth with a man trying to hit you with an axe. Sooner or later he'll manage to do it.

And the one-minute rest had to do what ten hours couldn't do, and somehow he got onto his feet and into the center of the ring.

Mace had grown to be larger than life size and Harv felt as though they were fighting under water, fighting in the dreamy bottom of some steaming aquarium. He saw the glove coming up, saw it grow, tried to move away, not fast enough, and then his lip hurt because it was between the mouthguard and the canvas of the ring floor and the light hurt his eyes.

There was some good reason for getting up, but he couldn't remember exactly what it was. The ring was a stone being spun on the end of a string and the spinning made him heavier against the floor. The floor had to be pushed down, pushed away.

And then he stood on legs whose knees threatened to bend both ways. He tottered like a marionette without strings and the right hand came looming toward him again, blotting the world into darkness.

Somehow he was on the stool and Lanny was back again. He remembered Lanny Morr from way back when Lanny was bending over him asking him something. With painful clarity he forced the words out, saying, "I'm fine, Lanny. Fine."

The mouthpiece was shoved back and Gus yelled into his ear, "Thirteen coming up. Stay down, kid. Stay down!"

The blows were pain no longer. They were muffled by the vast distance. Harv was way back inside himself, marveling at the tangled pictures his eyes were relaying to his brain.

He couldn't remember who it was who kept hitting him. A strong kid. A very strong kid and it was funny the way the strong kid seemed to be sobbing each time he threw a punch. Funny to sob like that. About what?

Then his cheek was against the canvas and he saw out there the three chairs in a row. Mag in the middle one, the boy on one side and the girl on the other. All solemn-faced and accusing. The boy knew how to throw the right now, he guessed.

Throw a right for the kid. Show him the right way. So they came to look at the old man fighting fifteen kids? Sure, they send out a new fresh one for each round. Fifteen twins. No, twins meant two.

He was on his feet again. Show the kid the way it was done. Too tired to get a right up to the height of the jaw. Have

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to be in the middle. He squinted through puffed eyes at the figure who moved in on him. Brace the feet, half turn and drive. See, kid? That way you get the shoulder and back in it. Right in the middle. Right against that hard brown diaphragm with the moist dark curling hair. Boom. See, kid? Pivot and slam it home. Watch your old man. You waste your strength if you bring it all the way around.

If that fellow'd stop hitting me around the head, I could show you better. Now with the left, same system, kid. Back and shoulders in it. Pick up a rhythm. Same way you'd do it on the heavy bag. Chin on your chest and keep watching that spot you want to hit. Left, right, left, right. See how solid? And as you force him back, you can take a step each time and that helps with the pivot.

One, two, three, four, five. Now he doesn't back up any more, boy. He's nailed against the ropes. Six, seven, eight. And now he isn't hitting me any more, boy. He isn't knocking your old man silly any more. Now when he bends over in the middle, he brings his jaw down. See, boy, he bends over because his stomach hurts. And then we move it up just a little and we bounce them off his jaw. One, two, three. And that's all, kid. He can't take as many there as he can in the middle.

**T**HEY held him on each side to get him down out of the ring. Gus was screaming in his ear, "You crazy guy! You crazy, crazy, wonderful guy!" The aisles were jammed and they were all trying to hit him on the back.

Then, as always, it was just the three of them in the dressing room and he was on the table with Gus gently working on the leg muscles.

"Okay?" Joe Klees asked.

"An automobile accident would have been healthier, but I'm okay."

"A fight like that!" Joe said. "For the

books. You shoot your wad and you can't nail him. Then he shoots his and you don't stay down either. Two guys with no arms left. Then you walk him around backwards while you tear his middle apart. I never see you do it that way before."

"He gave me the dreamies. I thought I saw the kids out there with Mag. I was showing the boy something."

Joe took his cigar out of his mouth, spat out a fleck of tobacco. "You should know better than that! Mag'd never bring the kids here."

"Now I know that. But I wasn't thinking so good with his right hand jammed into the middle of my head, Joe."

Harv sat up, trying to gather the strength to walk to the shower. After the shower there'd be some of the newspaper guys around who would want to talk.

He sighed. No, the kids hadn't been out there, and they never would be. And there never would be any reconciliation with Mag, because that was just the way it was. And it would never be any different. Except for the fighting. That would be different. This had nearly been it. But with a few breaks he'd last out for one or two more bouts. Mace was tougher than average. Don't let Joe book Mace again too soon. Mace would probably be the one. In the meantime, pile up a little more cash. Nearly the end of the road.

Maybe after he was licked and all through, Mag'd let him see the kids oftener.

He plodded into the shower. There was a mirror there. He thought of going to the zoo with the kids and Joe. He grinned and the grin hurt his mouth. Hell, this face was going to scare the monkeys. He turned on the cold water and stood, face uplifted, eyes shut, torn mouth open, letting the water begin the task of bringing his body back from the half-life to which it descended, a little further each time.



# Lightning Duster

By HANK WILLARD

*"Every net champ was once a racket-happy kid who outfought a better man for game, set—and a thing called last volley courage!"*

IT WAS early in the season and no one had ever heard of Andy Larsen anyway, at any rate as far as the tennis world was concerned. The gilt-edged amateurs were playing at West Ridge, on carefully manicured grass courts, and there was a fashionable crowd on hand. The tennis players were veterans. They had been around, they had played each other in various tournaments, and it was pretty much cut and dried as to who was going to win. There was this and that big name, there was Harry Vane, and Ross Clive from the west coast, and the kid from Florida and one or two from the eastern seaboard. They were all very well bred and well behaved and well coached, except possibly Clive. He was inclined to strut, and nobody liked his egotism, but everyone liked his tennis. He was a stylist, and very smooth.

Andy Larsen felt like the original yokel. People watched him walk with that ground-eating farm boy stride and figured he belonged back of a plow. Andy Larsen kind of had a hunch that he didn't fit here at West Ridge.

He was just a hick who was nuts about

●  
Andy danced back, went up in the air, and put it away.





tennis. He was not much help around his father's farm because of that. If he wasn't going off to town to play tennis, he was batting balls against the side of the barn.

And once he took a week-end off to go and see a friend who had gone to college eighty miles away. His friend was showing him around the campus and en route they passed the tennis courts. Andy Larsen stopped dead right there, watching a tennis match.

"I'd like to play that guy," Andy said. "I sure would. That heavy-set boy."

"Cormack?" said Andy's friend and laughed. "He's our number one man, Andy. That boy is a real prospect. He's figured as being Davis Cup potential in two or three years if his game keeps improving."

"I'd sure like to play him," Andy said. "Do you know him? Would you ask him? I'd have to borrow some shoes and a racket."

Andy's friend was not keen about it, but he persisted and it was finally arranged, just because Cormack was a nice guy and a friend of Andy's friend.

They stepped out on that court the next morning, rallied for a while, then Cormack said good-humoredly, "Go ahead and serve, Larsen."

Larsen went back to the service line and tossed the ball high. His racket came around and the ball rifled across court. Cormack didn't even swing his racket. He took a long look at Larsen, then without saying a word moved across to the odd court and waited for service.

The first one was out this time and Cormack nodded and grinned a little to himself, figuring that first one was an accident. He moved in to take the second service. It came over the net on his backhand and Cormack got set to blast a cross-court shot but the ball went off the wood of his bat. It was a twist service with a spin on it that Cormack had never seen

before. Cormack began to look thoughtful.

The score was thirty-love and Andy didn't fool around. He put two cannonball serves in to take a love game and when they changed courts Cormack was staring hard at Larsen.

Cormack won his own serve and it went on like that for sixteen games to eight-all. Andy won again and then broke through to take the set at 9-7.

They met at the net and Andy Larsen was grinning from ear to ear. "Thanks a lot, Cormack," he said. "I never enjoyed a game of tennis as much as that one. I guess I was a little lucky."

"Why haven't I heard of you?" Cormack wanted to know. "You played at Forest Hills in the singles? You ever played at Spring Lake, Southampton?"

"I've stayed close to home," Andy said. "I've heard about those places, never been to any of them. I don't belong in that kind of company."

"Listen," said Cormack. "You go there. You belong in big-time tennis."

He gave Andy quite a talking to, and the big farm boy went home with his head full of dreams that he couldn't quite believe himself. But he did tell his father what Cormack had said, what Cormack had insisted he should do.

His father listened patiently. Then he said, "And this fellow Cormack thinks you can make a name for yourself in amateur tennis, and if you do you could become a professional and maybe make as much as fifty thousand dollars at it? By just playing tennis."

"That's what he told me," Andy said. "I can't believe it myself. Maybe he was just taking me for a ride."

"Wait a minute," his father said. "You beat him, didn't you?" His father thought for a moment of the dog-eared books on tennis that his son had studied night after night, when he should have been doing homework, until the pages were falling out.



"I don't want you to be a no-good," his father said. "But I guess you ought to take this fellow's advice. You ought to make a stab at it. Only, if it doesn't work out, then I want you to forget about it and come back here and get to work. Is that a bargain?"

Andy agreed. A week later he headed for the eastern seaboard and the tournament at West Ridge. The stars were there and no one had ever heard of Andy Larsen. But he wasn't the only man there no one had ever heard of; a few other hopefuls had appeared. They, along with Andy, were unseeded, and they played their matches on back courts with no gallery.

Andy Larsen was just as pleased about that. The grass courts were something new to him; the bounce was different, and the footing. But he won two straight matches and moved into the quarter finals.

The next day he was scheduled to play on the number one court. He was up against one of the tournament favorites but he wasn't out there long. His opponent was serving. His second service was in and Andy hammered it to the baseline. They volleyed back and forth, then his opponent came in to the net and Andy tried to pass him. The player raced for the ball, lost his footing on the slippery turf and went sprawling on the ground. He didn't get up right away but sat there holding one ankle. It turned out to be sprained, and that was that. He had to default and

Andy Larsen was in the semi-finals, but only by luck.

He had a semi-final match the next day and once again they put him off on a back court because he was playing another unknown who had managed to get that far. The big match was on the number one court and the crowd congregated there.

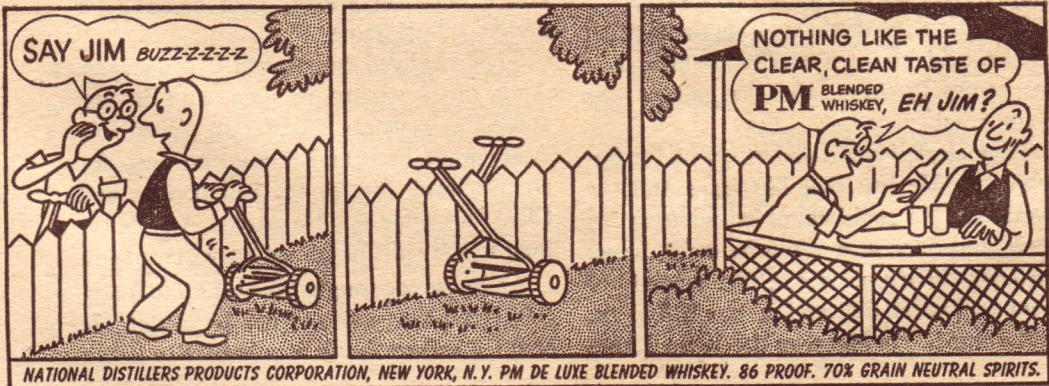
Andy was nervous but his opponent had the jitters even more. He kept making errors, putting his ground shots into the net, and Andy took him in straight sets. He was in the finals against Ross Clive. They were to meet the next afternoon.

ANDY heard people talking that night. Nobody seemed very happy. They had all been hoping that Clive would play Harry Vane in the final.

"It was just rotten luck," someone said. "Vane turned his ankle in that match with what's his name—Larsen, is it? Vane and Clive would have played a terrific match. Now Clive will just run through this Larsen. It's going to cut down the size of the gallery."

It might have kept the gallery down, but when Andy Larsen stepped out on the court the next day, he thought there were plenty of people on hand. Clive kept him waiting a few minutes and then sauntered out, looking very bored.

Andy got a little sore. Maybe he was a chump who had lucked his way into the



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finals, but they still had at least three sets to play before it was over. Andy won the racket spin and decided to serve.

He went back and signaled that he was ready. Across the net Clive indolently swung his racket. Andy went up in the air and powdered the ball. It picked up chalk on the inside service line and Clive stood there flat-footed, watching it go by him.

"Fifteen-love," intoned the umpire.

Clive moved across and Andy gave him that big service once again. This time Clive got his racket on the ball but knocked it a mile out of court. Two serves later Andy had a love game under his belt.

They changed courts and Clive looked annoyed rather than worried. Andy had watched Clive play. He was an accurate but not a hard hitter and Andy took his first serve in the corner and hit it down the line. Clive sent it across court and Andy drove deep and then raced in.

At the backline, Clive sent up a lob. Andy danced back two steps, went up in the air and put away the overhead smash for a point.

The gallery had come suddenly to life. Clive served again and again they volleyed, then Andy moved in. Clive tried to pass him on the backhand and Andy lunged and angled the ball away.

Red-faced and angry across the net, Clive double-faulted to make the score love-forty. He won the next point, then lost at fifteen-forty and Andy had broken through to lead two games to love.

He didn't break through again that set but he held his own service to take it at six games to three, and the gallery was going crazy.

They started again and Andy had it figured out. He had that big serve and the overhead. He could count on winning his serve and once in a while he could break through Clive's service. The second set went to him at 6-4, and it was 6-3 again in the third. He had won the West Ridge

title in straight sets, and suddenly instead of being an unheard-of nobody, he was a big new name in the world of amateur tennis.

The next morning his name was in all the New York papers. Andy bought them all and sent them off to his father. "The boys are moving on to a couple of clay court championships," Andy wrote his father. "But I want more experience on grass so I'm not going with them. I want to get ready for Forest Hills, that's the big one. And that's on grass."

It was six weeks later that Andy Larsen got to Forest Hills. Not having played in the clay-court championships, Andy was still not a big figure in the world of tennis and with just one important victory under his belt, he wasn't seeded at Forest Hills.

The results of the draw were announced and he was going up against Ross Clive in his first match.

There was some disappointment that he and Clive were meeting in the first round. But Clive had something to say about that. "West Ridge," Clive informed the press, "was a fluke. Larsen will never beat me again."

Andy Larsen had his own ideas on that score. He went out on the court the next day to put them into effect and he was serving first.

He went back and put the big serve in and it was too hot to handle, off the side of Clive's racket. He slammed it again and it was thirty-love. Two points later he had a love game.

They changed courts and Clive served. Andy cross-courted it, then came in fast and Clive sent up a perfectly placed lob. Andy went back and it was too deep for an overhead. He let the ball bounce and Clive had come up. He angled Andy's return to the sideline for an easy placement.

Andy Larsen fought his way up to forty-thirty and then lost and it was one-all. He held his service but it was harder to break



through today. The games went on and Andy forgot the crowd.

The games were twelve-all finally. Andy went back to serve and raised his racket, conscious that he was tired. He sent the cannonball over and this time it came back at him. He had started for the net and the return was straight down the sideline. It was just inside and the score was love-fifteen.

Andy got the first one in again and again he charged the net. Once more Clive was trying to pass him. Andy got back to the ball this time and returned it, but Clive was coming in for the volley and he angled the ball away from him for the point to make it love-thirty.

Andy went back to serve and his first was in the net. The second serve was good and he decided to stay back at the baseline. The ball was on his backhand. He returned and Clive began cross-courting him. He drove him from side to side and finally Andy lunged and just missed a ball that picked up chalk on his backhand.

Andy went back and his cannonball was long. He gambled on it for his second serve and it was outside by half an inch for a double fault and a service break. Games were thirteen-twelve for Clive with his serve coming up.

Clive served and took the net. Andy tried to pass him and lost the first two points. He set up lobbs but they fell short and Clive smashed them away to take the set.

It had been a long set but they were not changing courts; there was no rest period. Andy raised his racket again and began serving and once more Clive broke through him. For the first time in his life his big serve was not winning for him, and he was not getting a chance at his overhead game.

The second set was quick at six-three, and in the third one, Ross Clive swept through without the loss of a game. Andy walked slowly off the court. He shook hands with a grinning Clive and then a

moment later heard him talking to a reporter.

"I lost my head at West Ridge," Clive said. "I didn't play smart tennis. But I knew when it was over he wouldn't beat me again. He's got nothing but that big serve. And when he gets a little tired, some of the steam goes out of it. All you have to do is make that guy work a little. He's got nothing else. He came up out of nowhere and he'll go down just as fast. He can turn in that racket for a pitchfork now."

ANDY went back into the clubhouse. Three hours later he was riding a train and the day after that he put his rackets up on a closet and went out to work on the farm. His father studied him thoughtfully, and said nothing; but he was away often during the next few days; and there were some strangers around the house.

Finally he broke the news. "We're moving, son," he said. "I'm getting along and I don't take the cold weather the way I used to. I've sold the farm. Got a good price for it. I'm heading west, going to put some of this money in a little ranch. Maybe grow some avocados, maybe a little citrus."

Andy stared. "California, you mean?"

"You heard me," his father said. "Better get packed. And don't forget those tennis rackets."

They were located in California six weeks later. They had taken over a ranch and were putting it in shape one day when a stranger drove up.

"Got a tennis clinic not far from here," he said to Andy. "How about your coming over tomorrow?"

"Thanks," Andy said, "but I've got work to do."

"He'll be there," Andy's father said. "You name the time and he'll be there."

The man went away and Andy's father said, "Maybe you didn't recognize that



guy. He's Mister Big out here. He's trained and coached half a dozen national champions."

"Look," said Andy, "I told you I'd make good in tennis or quit. I had my ears pinned back but good. All right, I'm living up to my bargain. I've forgotten tennis. I'll work with you here. We'll have the best ranch in California."

"Maybe so," his father said. "But times have changed. I don't know as I'm much interested in avocados. I'd rather be known as the father of the best tennis player around. Where'd you put those rackets? Why do you think I moved out here?"

Andy went out there the next morning. The instructor did not seem to be surprised. He introduced Andy to a lean and weathered man in his middle thirties. "Joe," he said, "rally with this kid."

They pounded the ball at each other from the baseline for twenty minutes. The instructor, Art Blair, said, "What do you think of him, Joe?"

"His backhand," said Joe, "well, it isn't too bad. I played out here with a girl yesterday. His backhand is almost as powerful as hers. His forehand you can throw away. What did you bring this guy here for, Art? He's strictly from hunger."

Andy Larsen felt his face redden but he said nothing. Blair said, "Play him a game, Joe, and let the kid serve."

Andy went back and the remarks of the deadpanned character named Joe had gotten under his hide. He tossed the ball high, slammed his racket and across the net Joe blinked both eyes and watched the ball bound past him.

"Give him the twist," said Blair, "and move in."

Andy put in the twist service, and raced for the net. Joe tried to drive the ball past him and Andy lunged and volleyed the ball for a placement.

Joe came up to the net and held out his hand. "You must be Larsen. I heard about

you. You got plenty of work to do, fella."

Blair and Joe and others worked with him. He put the big service and the net game under wraps and forgot about it. There were chalk lines drawn across the court and he stayed back and aimed ground strokes at them. It went on and on and tennis was not much fun any longer.

They put him in a tournament finally and gave him instructions on how to play, and he was put out in the second round. There were other tournaments and then the tennis competition was moving eastward. Andy Larsen went along and Blair was traveling with him. They hit the grass courts and Andy Larsen won a few matches and lost some. He did not like it very much, but Blair said nothing.

They were back at Forest Hills finally and a year had gone by. Blair said, "You're on your own now. Go ahead."

He was up against an Australian in the first round. He stayed back and found that he was steadier from the baseline. He won back there and moved into the second round, and won his match against an eighteen-year-old eastern college freshman. He moved on and suddenly he was in the quarter finals and up against the fourth seeded player in the tournament.

It took Andy Larsen five sets but he got through it, he made the semi-finals, and came up against the Frenchman, La Gare. The previous afternoon La Gare had been carried to a 19-17 final set and it had taken its toll. Andy found that he tired quickly and he kept him running. La Gare began to make errors and Andy took him in four sets.

He was in the finals and he was going up against the national singles champion, heavily favored to repeat his triumph, Ross Clive.

Andy said to Blair, "You've done a lot for me. Without your help I wouldn't have ever gotten this far. But I'm not kidding myself. It's as far as I can go. I've



watched Clive in this tournament. He is a very smooth guy, much better than I am. It isn't your fault but I can't go far enough."

"You're not beaten yet," Blair said. "You're not quitting before you go out there, are you? Do you want to default?"

"Not so you'd notice it," Andy said, and grinned, but he was not happy about his tennis. His game didn't satisfy him.

He stepped out on the court the next afternoon and Clive was as cocky as ever. He was national champion and he had his plans all made. He would polish off the title again this year and then listen to the offers from the professionals.

Clive was serving first. He put the ball in and Andy took it on his backhand and put it neatly down the line. Clive cross-court and Andy smashed the forehand back and took the point. Clive looked surprised. He served again and they volleyed from back court, and then a drop shot from Andy's racket curled over the net and died.

Clive took the next two serves and brought it up to thirty-all. But two successive drives that were just inches too long gave the game and a break-through to Larsen.

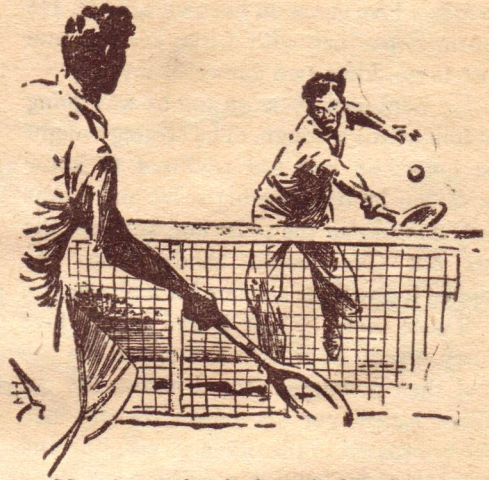
He managed to hold onto his own serve and they went along but the break-through was all-important and Andy took the first set at 6-4.

Clive went back to serve again and Andy thought this was going to be all right after all. It wasn't the kind of slam-bang tennis he had developed on his own, it wasn't the kind he liked to play, but maybe it would win for him.

THEY began the second set and he tried to break through again but this time Clive was stronger, and across the net the veteran was beginning to demonstrate the tennis that had made him famous. He could put the ball within inches of where he wanted it, and Andy Larsen found that he was playing defensive

tennis. He had gotten a break-through in that first set before Clive had warmed up, but now he was having to fight to hold his own service, and he lost it on the fourth game. He lost it again on the sixth game and the set was over quickly at 6-1. Ross Clive had hit his stride.

The third set was almost as quick at 6-2 and the players walked off court for their ten-minute rest period. Andy Larsen went into the clubhouse and sprawled on



He tried to break through, but Clive was stronger.

a bench. Blair came in. With him was the lean and sun-dried Joe he had played with months ago on a California court.

"What happened to the guy?" Joe was saying. "Where's that big game, that big serve and the volley?"

"He seems to be afraid of his service," Blair answered. "Holding back on it as though he doesn't trust it any more. Well, we taught him all we could, the ground strokes and the strategy. We got him a pretty fair backhand and a good forehand. We can't teach him the rest."

"I've been staying with him," Andy said. "I've been playing his game. He's better at it than I am. And now I've been at it so long I'm afraid to cut loose."

"You're two sets down," Blair said. "You can't lose another one. You've got



to mix it up now, but you've played all the defensive tennis you can get away with today. Go out there and pound it—play the way you like."

Andy nodded and started back out. He was letting down a lot of people, his father and his coaches and the fans who had plugged for him.

He was serving and he used the cannonball. He double-faulted twice in succession, and then took the net and was passed to lose a love game on his own service. He stormed the net with Clive serving and lost to go down two games to love.

He went back to serve and he was going to follow this through. The strategy might be lousy, he was too confused to know now; but he tried the big serve and it was out. He put in the twist and stormed the net but Clive could handle that. He ripped it down the sideline for a placement.

Twice more he lost it and it was love forty. Andy went back and tossed the ball and then powdered it and across the net Clive barely got his racket on the ball. Andy crossed to the other service line and hammered the ball again, and it was Clive's advantage.

The big service was out. Andy used the twist but he put more speed on it than he had been using. He stormed the net and the ball was coming right at him. He put it past Clive at the sideline to make the score deuce.

Two points later Andy had taken the game. He went back and waited for Clive's service. The first ball was good and he hammered for the corner, then started in and the ball came down the middle, catching him in midcourt. He backhanded it across the net, went on in and Clive set up a lob. Andy danced back, went up in the air and put the ball away.

It was a quick set, 6-4 for Andy Larsen, and when he went back to serve again he was thinking that maybe now he had some tennis knowledge hammered into his skull. A guy couldn't be a champion without all

the strokes. Blair and others had given him the forehand and the backhand to get by. But his game was in the service and the volley, the ground strokes. The baseline game was to fall back on when his touch was off, when he had to. But he wasn't going to win his titles that way.

He couldn't beat Clive from the baseline. But he knew now he could go back there if he had to for a while.

But maybe he wouldn't have to. He slammed the service across the net and then went in and a bullet was going past him down the sidelines. It was a perfect shot but he was a big guy to get past. Andy threw himself at it, his racket loose in his hand. He went flat on his belly but the ball was trickling over the net and falling dead for the point.

He went back to serve again and Clive was deep, tensed for that cannonball. Andy grinned to himself and gave him the twist. Taken by surprise, Clive tried to meet it and sent the ball far out of court.

Clive kept trying. But up in the stands they were yelling for the new champion, the power-packed kid, and finally they watched him go back for a match-winning point if he could make it. It was a good lob, perfectly placed, close to the baseline, and Andy couldn't take it on the overhead. He let it bounce, it went high in the air, and then from the baseline, Andy smashed it straight down the alley. Clive managed to get there but the force of the ball turned the racket in his hand and it was over. There was a new singles champion of the world. Clive walked slowly forward to congratulate him.

Blair came in to say a few words before they had the presentation. "Well, you're it," he said. "You're Mr. Big. You're champion. You turning pro right away?"

"Not this year," Andy said. "It's been hard work to get here. When I turn pro I'll be working for money, tennis will be a job. I want one more year of fun first—I want to win this thing again next year!"



# BYE, BYE, BACKFIELD!

By  
**JOHN  
WADE  
FARRELL**



He came through, all elbows and knees. . . .

**S**PRING around the Mideastern campus, especially during Easter vacation, is something the Army would invade with weasels, so on this fine Easter of 1949, as with every other year I've been on the Mideastern squad, we had borrowed, for two weeks, the facilities of little Grandon College in

*They were four glory-starved ball-toters who'd lost their way  
—till they found it in the other guys' backfield!*



Florida, a state even the Army couldn't spoil.

I was stretched out on my bunk in the borrowed dormitory when the other three members of the backfield came in.

"You people remembered to bring your press clippings?" I asked.

Big Charlie Western, the fullback, turned to Sancho Sanchenelli, our fleet left half and said, "Shall we bust a leg off this porky little mastermind?"

"Leave us not quarrel among ourselves," Bus Mulligan, the burly red-headed right half said. "This, gentlemen, is a council of war."

And so it was. You know how Mid-eastern did last year. We smashed the Ivy League, broke the hearts of our two Big Ten guests and piled up a lopsided score in the bowl game.

Charlie kicked the door shut and said to me, "Hal, is the new one going to give us any trouble?"

He meant our brand-new coach, a mountainous person named Bunny Hale, recently fullback for the Burros. About twenty-nine years old, one of those boys who go to so small a school that they never make a clipping until a smart pro team grabs them and turns them loose on the publicized kids from the bigger outfits. With the Burros he had made a three-year average of 5.1 yards every time they handed him the ball. Maintaining such an average against outfits like the Packers is akin to consistently throwing rocks through a concrete wall.

The old coach, Pete Linklater had, on the force of his record with us, gone on to greener pastures.

"You mean," I said, "is he going to break up our little party?"

Because, in a sense, that is exactly what we have had ever since the '46 season. We played together on a service team, accepted the blandishments of Mideastern, and set our offensive backfield up as a closed shop.

Pete tried to buck it when other boys showed promise, but as dear friends and true, Charlie, Sancho, Bus and I arranged to flub the timing so that Pete's hopefuls, no matter what position they played, looked very, very bad.

And it had paid off, very nicely.

"Why should he try to break it up?" Bus asked. "We're a winning combo. This is our last season coming up. We're the inner circle, and the defensive backfield, Lyan, Dupliss, Stelzac and Gold-man, plays along. This way we're not fighting each other."

"And if somebody pulls an injury this season?" Sancho asked.

"Why then we do just like last season. We decided who we want off the bench to plug the hole, and we make anybody else look bad."

Having agreed to preserve the united front, we shifted the talk to other things. We drifted down to the dining room and there, for the first time, we saw Bunny Hale in person. He was the same general size and shape as a brick phone booth, with a dull, sleepy expression. And he really shoveled away the groceries.

At the end of the meal Stim Jodrey, the sleek manager, beat on his glass with a spoon and the roar of conversation died. He said, "Fellas, without one of those big long introductions, let me just say that I want to present the head coach of the 1949 undefeated season, Mr. Melvin Hale, known nationwide as Bunny Hale, the man who carried the ball for the Burros."

The applause was heavy enough, but not exactly uncontrolled.

Bunny Hale stood up, stared sleepily at us. "My eyes hurt," he said. "I've been watching movies of you people. For a college team, you do good. Timing okay, fundamentals fair. This here is Harry Quinbee who will be line coach. I'll coach the backfield. The line has holes this season, but I think we can plug them. You



have a lot of power in the backfield. You run too many off the T and not enough single and double wing. You could have added another three touchdowns to the season total last year by forgetting that T within the five-yard line and punching Western over from a single-wing, unbalanced line either way."

I blushed. That was aimed directly at me.

Bunny continued. "The game can be fun and we'll play it that way. It's dirty, hard work, but we'll try for a few laughs. We've got two weeks here. We'll work every day, nine to twelve, two to six. Tomorrow be at the field house at eight thirty and on the field at ten of nine. One thing is going to be clear. Mideastern is paying me to boss this outfit. That I intend to do. My judgment will stand in every case. Based on what you boys show me in these two weeks, I'll plan our fall season and map out plays and do recruiting during the summer." He yawned. "See you tomorrow."

**H**ARRY QUINBEE had the linemen down at one end of the field. Bunny Hale was in uniform. He looked even bigger than yesterday. He had the eighteen backfield boys at the other end of the field.

He said, "With you guys it's timing and memory. A lineman is always having to outsmart the guy squatting face to face with him. The defensive backfield has the same sort of problem. But the offensive backfield has got to be a machine with interchangeable parts. There is going to be no prize offensive backfield any more. All offensive backs are going to work equally well together."

I glanced at Bus Mulligan, saw the angry flush on his cheeks.

"All you boys," Bunny said, "know the thirty-one series off the T. If you defensive boys are rusty, I want it practiced."

He split us into four backfield teams

and had us walk through the 31 series. I was paired with Sancho and a couple of sophomores. The series puts a load on the quarterback because each play starts with a half-spin, a fake handoff to the right half coming across, three steps back, then turn and flip to either the fullback coming down the alley in a delayed buck, or flip to the left half building up to a fade and pass or an off-tackle slant.

Walking through it we couldn't do much. But then when he upped the speed to regular timing, I was executing the fake to Sancho just right, taking my three steps and flipping to just where either of the sophomores wasn't. I teased them into some beautiful bobbles.

Bunny came over and said, "What goes on here, McKeaver?"

I said politely, "I guess I'm used to flipping to Charlie Western or Bus Mulligan. They always show up at just the right place. These boys are a little green, coach."

The sophomores gave me the dead-pan look and kicked at the turf with their cleats.

Bunny said, after giving me a long look, "Then it's up to you, McKeaver, to tell them where they have to be for the flip. They make you look bad."

Sancho snorted. Bunny turned to him and said, "Something on your mind?"

"Not a thing, coach. Not a thing."

He shuffled us around again, and this time I ended up in a foursome that included Bob Dupliss, left half, and Candy Stelzac, right half, from the first-string defensive backfield. The full was a junior named Donovan.

I did them like I'd been doing the sophomores and Candy said, "What the hell, Hal? What are you doing to me?"

Bunny was a hundred feet away. I said, "Doing? I thought Bus Mulligan was offensive right half. What do you care if you bobble a few?"

He glared at me and he and Bob Dup-



liss grumbled just out of earshot. On the next try Dupliss ran too close for the fake. He hit my hands with his hip and the ball dribbled away from me.

"Keep hold of that ball!" Hale yelled.

Then he broke it up and put us through a very rugged period of fundamentals, ending with a jog four times around the field and in to the showers.

That night in my room Charlie said, "Not once all day does he fit us together. Hell, I'd like to show him what we can do."

"He saw you in the movies, Charlie," Sancho said. "Relax. He knows the four of us click. He's just teasing us along a little."

"He's smarter than he looks," I said.

Dupliss and Stelzac came in with large chips on their shoulders. Dupliss summed it up by saying, "We know you four characters are very happy together, and we don't want your jobs. So help us look good in there when he sticks us on offense, will you?"

The same deal went on for days. Never did the four of us get in the same backfield. We were getting thoroughly browned off.

At the end of the week Bunny Hale decided we were ready for a few full-scale scrimmages.

He said, "Just to see how sharp you boys are, I'll play defensive fullback. Offensive backfield, McKeaver, Western, Sanchenelli and Mulligan."

We really snapped into it. We gave each other delighted grins. Charlie said, "Let's run him right into the ground, hey?"

Bunny had had some private words with Joe Goldman, defensive quarter. On their first shift, Bunny moved up as a line backer. We were starting at our own twenty and running it as a regular game.

I called a single wing and the snap went to Charlie, with all the power smashing off to the right. Charlie managed to

bull three yards. Then, on second down, I called one of the 31 series. Bus was to take the flip, fade back and pass to Sancho who had cut into the flat after the fake.

But as I took my three steps something hit me. I managed an awkward flip to Bus and saw him get it just as a house fell on him. Bus got up a little slowly.

We huddled and Bus said, "The line let that big lug through."

"Let, hell!" the guard said. "He ran over me like a tank."

"Come on," I said. "Third and thirteen. Thirty-one-four. Western down the alley."

Charlie came down the alley and I fed it right into his stomach. Charlie can drive. He hit Bunny who appeared somehow in the middle of the line. Charlie took three running steps without moving from the same spot and then flopped over onto his back for a two-yard loss.

In the huddle he said, "Oh, fine! Who was supposed to take him out?"

The guard said, "I hit him hard. I thought I was getting him just right, but I got an elbow in my mouth and a knee in my gut. Next time you hit him."

"Punt formation," I said.

Bus went back and got it away nicely. Joe Goldman had moved back to safety. He brought it up to their forty before our right end nailed him.

Bunny said, "We'll roll it the way it is. You boys stay in on defense, unless you think it might be too rugged."

What could the answer be?

We knew the defensive shifts. I smelled a single wing, moved the backs to their strong side. The line almost held. Almost. Bunny Hale came through the foot-wide gap, footwork as delicate as a toe-dancer. Beyond the gap he turned into a jet-propelled tank, concrete knees thumping high. Bus Mulligan hit him and bounced off. I hit him and then I was sitting there watching him go. Sancho and Charlie hit him at the same time. He



plunged free of Sancho, but Charlie clung. He dragged Charlie six yards before he finally went down. Eighteen yards total, right through the middle.

Charlie said, "I got him!"

"You did real good," Bus said bitterly.

Bunny, from his backfield, called, "Okay, dreamboys. This time I'm coming right over the middle."

I didn't quite believe it. But I bunched us a little just in case. He hit the bunch of us like throwing a sash weight through a venetian blind.

Eleven yards right through what were supposed to be four of the hardest, smartest college backfield characters in the country.

Our pride was smarting. Charlie said angrily to Sancho, "I saw you flinch off of that one, Sanch."

"You were too busy running for cover to see what I did," Sancho said dryly.

"Shut up, you guys, and stop him," I said.

"Same play," Bunny yelled.

This time I believed him. I bunched us, two and two, right behind the same slot. The line did good. They rose up to smack him and put him off balance as he came through. He came through spinning, and when he spun he was all elbows and knees. I thought I had him solid but it turned out I only had one stone-hard thigh in my arms. My feet spun off the ground and my hands slid off his pants and I landed face down ten feet away with a thump that made my breathing sound like a rusty bellows.

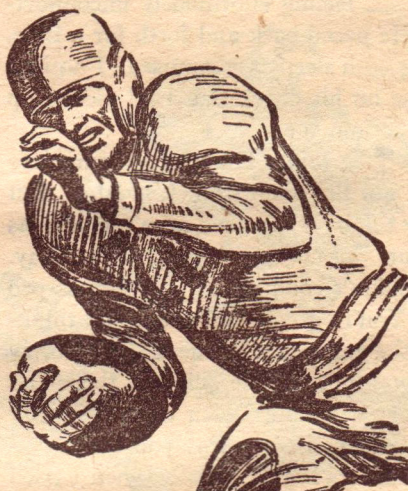
He straightened out in time to stab Charlie in the collarbone with a stiffarm that nearly drove Charlie underground. He fainted the end who had cut back, circled so that the end did an automatic block on poor Bus, and then he picked up full speed in two steps and ran over Sancho as though Sancho were the invisible man. He didn't even break stride for Sancho.

Charlie was beating the ground with

his fist and his face was all screwed up like an advertisement about what not to feed your baby.

Sancho picked himself up in sections, went over to Bus and said, "You big tangle-footed, ham-handed . . ." He launched the punch from way back yonder.

Charlie grabbed Sancho and I grabbed Bus's arm. When Bus tried to punch back it lifted me right off the ground, but the arm didn't go anywhere.



He hit us like a sash weight through a venetian blind.

I said to Charlie, "High-school kids could have ducked under that stiffarm he gave you."

Charlie said, "You had him once. Scared to hang on, Hal?"

Then Bus grabbed me and Sancho grabbed Charlie or, in the madness of the moment, I would have given away seventy pounds and tried to punch the head off the big fullback.

Bunny Hale, once in the clear, had circled back. He stood, breathing easily, the ball under his arm, an amused look on his face. His voice, when he used it, was like a bucket of icewater. "Come, come, children!"

I flushed and looked down at my shoes.



My three pals were all doing the same.

Bunny said, "We'll break it off right here. Four times around the field and hit the showers. McKeaver, Mulligan, Sanchenelli and Western, show up at my place at five-thirty sharp."

**H**E WAS waiting for us as we filed into his living room. In his sports jacket he looked almost as big as on the field.

"Sit down, guys," he said.

We sat, feeling enormously uncomfortable. He paced back and forth for a time, looking both sleepy and amused. I noticed a bruise on his cheek that he'd picked up in the scrimmage.

Finally he said, "Every coach runs into this. I got the pitch from Linklater. But usually the boys involved aren't as able as you four. For college players, you're okay. You couldn't compete on a first-class pro team. You're green, and you aren't thinking of the game as a business. I purposely made you look a little silly out there and you started blaming each other. It isn't any different from the way you were making the others boys look silly when I tried to force them into your closed shop.

"This year of play finishes you four up at Mideastern. But I'm on a three-year contract. If I let you guys push me around, I'll have nothing to go on for the nineteen fifty season. We'll have a big squad in the fall. So around each one of you four I'm going to build an offensive backfield. Each one of you guys will be an unofficial coach for his own backfield. The slickest combo resulting becomes first string, but I'll use all four interchangeably."

He gave us a chance to think it over. I gave Charlie a sidelong glance. He had a grimly determined look. Bus looked bemused. Sancho was scowling.

Bunny said, "Naturally each one of you guys can develop the timing of your backfield to bring out your own best

talents—within the pattern of the standard plays."

That did it. Sancho said, "These guys have been blanketing me. Just give me a chance to build my own foursome, and—"

"Blanketing, hell!" Charlie said. "We've been covering for you. I could drill a little group that'd gain more yards than you've ever seen."

"Besides," Bunny said softly, "if this coaching wasn't a good deal, I'd still be plunging my brains out for the Burros. You guys might get a start this way that could lead to a fine career for you."

Bus Mulligan nodded sagely and said, "I like it, coach. I think it's fine."

Bunny said, "Bus, you and Charlie and Sancho run along. I want to talk to Hal."

They left. Bunny grinned at me.

"Very smart," I said. "You broke it up fast. Psychology."

"Psychology, yes," he admitted. "But you could get them back in line and give me a bad time, Hal."

"Could I?"

"You're a smart character, McKeaver," he said. "And here's what I want you to do. I want this rivalry maintained, but I don't want a surly rivalry. And that's up to you, to help me keep it on a friendly basis. Because, Hal, we'll run into some rugged spots during the season. And then I want to be able to send the four of you in as my fat-cat offensive backfield, my surprise package. I know how much you can get out of those boys."

Suddenly I liked the big guy better than anyone I'd ever met. And ten minutes later I was walking back toward my room, full of confidence and happiness.

I stopped, frowning a bit, and suddenly wondered if I was a sucker for his brand of psychology, too.

Then I knew I wasn't and I walked on again. Hell, I knew he realized I was too smart to fall for a lot of silly psychology.

We had a winning season coming up. That was the only important thing.



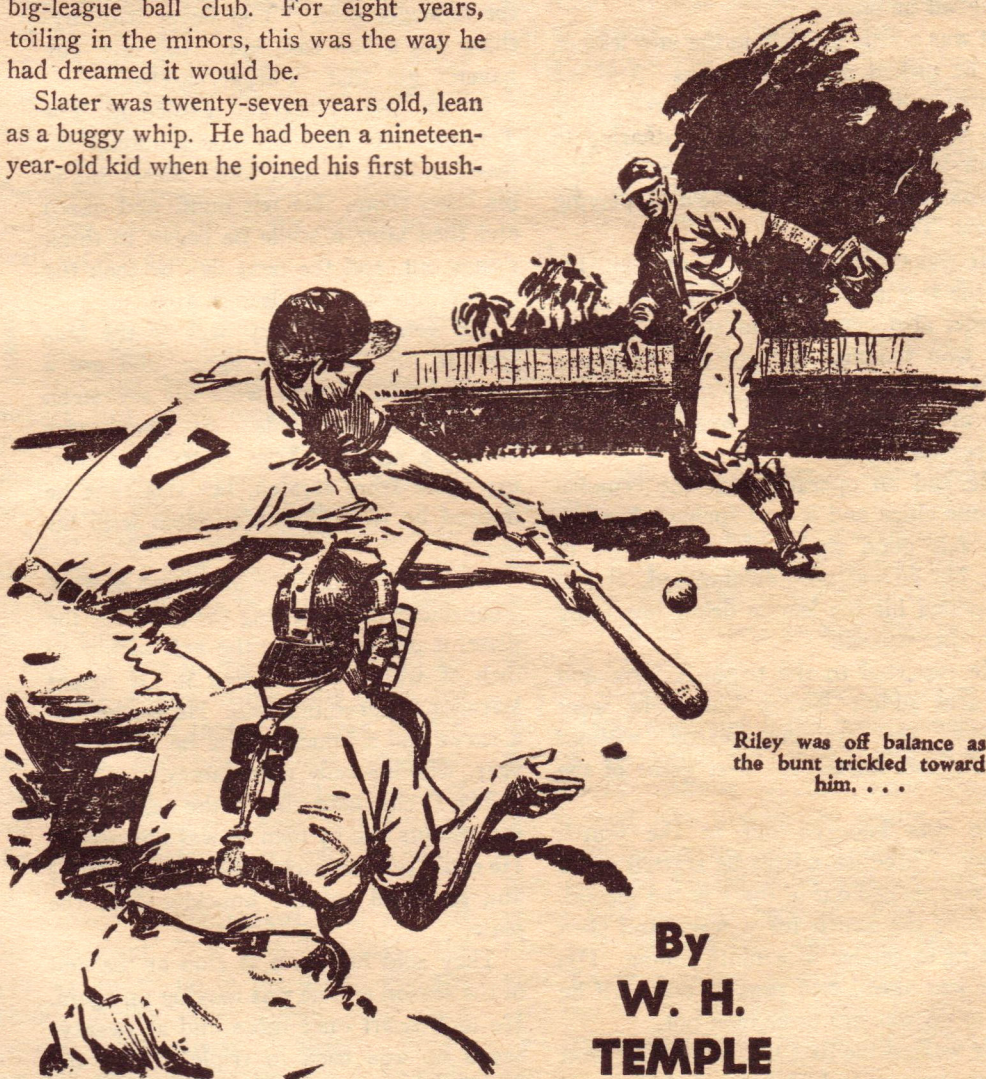
# Wrong Way Rookie

**T**OM SLATER was an old man as rookies go, but that didn't keep him from being as excited as a kid when he reported to the Eagles. There were palm trees lining the streets; the sky was a brilliant blue overhead; the hotel with its uniformed flunkys looked like a palace.

This was the way Slater had always pictured it, the Florida training base of a big-league ball club. For eight years, toiling in the minors, this was the way he had dreamed it would be.

Slater was twenty-seven years old, lean as a buggy whip. He had been a nineteen-year-old kid when he joined his first bush-

*A little busher in a big spot, he crouched in that three-and-two corner, where forked lightning hurled glory his way—if he was big enough to hold on to it!*



Riley was off balance as the bunt trickled toward him. . . .

By  
**W. H.  
TEMPLE**



league club, a lanky kid with an erratic pitching motion and a fast ball. He was wild as a hornet but that high hard one came out of nowhere like a bullet and he won twenty games his first season in pro ball.

The Terriers bought him. They paid twenty grand and Slater figured he was on his way to fame and fortune in the big time. But the Terriers farmed him out to an A-league team in the midwest. That was all right with Slater, he didn't figure himself hot enough to make the jump all at once.

It was a little tougher in the new league, but he picked up sixteen wins. And the next season he was playing triple-A. This was it, the last step before graduating to major-league ball. His final year in the minors, and the next year he'd be playing for the Terriers.

He was doing pretty well that year. He led the league in walks in midseason but he was also out front in strikeouts. He had won ten and lost six and then one night under the lights something gave way in his elbow and he was through for the season.

He had an operation for the removal of bone chips and it was spring when the arm felt good again. It was tough to take, but he was not downhearted. It just postponed his big-league debut one more year, that was all.

He reported to the triple-A farm and his arm didn't bother him. He went through the training season without trouble and started the first game of the year.

He was knocked out in the fourth inning. Three days later he started again and was shelled out of there in the second. He rode the bench for a week and then went in to relieve in a ninth inning. His team was ahead two runs to one. All he had to do was get three men out.

He walked the first two men. The next batter came up and Slater reared back and

let go with the old reliable, the high hard one whistling down the slot shoulder-high.

The batter rode the ball over the center-field fence. It was the end of the ball game and the end of Tom Slater.

The manager came to him that night. "We've got to drop two men from the squad, Tom," he said. "I'm sorry—you're one of them."

Slater said, "Give me a chance. That operation has made me slow rounding into shape. In a week or two—"

"I might as well give it to you straight," the manager said. "You never had anything but a fast ball, kid. And now you haven't got that. Forget baseball."

He was twenty-two and washed up. The Terriers gave him his unconditional release, nobody wanted him. Slater sat in his hotel room. He felt numb and dazed and then after a while he began to think things out, and the next day he took the rattler into the bush-league area.

He went all the way back to the bottom, to the D leagues again, and got a tryout. The players were all seventeen and eighteen-year-olds. At twenty-two he was a veteran. Tom Slater was starting again from scratch, but this time he figured he would learn to pitch with his head.

And the first thing to learn was control. That didn't mean getting the ball over the plate, it meant putting the ball within an inch of where you wanted it. It meant learning to curve that ball. He worked on a curve and a knuckler and he had a bad year, winning only nine games.

The D club kept him on the next season for peanuts and by then he was improving. He could put the curve where he wanted it and he could get the knuckler over the plate.

They sold him to a B club at the end of the season and he was moving up again. He took heart once more and at twenty-seven he was back in triple-A. By the middle of the season he had won twelve



games and was leading the league. Each day he kept waiting to be notified that he had been sold to a major-league club but the season went along and nothing happened. He won twenty-three games and finished out the year and he still hadn't been sold.

He packed his bags to go home and then went to the manager, who gave him the lowdown.

"Sure," he said, "a lot of scouts came out to look you over. They all turned you down, Slater. Not enough on the ball, that was the verdict."

It was tough to take, to come all the way up the ladder the second time and then stumble on the final threshold. He went back to his home and there on a December morning he read the news. He had been picked up by the Eagles in the draft for ten grand.

IT WAS quite a Christmas present. The Eagles had fallen upon lean years but they were quite a club. The owners had spent money like confetti. They were loaded with bonus kids, youngsters just out of high school who had been given fifty thousand to sign.

"The Eagles," said Slater to himself, and went to a wall calendar, checking the number of days until he was due to report for training.

Now he was in the south, he had arrived. He walked in the hotel lobby and saw the players there: big Jake Moffat, the huge hard-hitting first baseman, catcher Biff Tyler, the red-hot rookie of last year. Manager Laney was over at the desk and Slater walked over and introduced himself.

"Slater," Laney barked, and scowled for a moment. "Oh yeah," he said, "the guy we picked up in the draft. For ten grand. Every other rookie cost us a fortune." He grinned at Slater. "We've got you scheduled for our top farm club, Slater."

Slater's heart went right out of him. Then he straightened. He said, "I figure on pitching for the Eagles this year."

Laney stared at him. "I like a fighter," he said finally. "You'll get a trial."

Slater went up to his room. He had believed the Eagles had picked him because they wanted him. He had been wrong. He was just a basement bargain for their farm club.

He went into his room and met his roomie lying on the bed, a cigar between his teeth. He was Smoke Riley, a bonus kid of twenty, a southpaw hurler.

He was not like the rookies Slater had known, timid, quiet and uncertain. This guy had fifty grand in his kick and because of the bonus clause he couldn't be farmed out without being subject to the draft. He was sure to stay and he knew it.

"I win twenty-seven last year," Riley said. "High school and semi-pro. Sixteen clubs were after me. I sat back and waited for the top price. Fifty grand. What did you nick 'em for?"

"Not a cent," Slater said. "I was drafted."

"Oh," said Riley. "One of them bush leaguers."

Here was a guy who had everything in his lap, Slater thought, and he was contemptuous of it. The money didn't bother Slater. Just the chance to stay, that was what he wanted.

They went to work the next day under the tropical skies and Slater took it easy, getting the kinks out of his arm and being very cautious. A sore arm now might send him downstairs pronto.

Out on the playing field the team members watched Smoke Riley and another young pitching star perform. The kids fired that ball and they were hot. Manager Laney watched and grinned. "If only one of 'em comes through," he said, "we got the flag sewed up. If one of 'em can cop twenty, we're in."

Nobody paid much attention to Slater,



but he got his chance a week later. The veteran Hagerty pitched the first three innings. Smoke Riley went the middle three in the grapefruit-league game against major opposition. Riley was sensational. He put down nine men in order, and fanned five of them.

Slater went out to toe the hill at the start of the seventh. He had a system now, developed over the years. He had acquired a smooth and effortless pitching motion. He used varying speed, half speed and three-quarter, and when he needed it, he came in with the high hard one. It wasn't as fast as it had been, but it was no slow ball either and he used it sparingly.

He worked on the first hitter and with a two and two count he got the batter on a long fly to dead center. He gave the next man the curve and the batter poked it between first and second for a single.

Slater looked at the next hitter standing there, swinging a big bat. He pitched the knuckler right over the heart of the plate and the batter lashed into it but the ball broke under the fat part of the bat. It went skittering down to second and Ransom scooped and tossed to second. The shortstop fired to first to complete the double play.

He gave up another hit in the eighth and one in the ninth, but nobody got past first, and Slater was satisfied. It was a good workmanlike job.

Slater felt good about it but in the hotel lobby that night he heard manager Laney talking to his catcher, scrappy Biff Tyler.

"What's Slater got?" Laney said. "What did he show you?"

"Nothing," Tyler scoffed. "My grandmother could catch him. Except for that knuckler. I'll hand him that, he's got a good knuckler. Seems to be able to get the ball over. He might do for relief."

"We got Pop Larson and Jug Faherty for relief," Laney said. "The two best

three-inning pitchers in this league."

Slater thought he might get a good notice in the press but the next day proved how wrong he was. The papers were full of Smoke Riley and his speed. Slater got seven words in one paper. "Slater mopped up the final three frames," one paper said and that was that.

It was a week later that Slater got another chance. Once again he was following Riley, and this time the smokeball star went four innings. Once again he was sensational. He walked the bases full in the first inning, then fanned the side. The boys were teeing off for the fences but the hop on the fast one was too much for them. He walked six but there wasn't the smell of a hit off Riley in four innings.

Slater took the hill and he stood out there and made up his mind. They didn't like this cunny thumb pitching of his. Well, he had been a fireball pitcher once; maybe he could be again for a couple of innings.

He reared back and let fly with the fast one and the batter swung and missed for strike one. Slater fired again and then ducked. He had a flash of a rocket going past his head and rising as it went and then there was a man on third dusting off his pants.

Tom Slater lost his head for the first time in years. He pitched one through the middle. The hitters hadn't been able to time Riley's speed but Slater was something else again. There was a solid crack and the ball was over the fence.

Four more hitters came up. Four drives went between the outfielders and then Laney came out of the dugout and waved his arm and Slater was through.

**H** E WENT into the locker and Laney joined him there later. "Slater," he said, "our triple-A farm reports for training next week. You'll join them then."

So it was all over. That night Slater sat in the hotel lobby. He had been crazy



to try to imitate Riley out on the mound that afternoon. But it was too late now, the damage was done.

Across the lobby Smoke Riley was shooting off his mouth. "That Slater," he said chuckling, "I thought he was going to get kilt out there. He was ducking cannonballs." Riley leaned back and puffed on his cheroot. "Those guys were meatballs," he said. "I'll win twenty in this league without breathing hard."

"You won't win ten," Slater said.

He had spoken without thinking and the words were louder than he had intended. Riley said, "A little sore, aren't you bub. I'd bet you on that only you're a busher and you don't have dough to bet. I'll take twenty easy."

"Well, I hope you do," Slater said. He got up and started for the elevators, and then manager Laney put a hand on his arm and stared at him.

"Why'd you say that?" he demanded quietly. "Were you just sore or is there something else?"

"He's got no control," Slater said. "The batters are swinging at bad pitches now. Come the season, their eyes will be sharp. They won't go after those bad ones. Sure, the guy has a terrific fast ball. He's got the basic stuff. But they'll bunt him to death. He's off balance after every pitch. I don't think he's ready."

Laney stared at Slater a moment, then turned and walked away. Two days later they had an intercamp game and Riley was pitching for the regulars.

The first man to face him missed the first pitch. The next one ripped in and the batter's hands went slack, the ball trickled out toward the mound. It was a poorly placed bunt, right for the pitcher.

Riley was standing on one foot. He lost his balance, then charged forward, sprawled and got the ball, then threw to first. He threw it two feet over Jake Moffatt's head and the batter went to second.

The next man bunted on the first pitch. He dropped the bunt down the third-base line. Wilson came in quickly to field it and was all set to make the play when Riley charged into him. There were men on first and third. The next hitter came up and dumped one toward the mound and Riley charged in furiously. He elected to make the play at home, the throw was too late and the men were safe all around.

Laney switched signals then. There was no more bunting and Riley finished the next five innings in style. But after the game Laney approached Slater.

"You called the turn," he said. "You've forgotten more baseball than that lug will ever know. But he's got the speed. I wish you had a little more. But I think this league is over your head. I'd like to ask you a favor. Put off reporting to the farm club for a few days. Stick around and try and teach Riley some of the inside stuff. Will you do it as a favor to me?"

"On one condition," Slater said. "Give me a chance to pitch once in a while."

"It's a bargain," Laney said.

Slater took his turn after that. He didn't get much, an inning or so here and there. And in practice sessions he worked with Riley. But the big rookie didn't like the idea; he was still inflated with that fifty-grand bonus.

The squad went north and Slater knew he had done a good job on the mound. He hadn't been spectacular, but he'd been stingy with hits. He had an idea that Laney was considering hanging on to him.

They reached home and the season was ready to get under way and Slater was still with the club, hanging on by a thread. Then Laney came to him.

"I'd like to keep you," he said. "I've been trying to make up my mind between you and a couple others. I want to keep you all but I'd be over the limit. I'm afraid it's going to be you, Slater. You're



twenty-seven, and when it comes to a decision I'll have to stick with the younger men. I'm not chopping you off the roster today but I wanted to let you know. I'm sorry."

Slater had been expecting it. He began to wish he had never been picked up in the draft. It was worse, getting one tantalizing look and knowing it wouldn't last.

They had opening day at the big Eagle double-deck stadium with the flags and bunting draped around the stands. Tom Slater sat out in the bullpen with Pop Larsen and Jug Faherty.

The veteran Hagerty pitched the first game, a beauty for six innings, then lost his stuff. Larsen went in until the ninth and Faherty mopped up and the Eagles started off right with a 3-2 win.

Simonds went the next day. He was the other prize pitching rookie along with Riley, a smoother but less spectacular star. He pitched five scoreless innings and then blew up. Once again Larsen and Faherty cleaned up but they dropped this one, 4-3.

On the third day there was another crowd on hand, and today they had come to see the southpaw artist, Smoke Riley. He strode to the mound like a conqueror.

In the bullpen Larsen chuckled. "That boy shoulda gone on the stage," he said.

Riley wound up and pitched a ball. The count went to three and two and then Riley walked him. The next man came up and bunted on the first pitch, a drag bunt out toward second. Riley went charging over for the ball, tripped, couldn't find the handle on the ball and there were men on first and second.

The bunt was expected now. The infield came in. Riley fired and the batter laid it down the first-base line. Big Jake Moffatt charged in and like an elephant Riley rumbled over to first. The second baseman had moved in to take the throw. He and Riley got there at the same time

and collided. The ball fell between them and the sacks were loaded.

The clean-up hitter was up. Laney waved to the bullpen and Slater and Larsen got up and went to work.

Riley showed his stuff then. He whipped two fast strikes over the plate. The third pitch was even faster. It was over the plate but also over the catcher's head. One run came in and the runners moved up. Riley hit the next man in the middle of the back. He threw four straight balls and another run came in and the bases were still loaded.

The signal came out to the bullpen. Slater threw three more pitches, then tramped in toward the mound where Laney, Biff Tyler, Jake Moffatt and Smoke Riley awaited him. Riley's temper was completely gone.

Laney said, "Pop's been in twice already. So has Faherty. Maybe you can hold them for a couple innings, Slater."

Riley kicked the dirt viciously. It had been a tough debut for the big boy. He went off toward the clubhouse and Slater threw his practice pitches.

The sacks were loaded and there was no one out. Slater stood out there and he thought this might be his first and last chance to pitch in the big time. He wanted to make it good.

Biff Tyler said, "What'll it be? With the bases loaded, forget that knuckler. There's too much chance of a wild pitch."

"I'll get it in the strike zone," Slater said. "It's a tough delivery to catch. If you're afraid it'll get by you—"

"It won't get by me," Tyler said, and strode back to position.

**S**LATER took his short windup. He went into his delivery and the ball went plateward, heading toward the middle of the platter, then breaking sharply downward.

The batter had been waiting for it. He caught the ball on the lower part of the



bat, hit it viciously into the ground and to the left of the mound.

Slater whirled to the left, his back toward the plate and threw his gloved arm across his body. The ball rocketed into it. He turned and fired to the plate and Biff Tyler caught the ball with the runner four steps away. He pivoted, whipped a throw to first to double up the runner.

Tyler trotted out to the hill. "Nice play," he said. "We'll walk this next guy. Load 'em up, get an easier man."

Slater nodded, threw four wide ones, then faced the next man in the lineup. He threw the dinky curve for strike one, then a high fast one on the inside. The batter hit it far and high but straight-away into centerfield. Jig Keely danced back and gathered it in for the third out.

Slater walked in to the bench, hearing the handclapping. "Nice going," Laney said. "Two runs behind, gang, let's pick 'em up."

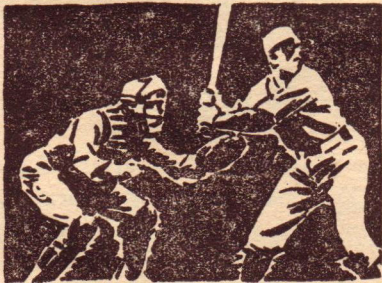
But they went down in order. Slater went out to the hill again. The pitcher was up. Slater fanned him on three pitches, and began with the top of the order. The lead-off man singled, but

died on first as the next two hitters fled deep to left.

In the third the Eagles picked up a run. It was two to one and the game was moving along steadily. Out in the bullpen Larsen and Faherty relaxed on the bench.

Tom Slater was giving it all he knew, working slowly, mixing up his pitches, throwing for the corners, trying to keep the hitters off-balance. They knew he had that knuckler, that was his big weapon. Slater tried to confuse them. When they were set for the knuckler he gave them the fast ball or the curve. When he was behind and they looked for the fast one, he tossed up the knuckler.

He got in jams and he wiggled out and they came up to the seventh inning, still a run behind. Biff Tyler, hitting third in the lineup with two out, drew a pass and the tying run was there. Jake Moffat, hitless all afternoon, watched two strikes go past him, then lashed at the next one, and the ball soared off the bat and into the upper deck. It was 3-2 for the Eagles. Laney gave the signal and Larsen and Faherty got off the bench and went to work out in the bullpen.



## BLAST 'EM, BUSER!

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Slater went to the hill. He was bushed; he hadn't worked this long any game during the training season. He wobbled out there and walked his first man of the afternoon unintentionally.

They sacrificed him down to second. The next hitter lifted one to deep center and there were two away. Slater breathed a little easier, then pitched one in. His control was wavering; the pitch was too good. It went rocketing over short and then the centerfielder, racing in at top speed, dove and caught the ball at his shoetops.

Back on the bench, Laney said, "You're pooped, Slater. I'll send in Larsen."

"He needs a day's rest," Slater said. "Maybe I can stagger through. And I got three men down that first inning. I'd kind of like to make this a complete game if I can. But I guess it isn't smart ball."

"I'm not too sure," Laney said. "I'll have Larsen ready."

The Eagles went down in order and Slater walked out to the mound again. He got behind right away, two and nothing. He got back even, then tossed one that was a hair inside and it was three and two. Biff Tyler signaled for the knuckler and Slater nodded.

He put everything he had left into the delivery and he never threw a better one. It came in knee high, broke sharply and the batter missed it by eight inches. The ball dipped down into the dirt and spurted off Tyler's glove. It was a strikeout, but the ball rolled away from the catcher and the runner made it down to first.

Tyler came out to Slater, his face red, his fists clenched. "I should be in the bushes," Tyler said. "I should play with the Bloomer Girls."

"We'll get 'em," Slater said grimly.

The batter bunted perfectly. They threw him out at first but the tying run was down on second.

Slater tried the knuckler again and this time it was a bad pitch. It hit in front of

the plate and Tyler did a magnificent job, blocking the ball with his body, keeping it from going all the way back to the stands.\* But the runner was on third with one down. A fly ball would tie it up.

Tyler came out to the mound. "Watch the squeeze," he said.

Slater nodded, studying the batter. He wound up, delivered the pitch and saw the batter set himself. Slater came tearing in from the mound and from the corner of his eye he could see the runner on third racing for home.

The batter lunged for the ball and it was a bunt but a bad one. It was a pop fly right for the mound, and the only trouble was that Slater had left the mound, anticipating the bunt.

Slater braked to a stop, then twisted like a diver and threw himself backward forward the mound. The ball hit in his glove just before Slater sprawled full-length on the ground. He lay there, and turned and lobbed the ball to third base to double up the runner and end the game.

Slater didn't think he had the strength to get up. But he didn't need to; his teammates pulled him to his feet.

They went into the clubhouse and after he had his shower, Slater felt better. He came out and found Laney waiting.

Laney said, "I was going to send you to the bushes. I guess maybe the owners should send me."

Slater grinned. "The other boys have more stuff. I didn't blame you."

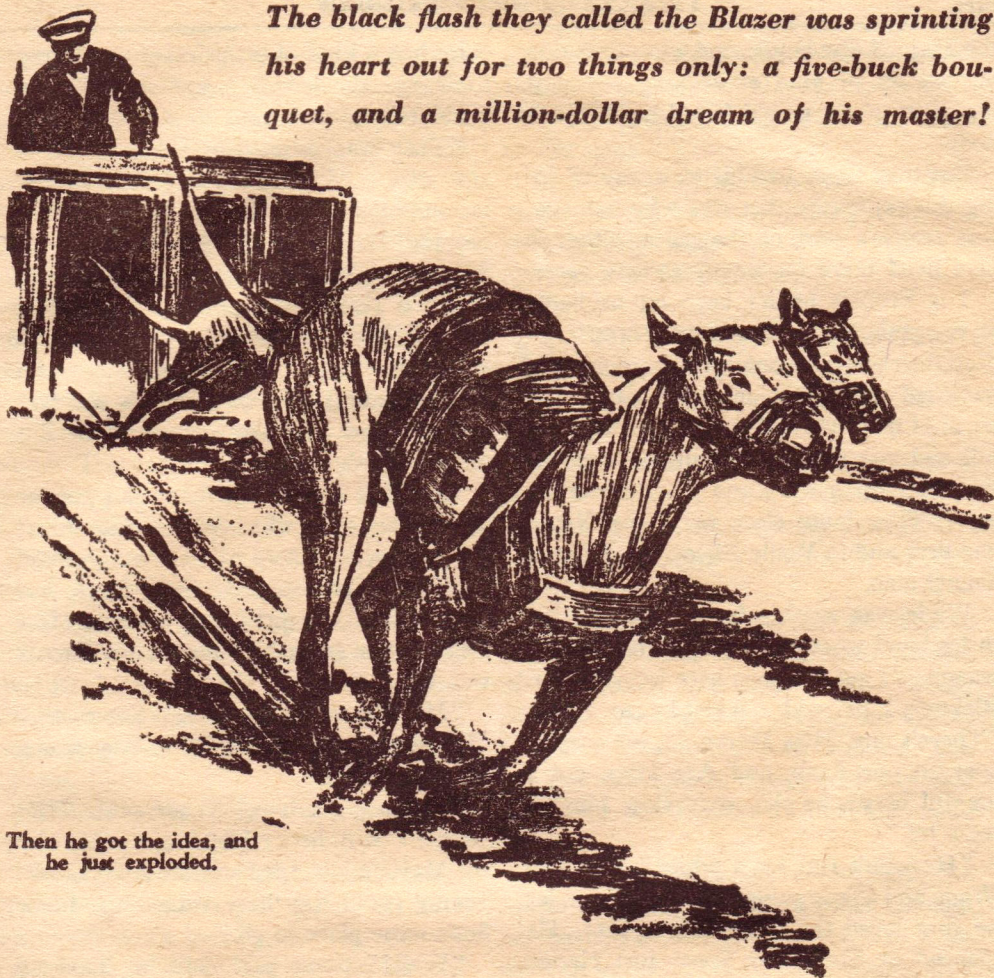
"They pitch with their arms," Laney said. "You pitch with your arm and your head and your heart. It's a tough three-way combination, Slater. Come on in the office with me. We'll tear up that minor-league contract and give you a new one." Laney grinned. "I hope you won't try and hold me up."

Tom Slater looked around the big-league headquarters, then turned to the manager.

"I don't think we'll have any trouble," he said.



*The black flash they called the Blazer was sprinting his heart out for two things only: a five-buck bouquet, and a million-dollar dream of his master!*



Then he got the idea, and  
he just exploded.

## TRAIL OF THE BLAZER

**W**HEN Steve and I drove up the high hill to Major Ganning's with Steve's wagon, the fire had been out for nearly a week, but the mark of death was still fresh. There was black and charred ruin all over the top of that old hill; nothing was left of the house but

a pair of porch pillars which hadn't burned all the way, and two chimneys—one on either end of the place—that poked black and naked at the sky.

The crowd was down around what was left of the kennels, and Steve hustled down there with nary a look at what was left of

By **JOHN PRESCOTT**



the Major's fine house, and without taking his hat off or kind of walking soft past the place where they'd found the Major's body.

But then Steve had his own way of doing things; maybe that was why he never was really a part of the place, although he'd lived there for nearly twenty years.

The kennels hadn't been hit as badly as the main house, but there'd been a lot of suffocation and some of the dogs had panicked and gone into the fire. The smell of that was still straying around the hill and you could see it in the way the live dogs stood wary and made big white eyes. They hung close in to the Negro handlers and to Wade Elicot, the Major's kennel man.

Wade was waiting for us with his hat in his hand when we came down from the wagon. "I got the dogs here for you, Mr. Blakney," he said quietly to Steve. "There's one, Miss Marygold, got a singe spot on one flank, and Ace High got a lungful of smoke that may slow him up for a bit."

"He won't run for a while," I said to Wade and Wade smiled careful gratitude; he sure loved the Major's whippets. He glanced at Steve but Steve just circled slowly around the dogs with his hands on his hips. He'd waited a long while to get some of the Major's dogs on his own terms, and he was enjoying it.

I watched him and thought how proud those shabby whippets had always looked when they were running for the Major. It always seemed like they knew who they belonged to, who they were running for. They looked lost now, as though the fire had destroyed all familiar things; as though they couldn't understand what this tall, dark guy was doing walking around them that way.

"My list calls for five and I only see four," Steve Blakney said to Wade, without looking up. He was on his knees, holding the foreleg of a big brindle. His

voice had a kind of proprietary roughness to it and the brindle's eyes rolled; you could tell he was used to a soft tongue.

"That was a mistake," Wade Elicot apologized. He shuffled around to where he could get a look at Steve's face. "The list the Major's lawyers had called for five all right; but before the fire the Major'd given young Jimmy Callan Idle Hour." Wade spoke slowly and chose his words carefully. "The Major was awful fond of Jimmy and his dad; his dad was trying to get the Major out of the fire and they both went down."

I couldn't see Steve's face but I got the impression that what Wade said didn't set too well. There were those around there who remembered that Steve had once courted the girl who'd married Mike Callan—the girl who'd died when Jimmy was born.

"My list calls for five," Steve said. "Is Idle Hour still here or has young Callan got him?"

"Jimmy's got him," Wade said. "But Jimmy's still here; his dad worked for the Major a long time and the lawyers said Jimmy could stay here with me until he finds some place to go."

"Well?" Steve said, and he stood up and let it hang that way.

Wade went off toward the main kennel door and he came back in half a minute with Jimmy Callan. Jimmy looked wide-eyed and belligerent and the bridge of freckles across his nose was bold and pronounced—like his red hair. He had Idle Hour cradled in his arms and they both looked like they'd been listening at the door. Jimmy didn't let go when Steve felt of Idle Hour's limbs; and the dog rolled its eyes and got the kind of look the brindle had.

"How come you got this dog I bought, kid?" Steve asked. "Don't you know he's supposed to be with these others?"

Jimmy Callan wasn't any more than fifteen years old but he raised the black



pup's head beneath his own chin and stared hard at Steve; a thing few grown men would do with Steve Blakney.

"The Major gave him to me," Jimmy said. "I raised him from a pup and he gave him to me. Wade knows; they got the records mixed. That's all." Jimmy Callan looked at Wade and Wade's mouth was firm as he nodded. I found myself nodding too; a hell of a thing, with me working for Steve.

"That's right," Wade said. "Jimmy's had Idle Hour for his own for quite a while. The Major gave him to him, but it never got into the records somehow. It beats me how it got on the list."

"It was on the list and I bought it," Steve said. "And I intend to have it."

He looked at Jimmy and for a second I thought Jimmy was going to break and run; but he didn't. He stood his ground. I had an idea that Steve enjoyed what he was saying, and if he did, it was natural, I guess.

"There's other dogs you can have," Wade said respectfully.

"I bought five dogs," Steve said evenly. "I either get what I paid for or I'll have the sheriff down here."

I looked at Wade and he was an unhappy and confused man. The Major's estate had ordered the sale and Wade didn't really have anything to say, but I could tell he sure wished he had.

Jimmy put the black whippet down carefully and slipped a short length of rope around its neck.

"It's all right, Wade," he said. "I didn't mean to make no trouble; I guess it was all a mistake. I still got Sister Sue." He avoided Steve and gave me the loose end of the rope. "Take good care of him, will you? He's a fine dog; fast. I'd like to come see him some time if it's okay."

I said, "Sure, Jimmy, you come over any time," and then I got hold of myself and remembered Steve. I thought I'd be

getting the red eye from him but he wasn't watching any more. He was down aside Miss Marygold, looking at the singe spot on her flank.

In a couple of minutes we left, going on up the hill to the wagon. Jimmy was still looking when we went down the drive and hit the highway.

WE DIDN'T put one of the Major's dogs into competition for nearly three weeks; and then one Saturday night we ran Miss Marygold over at Millbrook in the fourth race. I took her down to the track early and Steve came on by race time, driving some flashy-looking dame from Baltimore in that big car of his.

Miss Marygold was what we liked to call a silver faun and, like most females of the breed, she was small—twenty pounds. She had big, brown, intelligent eyes and a careful way of walking; you got the idea that it wasn't just *any* clod she'd step on. Besides all that, she could run.

She had a pretty fair record with the Major and it didn't seem to suffer through her change in ownership. She was a bit nervous in the box but I had a feeling that was as much from the way Steve had whacked her across the quarters in the ring, as from pre-race jitters. That didn't last long, though; it all cleared off when the gates opened.

Those eight dogs were fast, but aside from one, a big brindle, there was nothing there that could touch Miss Marygold. She had a good second all the way around, and she might have pulled a first if the brindle hadn't thrown his haunches at her on the first turn. She lost her balance long enough to kill her bid for first. But that didn't make any difference to me; she was good enough for my money, and I crooned to her all the way back to the ring behind the stands.

Jimmy Callan came by as I was wiping



her down and getting ready to put her in the wagon.

"Howdy," he said, and he stood off a ways, kind of careful, as though he thought Steve might come jumping out at him. I felt sorry for him standing there that way; nice kid like that with no people, and like as not no real home or place to go to.

I said, "Hi, Jimmy," and then as casually as I could I asked him if he was still over with Wade.

"I guess I'll be there for a while," he said. "I can stay until they sell the land. Wade's gonna be there and he said I could stay."

While he was talking he came a little closer; he had good hands and he rubbed Miss Marygold's neck and back. Then he looked in the wagon and sat down on a box.

"Why didn't you run the Blazer?" he asked. "He could have taken this field tonight."

At first I didn't get it and then I said, "You mean Idle Hour?" and he smiled.

"That's what my dad called him," he said. "He told the Major once that Blazer was the fastest in the kennel; he said all he needed was love. That's why the Major gave him to me. I don't know if he believed what my dad told him or not, but he said I was the one to try it out."

"That dog's still a pup, though," I said to Jimmy.

"He just looks like it," Jimmy said. "He's a little young yet but he's mature." He took Miss Marygold's small head in his hands and blew softly over her ears. "I was thinking you might run him tonight, so I came over. You going to soon?"

"Well, I don't know," I said, and I didn't. Steve gave the orders on that; and aside from making damned sure the terms of sale were fulfilled he hadn't paid much attention to Idle Hour.

"He'll win sure," Jimmy Callan said.

"You just tell Mr. Blakney what my dad told the Major and he'll run him."

I laughed a little and said maybe I would, although I didn't think I'd repeat anything Mike Callan had ever said. Steve had been spending the last sixteen years trying to forget the superior brand of courting that wild Irishman had.

"What you going to do?" I asked, by way of changing the subject.

Jimmy made curving marks in the dust before he answered. "Wade says I can stay there with him until he goes; later, he says I can go out west with him if I want to."

Well, any kid of fifteen would be crazy not to take a chance like that. But looking at Jimmy Callan I got the idea he wasn't just any kid of fifteen. He didn't want to go out there. He looked up and knew that I knew.

"Before Mr. Blakney took the Blazer I'd figured on running him here in Maryland," he said. "I wouldn't make much, but I'm young."

"You got Sister Sue," I said. "What about her?"

"She can't run," he said, and I didn't ask him why because I hadn't seen Sister Sue in a good while; I hadn't seen her since the fire, and there'd been a lot of them that came out of the fire alive that would never run again. "I just thought I'd like to be here instead of out west. That way I might get to see the Blazer once in a while."

He stood up suddenly and tried hard not to look like a kid.

"Do you think I could get a job helping you? Do you think Mr. Blakney would put me on? He ought to need another man, what with five more dogs; and that way I could help with the Blazer."

"I'd have to ask the boss," I said. "I might be able to use you, but the boss is the man who does the hiring; he says whether I need a man or not."

"But you'll ask him, won't you?"



Jimmy Callan said quickly. He had brown eyes and they were shining beneath the red thatch that fell across his forehead. I guess it was the most important question he ever asked; he'd do anything to be with the Blazer.

"Sure," I said. "I'll ask him first thing in the morning, and when I get the time I'll drive over past the hill and let you know what he said. How's that?"

Jimmy gave me that grin. "That's swell," he said.

IN THE morning I asked Steve and he said what I had a dead feeling he'd say all along. He gave me a flat "No", and I thought of the way Jimmy Callan had stood up to him and how much the kid looked like his dad.

When I went over to the Major's, Jimmy wasn't there, for which I was kind of glad; and so I gave the news to Wade. Wade nodded like he'd known it all the time. Wade had a sad face anyway, and this made it just that much worse. It made me say a foolish thing.

"Listen, Wade," I said. "You tell Jimmy I'm sorry; I can't very well make it up to him but you tell him I'm going to run the Blazer Friday night at Millbrook."

"Blakney's decided to race him, then," Wade said.

"Well, I don't know if Steve's going to know about it or not," I said carefully. "I'll try and slip the dog in somewhere if I can and hope that Steve either don't find out, or, if he does, that the Blazer will make a good enough showing so Steve won't give me hell."

Wade dug thoughtfully at a little mound of dirt with the toe of his shoe. "Well, I never saw him run except on a practice track, but he looked all right to me then. He's young, but he's got fine blood lines."

"I know," I said. "That's why Steve wanted him; but I thought I'd slip him in Friday to make Jimmy feel a little better."

Wade said he thought that would make Jimmy feel a lot better, and that he'd tell Jimmy I'd come by and pick him up with the wagon and dogs on Friday. I told him that would be fine and then I drove back to Steve's to have a better look at this Idle Hour which Jimmy called the Blazer.

Well, he was pretty much of a pup but he had a lot of the subtle grace and development of a mature dog. He was just about two years, six or seven months below good racing age, but you'd never know it to look at him; that is, if you looked close. And when you looked close you saw a lot about that dog that you didn't often see in others; especially the eyes. Those eyes were a damn sight finer than I've seen in a lot of humans.

He was a lot of dog in other ways too. He was large, nearly twenty-eight pounds, and he looked to me like he was still growing, still filling out; and he was all black. And that shiny ebony coupled with his size and the restlessness of the muscles in his shoulders and legs gave an impression of great speed. It gave me a fair idea of why Jimmy called him the Blazer.

For a whole week I pampered him and worked on him, being careful of course so Steve wouldn't know what I was up to; and when Friday came around we got a nice break when Steve announced he wouldn't be at Millbrook that night. I picked up Jimmy Callan on the road near the Major's just before dark. He was about as excited as a kid could be, and he hopped in the back and rode with the dogs all the way to the track.

Once we got there I got a case of the jitters and began to wonder just what in hell had made me lose my mind. I had no business putting Idle Hour up to run; I had no business crossing Steve Blakney that way. Fact was, if he found out, I'd have no business. Funny how you think of those things when it's too late.

But looking at Jimmy and the Blazer made me think it was nearly worth it. I



never saw so much life in a kid his age before; and that dog was a different animal too. Just being around Jimmy seemed to give the Blazer enough vitality for three dogs his size. He kept bouncing around him, wagging his tail and making ecstatic noises deep in his throat. He was just full of love, and he didn't behave in any way like a racing dog should; that is, he didn't until he went to the post.

We had him in the fourth race, a two hundred and sixty-five yard shot, and most of the other seven dogs were like the Blazer in that they had neither notoriety nor name. They were mostly nondescript and nervous and Jimmy got real proud and said they didn't have the class to run with the Blazer. The dog looked a little haughty too, standing in the box; and when the bunny popped I knew they both were right. The Blazer was in that one all alone.

He'd never made a gate start before and he didn't get the idea until he surged out with the others and saw the bunny. You could tell he was trying hard to figure it all out, and he was trailing way back about fifth place before he had the angles. Then it all seemed to hit him at once, and he just exploded. He moved like a black fury; you couldn't even see his legs. He was one big blur from his shoulders on back.

There were two turns in that short distance and he was out of fifth and up in third before the dogs came down from the rail where the bunny was and went around the first. He barged right in from the rear, throwing that weight around like a college tackle and scattering fur and flesh high and wide. There was a deep noise around us in the crowd; it started low and kept on rising. It was the kind of surprised, wondering noise a crowd makes when it can't believe what it is seeing. It caught up short when the black dog rammed his way to second.

On the stretch the Blazer hit his stride

and lit out long and low along the flats toward the second turn. He was a young and untried pup but he moved fast and easy like an old campaigner. He left the field like it was anchored there; except for the one spot, and he washed that out before he hit the turn. He went in low and black and menacing, and damn near caught the rabbit when he came out.

From then on it was all his race. There were maybe fifty yards stretching away dusty and long beneath the overhead arcs but they fled beneath his dim, flying legs in a way I'd never seen them do for any other dog. Behind us there, the crowd stood kind of stunned and then it let go as the Blazer crossed the line.

WELL, I wasn't so sure I believed it myself. I walked a little stupidly down the ramp to the ring when Jimmy brought the Blazer from the track. But Jimmy was all lit up and breezy like he'd known it would happen all along. He kept hugging the dog and talking in a breathless way.

"You see," he said. "He's a winner. I told you he was like that. Blakney had a winner and he didn't even know it."

There wasn't much I could say to that, but I don't think right then that I cared to say anything anyway. It seemed just enough to stand there and watch the kid and the dog carry on, and to know it was true.

Funny how you can get caught up in something like that and lose track of what's going on around you. It was like that then. I got all warm and gooey the way you sometimes get when things are perfect; and then I looked around and saw Steve coming into the ring with that flashy dame on his arm and a bottle in his belly. He was sullen and he didn't care who knew it. He saw Jimmy before I got a chance to smooth things over.

"I thought I told you that kid wasn't to hang around the dogs," he said to me.



He'd never spoke to me that way before and the only reason I put up with it was because it was my fault Jimmy was there.

"You ought to be glad he's here," I said. "He told me about Idle Hour and I ran him tonight and he won."

"That black dog?" he asked stupidly, and he stared at the Blazer pressed up against Jimmy's legs. "This pup?"

"He ain't so much of a pup," said. "He ran in the fourth race and won. He won going away."

"Who in hell did he run against?" Steve asked, and he took the list I had in my hand and stared at it. He looked at it quite a while and then he sniffed and let it flutter out of his hand. "Not a name there; no wonder he won. They all got four legs?"

"Look, Steve," I said, and that time I got excited. "You got something here; he's a winner. He's an ace. Jimmy said he—"

And I guess that was the wrong thing to say because Steve turned around quick and tied into Jimmy.

"Any time I want you around my dogs, Callan, I'll ask you. Now, you clear out of here before I call a track cop. If you think you can run my kennels you better think again."

"It wasn't his fault," I said. "He didn't have anything to do with it. Idle Hour just looked good enough to run."

"Listen," he said, and that time his voice got real ugly. "I'll do the thinking for this kennel, if you don't mind. I'll say when a dog looks good; you just do what I tell you. You like your job, don't you?"

That night I was as big a coward as ever was born.

"Sure, Steve," I said. "Sure, I like my job."

I DIDN'T get around to see Jimmy for a couple of days, and when I did it wasn't as bad as I'd thought it would be;

he seemed sort of resigned. He said he felt good that the Blazer had won, even if it didn't satisfy Blakney; and that maybe he'd go to the coast after all. It would be tough not seeing the dog any more, but, well— He let that one hang.

Toward the middle of the week Steve came off his high horse long enough for me to talk to him about the Blazer again. He'd been half oiled that night and I wasn't sure just how much he remembered.

"That was a bunch of tramps Idle Hour ran against and you know it," he said when I brought the matter up. "He's barely two years old."

"I know," I admitted, "and that's why it's remarkable. He won going away. He equaled some of the best time that's been turned in this season. He's just starting younger than the others. He's growin' fast."

Sometimes there were ways to get around Steve and one of the best was to hint around about a fast buck. He wasn't ready to give in on the Blazer, but when I built the black dog into something that he began to think was more than he'd paid for, he got more interested.

"You never saw him run," I added by way of a clincher, "and you sure can't lose anything by watching him. Why don't you get him into a good race Friday night and see what happens; and if he does well enough, slide him into the Silver Cup Saturday night."

Steve thought that all over very carefully; all except the Silver Cup. When I mentioned that his eyebrows went up slightly, and I can't say that I blamed him. The Silver Cup was for topnotch performers, and in order to insure that no riff-raff got in, the stewards always posted a five-hundred-dollar entry fee. It was run for the prestige value only; the winner got nothing but a bouquet of roses and his name in all the record books and rattling around on the tongues of doggy society



for some time. It generally hoisted the value of the dog some, and of his progeny, but there it ended.

Well, Steve thought it over and finally he gave the nod for Friday night and I spent the rest of the week, which wasn't much, getting the Blazer all primed for his honest-to-goodness shot at the big time. Steve left me pretty much alone, which was fine because the Blazer didn't like him, and all things went fairly well although I had a feeling they would have gone better if Jimmy had been around. I knew there was no getting him in on it though; not as long as Steve was in the same state.

It might have been worth risking his ire at that, though. I kept getting uneasier and uneasier as those last few days wore out, and some of it seemed to transmit itself to the Blazer; or maybe it was his own private case of the jitters. You expect a certain amount of nervousness at the track, but this all commenced a good day or so before the race came up; it kept on getting worse, and by the time we took him over to Millbrook Friday night he was acting like a toe-dancer on a pancake griddle.

Well, I'd hoped for some sort of miraculous transformation when he went into the gate, but there was nothing like that at all. He went in docile enough but he was no sooner in than he was tearing at the lumber to fight his way out. The whole damn business was shaking and rocking and I guess that got the other dogs all blown higher than a kite too.

About that time the judges woke up and opened the gate and they all came out, even the Blazer; only he just stepped out and stood looking around and high up at the crowd. I heard Steve make a strangled noise beside me and I didn't dare look at him. I kept watching the Blazer and I could feel my heart go out to him because I knew he was looking for Jimmy Callan; I knew he'd never run without that kid.

I TRIED to explain that to Steve when I finally got the Blazer off the track and down to the ring before we loaded. But that only made him madder, and of course, I should have known it would.

"He's a no-good wild-eyed pup," Steve said. "A damned tramp."

"No he ain't," I objected, and that was the one thing I'd stand up to Steve on. "He's a fine dog; he runs swell for Jimmy Callan."

"And that's what makes him a no-good tramp," Steve snapped. "Any dog that runs for a shanty-Irish kid is a tramp. A no-good tramp, and no dog that I want in my kennel. I want you to take that mutt out and kill it."

I'd never seen Steve that far gone before. This was more than honest anger; it was something wild and unnatural. I told him so, and he stood with his feet spread wide in the ring and yelled at me. He was shaking all over and his face was red and shiny.

"Take him out and kill him!" he screamed, "before I do it with my bare hands. Take him out and kill him!"

There were a lot of people standing around the ring and when Steve began to yell that way and walk stiff-legged toward the Blazer, they all looked and some of the dames in the crowd put their hands to their mouths and got all white.

It scared me too, and before I really knew what I was doing I got between him and the Blazer and just stood there. But he kept on coming, and then he was right there and trying to plow past me and I was swinging at him and the Blazer was snarling and yelling and Steve was swinging those sledge-hammers at me and I was going down in the dust. The last clear thing I heard for a while was the Blazer standing over me and bugling his guts out at Steve.

It only lasted a couple of seconds and then I got up and Steve was still standing



there, but white now because the Blazer's mouth was full of daggers and his black ears were pressed tight against his skull. Steve was just about able to speak, but he had control; and his money sense too.

"You want him, you can have him," he said. "For five hundred; otherwise I take him out and kill him."

Well, five hundred was about half of what I had in the world and I carried it all in a checkbook which I suddenly had out without really being aware of it. I was shaking so bad I could barely sign my name, and when I got it off I gave him the check and took hold of the Blazer.

I didn't even look at Steve. We went up the ramp and when we passed the steward's office I thought of the Silver Cup on the next night. I must have been in a trance because I walked the Blazer in there with me and I gave them the rest of my checkbook.

After that I took the rest of the dogs and the wagon back to Steve's and loaded my gear into the suitcase. He hadn't come back yet by the time I left. The Blazer and I didn't wait around, but took right off on the long road to the Major's place. Walking along that way it was cool and sane, and I began to wonder just what in hell I'd let myself in for.

It was bad enough just thinking about it and I didn't see how it could get worse—until I found Wade and discovered that it already had. Wade looked sadder than ever when I told him what had happened and that the Blazer would only run when Jimmy was near him.

"I'm just closing up around here," he said. "I'm leaving for the coast in a couple of days; all the dogs are sold now. I already sent Sister Sue and Jimmy out in the pickup. They left this afternoon."

**W**ELL, that was that.

I stayed there with Wade that night but I didn't feel any better in the morning, and the closer it got to

race time the worse I felt. The Blazer and I started out for Millbrook around two o'clock; we didn't have a car any more and I had to carry him most of the way.

Down there I kept to myself, staying quiet and watching the entries show up and weigh in. There were a lot of fine-looking dogs in that race and the more that came in the less our chances seemed to be. It all kind of topped off when Steve came in with Miss Marygold; I knew he'd done that out of sheer meanness.

While all that was going on and they were putting the dogs into the gate, the crowd was surging round the rails and pushing down so it made it hard to breathe. I'd had a place near the Blazer's box so I could talk to him, but presently the crush had me moving slowly along the rail until I couldn't see him any more.

I knew he needed all the moral support he could get and so I fought back at the crowd and stood up on my toes and began yelling his name, but it was like yelling against Niagara and pushing against the Michigan line. Everybody around there thought I was crazy or worse, and began jabbing at me and poking me and someone even threw an empty whisky bottle.

That got me really sore and I put my head down and drove, still yelling the Blazer's name and trying to get back where he could see me. But I couldn't get traction and presently I heard some other voice, some wise guy, yelling the Blazer's name too. It was loud and clear and then it was drowned out by the high yell of everyone as the gate swung and the dogs came out.

Well, it was incredible but there he was, going like a mad black dream along the inside toward the first turn. He was low down and running wild, putting his whole big heart and soul into it the way he had in his first race when Jimmy Callan had held him and talked to him.

He seemed to have a way with those turns that a lot of dogs don't. He seemed



to think it all out ahead of time—as though he remembered the way the rabbit ran—and he wasn't going to be suckered out the way a lot of dogs were.

That smart thinking brought him through the turn in fine style, cleared a lot of the deadwood away from around him, and when he came on out, the black dirt flying away from his feet in a fine spray, there was only Miss Marygold between him and the last turn. I loved the girl dog too, but I loved the Blazer more, and there was no sadness in me when he flicked his tail in the lady's face and clamped down on the lead.

With the Blazer in front the sound got deep and heavy and rolling there around the rails and got even more so as the big black dog rammed along the stretch and took the last turn. The mob began to chant his name, booming out with, "Idle Hour! Idle Hour!" except for that one guy who kept yelling for the Blazer. I found him in the crowd as the Blazer crossed the line. And I got my second shock that night when I saw the face of Jimmy Callan.

**W**HILE Jimmy and the Blazer were disporting themselves in the ring like a pair of demented fools, I sat on the ground and thought, so what? We'd won, which was swell and beautiful, but so what?

In a couple of minutes Jimmy and the dog got tired and came over and sat down. I tried to be real gay; I didn't know what Jimmy had found out.

"You might as well come clean," he said. "I been talking to Wade."

"Well, it's a good thing you did," I said. "The Blazer don't run so well when you're not around. Fact is, that's how I got him."

"I know," Jimmy said. "Wade told me everything when I came back to the Major's place tonight."

"I thought you were on your way west," I said.

"Well, I was, but I had complications, so I came back."

I said, "Oh," and Jimmy stood up and grinned at me and we started up the ramp for the outside. "We're going into the dog raising business," he said presently. "You and me and Wade. We're going to raise and race champion whippets. Wade and I talked it over and he thinks he can get a section of the Major's kennels that haven't been sold. That is, if it's okay with you and the Blazer."

"It's okay with me and the Blazer," I said. "But it costs a lot of dough, which we ain't got—unless you want to sell the champ here; otherwise all we got tonight is fame, but can you eat it?"

"Well, in a way, we can," Jimmy said, and he grinned again. It was a real, teasing, Irish grin—just like the old man used to have. We were at the pickup and we got in and drove back toward the Major's.

"What do you mean we can?" I asked him. I couldn't hold it in any longer.

We were going into one of the old kennels then and the Blazer trotted on ahead of us and then drew up sharp and hoisted himself up on his forepaws and gazed across a partition; I looked in and saw one big dog and a lot of squirming pups. They were brand new.

"That's my complications," Jimmy said. "Sister Sue was having pups; I had to turn around and come back. Just made it in time."

"But I thought she was hurt . . . That is when you said she couldn't run . . . I mean—what about the fire—?"

"Didn't touch her. It was the pups. They're real pups now; probably worth a hell of a lot, now, considering their old man."

I looked real hard at those pups and then at the Blazer. The color was there all right, but I didn't need that to tell me. That Blazer looked like he was going to start passing cigars at any moment.





# ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

## By JOE HAMMER

(Answers on page 97)

**I**F YOU prefer sitting-down exercises, we're pitching this one straight at you. You don't have to weigh in or show us your muscles; just square away at each of these twenty questions, and may the best brain-cell win! Play it solo, or against a friend.

### Baseball—Top score, 3-0.

1. How can a batter take a base without hitting, waiting out four balls or being struck by a pitched ball? *Answer this, and you walk.*

2. Babe Ruth scored 100 or more runs a year during 11 years. So did two other great players. *Name one of them, and the next man boosts you to second.*

3. These names were all once applied to a big-league club: White Stockings, Colts, Bronchos, Rainmakers, Cowboys. *Name the club, and you steal third.*

4. Who pitched a one-hit series game? *Go home on this one. If you can name two, the next man follows you in.*

5. If you've struck out, or died on base, here's where you can make up for it. *Name the original professional baseball team, and we'll give you a homer.*

### Football—Top score, 20-0.

6. If a game is won by forfeit, what's the official score? *Answer correctly, and you get the score mentioned.*

7. Fifty years or so ago, some backs had leather handles stitched to their uniforms. *Tell us why, and you get a field goal.*

8. *A touchdown for you if you can tell us what college team pulled down the all-time one-season scoring record. Come within five years of the date, and you convert.*

9. If that one threw you for a loss here's a chance to make up the yardage: *Guess how many points were made against the record-*

*scoring team, and score a field goal. 41? 67? 72?*

10. This one is the payoff for you money-minded players. Football's first professional was a guy named John Brallier. How much did he get per game? \$1? \$10? \$100? *Pick the right one, and you score a touchdown.*

*Fight—Answer 3 and cop decision; 4 for TKO and 5 for KO.*

11. Jack Dempsey scored 108 kayos during his ring career. Who beat his record?

12. Here are the real names of three well-known fighters. Can you supply their ring names? A, Stanislaus Kiecal; B, John Cucoshay; C, William Papaleo.

13. The Boxing Commission has ruled that a manager's fee should be no more than: 20%? 33⅓%? 50%?

14. True or false—Boxing has been legal in the U. S. only about 50 years.

15. What famous boxing champ fought his last bout at the age of 52?

### Miscellany—Score one point for each.

16. How fast does a ski jumper travel?

17. Mexico has a game which is a combination of jali alai, squash and handball! Can you name it?

18. What stadium in the U. S. has the greatest capacity?

19. In swimming, what is "dead water"?

20. What would be the probable outcome of a race between a champion sprinter and a champion ice skater, on a 100-yard course?



Joe stepped up and hit a  
drive that should break  
Cary's heart. . . .



# IRON HEART

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

*Dewbird and champ, they teed off  
on that sudden-death fairway that  
would make one a king for a day*

*—the other a bum forever!*

SHE'D gone through the winter circuit with him, along the coast, through Texas and down into Florida. It seemed like a fine way to spend the winter. Joe hadn't minded it too much, but Joe was used to cheap rooms and hur-



ried trips. Joe was getting used to the ups and downs of tournament golf. Joe had never known the millionaire background.

She had.

She'd been an outstanding woman amateur, but she didn't look it. She looked like what she was, a beautiful, good-humored, healthy girl from a wealthy background.

They'd been married a year, this April day in Virginia. They were sitting on the porch of the comfortable but not expensive Marlowe House, in Bluff Ridge, when she said, "Joe, would you miss me if I took a little vacation?"

"I miss you when you go out to mail a letter," he said, and his eyes didn't meet hers. "A vacation from me, Jean?"

"No," she said. "You shouldn't say things like that. A vacation from—from the trail, from poor meals and quick trips, from golf, golf, golf—"

"That's no way for the former Connecticut Women's Amateur champ to talk," he chided her gently. "How long a vacation, honey?"

"Just for the summer," she said. "Just for a couple of months of breakfast in bed and some feminine chatter and just general laziness."

Now he faced her, and smiled at her. "You've certainly earned a vacation. Where did you plan on going—home?" He tried to sound matter of fact, but his voice might have betrayed him.

She looked at him sharply. "Joe, don't sound so mournful. I'm not deserting you, you know. It's only for a couple of months."

"Sure," he said, and didn't believe it. "But who'll nag me? Who'll make my life a living hell if you go? Who'll keep me out of poker games and side bets and away from that extra drink? How can I get along without you?"

"Nice guy," she said. "Nice guy, I married. Joe, you would miss me, wouldn't you?"

He nodded. "But think how wonderful you'll look to me when you come back. Honey, I want you to go. This first year on the trail is always the roughest. You'll come back with sound nerves, and it'll make things easier."

He knew she wouldn't. He could guess what servants and good living must look like after a season on the trail. He could go there, and work for papa. But she wouldn't be back.

"There's a train, tonight," she said, and suddenly her eyes were wet. "Joe, it's—I want to save what we have. I'm not leaving because—"

"Of course you're not," he said. "Don't overdramatize it, honey. Don't make a wake out of a vacation. I'd take one myself if I didn't think I was going to have a hot summer." All words, none of them related to the truth.

"I'll write every day," she said. "Long letters, too."

"Full of sweet talk?"

"Loaded with it."

He smiled again, and looked at her long and steadily. "And never a word about working for papa?"

"Nary a word," she promised.

He put her on the train at 7:10. He loaded her down with magazines and more candy than a sane adult could consume. He put his hands on her shoulders, and looked deep into those candid eyes and said, "You're coming back."

"That's for sure," she said lightly. "You have a great animal attraction for me." But her eyes weren't light.

He watched the train pull out, and then went back to look up Spoon Halloran. Spoon was in the bar at the Montrose.

"I just put Jean on a train," Joe said. "For home."

Spoon said nothing, studying his drink.

"Just a vacation," Joe went on. "That's what she thinks now. But I'm scared, Spoon. What can I do?"

"Nothing," Spoon said. "It would have



to be her decision. We could get drunk, though."

Which they did.

It was the first time in four years for Joe; it was the last time, he vowed next morning. He had eighteen holes of golf scheduled for the morning, and his nerves were screaming.

He went out in a miserable forty, came back in a creditable thirty-five. The second nine had taken all his concentration, and thirty-five on that nine was nothing to put up a plaque about. But it wasn't bad for a man with the jitters.

He qualified only by virtue of the sixty-seven he'd shot the day before; his one forty-two was adequate by exactly one stroke.

The next day, he shot a sizzling sixty-five for his morning round.

He had lunch with Spoon, and Spoon said, "You looked like your old self this morning, I hear. You're starting to slug them again, I hear."

"Slug?" Joe said. "When did I stop? A drive and a putt, that was always my game."

"Until you got married," Spoon said. "Until you got careful. Then these sharpshooters started to break you down."

"You've got it wrong," Joe said. "Any boy who decides to play it my way is going to have some wild rounds, here and there. I was just out of the groove, for a while."

"Have it your way," Spoon said. "I'm glad to see you back."

That night's letter from Jean was cheerful, though she missed him, she said. Father was fine and mother the same, and they both wished him well.

They both liked him, Joe knew, and he liked them. Even if they were on opposite sides of the fence regarding golf. He wondered if, by now, the luxury of Jean's current living was winning her back to their side of the fence.

He finished at Bluff Ridge with a

sixty-eight, sixty-five, and a sixty-four that equaled the course record. It was enough for first money. It wasn't one of the big tournaments, but it was the first time in a year Joe had been medalist in *any* tournament.

**S**POON drove up to the Indiana Open with him, splitting Joe's gas and oil bill.

Spoon said, "You and Bulla and Thomson. Only you can putt, too. I've got a hunch on you, Joe. I've got a hunch you're going to have a hot summer."

Joe, himself, had used the same words without believing them. He believed them, now. "And a lonely one," he said.

At Indiana's Gold Crown Country Club, he got another letter from Jean. She'd read about his winning the Bluff Ridge Invitational, and it was good to see his name in the papers for a change. Papa's business had never been better, she went on, but she'd already told him Joe wasn't interested.

He told Spoon, "I'm being nagged by inference, by indirection. It's a new experience."

"You're probably being nagged into accepting a million dollars," Spoon said. "You won't mind if I don't sympathize with you?"

"I'll try to bear up," Joe said. "How about a practice round, ten, twenty, thirty?"

"Just because I think you need the money," Spoon said.

Spoon had a solid, flawless round. Spoon's tee shots were down the middle and his irons crisp and confident. Spoon's putting was deft and without error. Spoon only lost fifty dollars.

"If you keep going the way you're going," Spoon said, "you'll be the one slugger in the game I fear. Most of your type are strictly fish for me."

The Indiana was medal play and he was teamed with Gus Needles and Cary Helm-



stead, two good golfers, not in Joe's class.

Gus was old and his steam was gone, but Gus was murder anywhere from eighty yards in. Cary was young and full of fire. Cary laid one down the middle about two hundred and forty yards, a sweet clean shot.

Joe's was a full thirty-five yards beyond that. Joe's was a prime example of wrists and rhythm, with the faint hooking tail on the end that marked the slugger.

Gus hit an easy, straight ball with overspin, about two-ten.

Cary was frowning as they went down the fairway. Cary, probably, was still too young to know every man should stick to his own game.

Cary put a seven iron fifteen feet from the pin. Joe's wedge tore up green turf seven feet in front of the pin and died in the birdie circle.

Gus had used a four, and the ball had too much run, rolling to the far end of the green, and off about a foot from its edge.

Gus was out; Gus gave it some study, inspecting the nap, the slope, the cleanliness of the cup's rim. Caution in Gus, and maybe a little ham, too. But a great guy, and they waited tolerantly.

Gus went back and chipped a running, rolling ball that was good all the way. As it rattled into the cup, the small gallery applauded heartily. It was one of those miracles you expected from Gus.

Now Cary was away, and Cary looked nervous. This was medal play and the two with him only a small part of the field. But he wanted to look good. At his age, it was important to look good.

He gave the putt some thought, then stabbed at it like Delbert Dub on a Sunday round.

It was woefully short, and badly off line. He was far enough from the cup to make his second one not too easy. He looked at Joe, and down at the green. It was clear he figured it inside Joe's.

Joe said, "I think you're still out, Cary."

It was a remark that was meant well, but as soon as he made it, Joe realized it might not have been the most tactful remark for the moment.

Cary flushed, and his jaw line stiffened, and he walked over to the ball quickly. It was one of those putts that could go either way, and it chose to walk the edge. With overspin, it would have dropped, but it had been hit carelessly.

In the gallery someone sighed audibly, and Joe looked over to see a very pretty girl in green linen standing at the green's edge. She looked like she'd just seen the end of the world.

Joe addressed his ball carefully, stroked through cleanly. The ball hit the back of the cup and dropped with a rattle, for the bird.

He'd maintained his honors, and confidence was strong in him as they walked to the second tee.

He took a full backswing, and his wrists came in at the precisely proper moment for maximum impact. It was a low ball, climbing gradually, tailing faintly at the end of its flight and rolling, rolling, rolling. . . .

The gallery applause was spirited, and Gus shook his head. "You're back in form, Joe," he said. "You're a bad influence on us." Gus' drive was straight, with a good roll.

When young Cary stepped up to address his ball, his face was stormy. Joe could almost feel his tension. He knew that the combination of his drives and Gus' putt-saving chip shot had registered on the lad. Cary Helmstead, who should have known better, was out to show this small gallery that he was a match for any of them.

His backswing was too fast and too full, and he came into the ball with his wrists loose and uncocking early. It was a smothered hook, and went kicking into the trees at the left.

There was no sigh from the girl, this



time, but Joe caught a glimpse of her face, and it was white and distraught.

A word here, Joe thought, wouldn't be amiss. A word to Cary about playing his own game, which must have been sound to bring him this far on the trail. But it was a word that might be misunderstood and Joe didn't voice it, as they left the tee.

Gus did. Gus said to Cary, "Every man to his own poison, lad. Slow up and play *your* game."

Cary didn't indicate by a nod or a glance that he'd heard Gus. His caddie was already cutting into the woods; he followed.

Gus shrugged.

Joe said, "I hope he didn't misunderstand me, back there on the green."

"He's got a lot to learn," Gus said, "and I guess only the hard way is good enough."

CARY'S attempted recovery was a dribbler, bouncing off the base of a tree and landing on the edge of the fairway. His third shot was good, soaring for the pin all the way. It dropped in front of the green and rolled for the cup, stopping about three feet short.

Gus laid his in there, this time, and Joe's was almost as good.

Joe's putt walked up to the hole, peeked in, and decided to stay out. It was a par. Gus sent his home as though it were on a rail.

Cary's was stabbed again, a jerky putt that dropped from the side, luckily.

Gus had the honors, next hole, and it was a par three. Gus put his tee shot eight feet from the pin. He was having one hot round for a man almost fifty years old.

Joe's was a beauty, taking turf and then hopping backward toward the pin.

Cary's was about even with Joe's; Cary was settling down, Joe decided.

When Cary rammed home his putt for the bird, Joe was certain of it. There'd been no jerk or stab, this time.

But on the next tee, his smothered hook again sent him into the rough, and Gus shook his head.

Gus said quietly to Joe, "He's trying to match your drives. I'm not, and I've got a stroke on you, right now."

"I'd like to say something," Joe told Gus, "but it might sound like putting the heat on. He'll snap out of it." Then he looked sharply at Gus. "About putting the heat on—that remark about having a stroke on me, that could be classified as heat, too."

"You know me," Gus said. "Clean and lithe young sportsman. I wouldn't stoop to that stuff."

"Just for that," Joe said, "I'm going to get the stroke back, this hole."

And he did, with a twenty-foot putt that never wavered.

They went on, and Joe got hotter, and Joe's drives were jet-propelled, and Cary went completely to pot. He didn't withdraw; Joe admired him for that. He was out of the running with an initial eighteen of eighty-three strokes, but he didn't withdraw.

At the clubhouse, Joe ate with Spoon and Gus. They were just ordering when Cary came in with the girl who'd sighed, on the first green.

All the tables were occupied, and they stood there looking over the room. Gus was no one to overlook a girl like that. Gus got up, and went over to them.

The girl smiled, but Cary had that stubborn look. The girl said something to him, and he looked even more stubborn. But they came back to the table with Gus.

Spoon and Joe rose, as Gus said, "I guess you lads don't know Cary's wife," and introduced them.

Her name was Mary and she'd lost some of the morning's tenseness, but none of her charm. She said, "Cary's still in a peeve. We'll ignore him."

"You can't blame him for that," Gus said. He had a miserable round." Then



he looked at Cary. "I know it's the wrong time to say it, but I'd forget the gallery was there, if I were you. Play to win, and play your own game."

"Gallery—?" Cary said, and it was honest surprise on his face.

"Let's talk about something else," Mary said. "Let's talk about that lucky chip from the edge of the first green."

"Pure skill," Gus said, and handled the dialogue from then on.

Under the spell of it, even Cary seemed to relax. Joe watched Mary, and saw that Mary was eating very lightly.

When they'd finished, Gus said, "Low man pays the check, of course. That would be—let's see, I guess you're stuck, Joe."

"I'll pay it," Joe agreed, "with Spoon's money." He handed the waiter a twenty.

And as he did, he saw the look of relief come to Mary's face, and to Cary's. No wonder the boy was pressing. . . .

Joe'd been down, financially, often. But never low enough to have a luncheon check give him hysterics.

He made no mistake, the second eighteen, and his touch was still there, and he led by four strokes at the end of thirty-six holes, with one thirty-four.

There was a letter from Jean again, that night. She'd played a round of golf, with the club pro, and won thirty cents. And how was he doing?

Joe wrote that he was currently holding down a four-stroke lead, and he was going to be one of the big-money winners this year, and he was thinking of trading the Olds in on a Cadillac. And he hoped she was as lonely as he was. The rest was sweet talk.

Then he sat in the hotel lobby, reading about the Braves and the Pirates and the Cubs and the Cardinals and the Yanks, and remembering none of it. Remembering only Jean's humor and her smile, and the graceful, beautiful way she smacked a golf ball.

He turned to the financial page and saw

Cody, Inc., was selling at 123. Cody, Inc., was papa.

Before Joe had won the National Inter-collegiate, he'd been taking a business administration course, and before that he'd always made his own way. Cody wouldn't lose any money on Joe. And all Joe would lose would be his soul. This rugged individualism could be carried too far. Especially if it cost him Jean.

A disturbed state of mind, but it didn't seem to affect his golf, next day. He shot a sixty-eight in the morning, and came into the clubhouse to see he was five strokes up on the gang, now. Cary Helmstead, he also saw, had come back with a sixty-nine. Not that it would do him any good, with that eighty-three in there. But Joe was glad to see it.

With a five-stroke lead, some of the heat is off. With eighteen to go, a man can take his time. Joe coasted in with a seventy for a seventy-two hole total of two seventy-two—which was enough for the cup and the check and an offer from Golfguild.

Golfguild made clubs and balls and no mistakes about who was hot and who wasn't. Golfguild gave him the standard offer, including matching any purses he might win in the future. It was plain they thought there were some purses in his future.

Joe told their representative he'd give it some thought and a definite answer in two days. Joe didn't say other manufacturers had given him the same offer, but he looked as though they might have. The Golfguild representative had failed to mention a bonus, and Joe wanted to give him two days to think of it.

It wasn't his fault that Gus happened to remark to the representative that Joe was flooded with offers.

Joe said nothing about it in his letter to Jean, that night. He wasn't going to wave a purse at her to bring her back. Papa could match that, any time. He said he



was lonely, but hitting the ball well, and he loved her more than any reasonable girl had a right to expect. He said Cary Helmstead had a wife who stuck with him through thick and thin, and she was pretty, too.

When the Golfguild agent appeared again, he was talking bonus.

Joe said, "There's a chance I might quit the game, this year. What happens in that case?"

"We'll take that chance," the man said. "No pro who's hitting the ball like you are is likely to quit the trail."

"I'm married," Joe said. "I've got to be thinking about the future."

The June Cup, at Villard Hills, was match play and Joe went into the finals before he was defeated. He was defeated on the thirty-sixth green by a birdie putt that traveled twenty-eight feet. He was defeated by Spoon, who'd had the hottest sequence of rounds in his career.

Joe shook hands with him, there on the thirty-sixth green, and said, "That's your win over me for this summer. Relish it, because it's your last."

"I've got your number," Spoon said. "It's clover, from here in."

**J**ULY then, and through the middle-west, the St. Paul Open and the Brinsmere and Joe was up there, medalist in both. Jean was still writing often, missing very few nights.

Cary Helmstead had settled down, and was finishing in the money, but Joe thought his game could stand a little less caution.

August, and the Northern. The big one, for August, one of the big ones of the year. August, and Jean had left him in April, and Joe's fears were edging closer to the reality, now. Match play, the Northern, and the cream of the field.

*After this, Joe thought, I'll have to choose between golf and Jean, the way it looks.* Her letters were regular but there

was no mention in any of them of her intent to rejoin him. She did say she hoped he could come for a couple weeks of vacation, himself.

That meant another personal appeal by papa, and papa's powers of persuasion were great.

But the Northern, now, the one he'd never come close in. There were too many boys with too much stuff in this one. It was a course laid out for the hitters, a long course, and not too tricky. The pins would be set at the worst possible angle; there wasn't much more they could do to make it sporty. But distance is a killer, and it had the distance.

Joe wrote to Jean. He still hadn't told her about his deal with Golfguild and he didn't now. He did write:

Isn't it about time to make the decision? Is it the trail, or is it Cody, for me? It's your decision, because there's no life for me without you.

Then he went out and had dinner with Cary and his charming wife, plus the unshakable Spoon.

All three of them had qualified; match play would start tomorrow. Spoon was in a jovial mood, Cary rather silent.

Spoon said, "This is one of those courses designed for you, Joe. I'll concede right now. This is one of those courses where skill means nothing."

Cary said, "I'll be glad to see you concede, Spoon. You're my first-round opponent."

"I just learned that, a half-hour ago," Spoon admitted. "You'd better be hot."

"Cool, you mean," Cary said. "I've decided to be cool—and collect."

"For a gag that old," Spoon answered, "you are fined one double Scotch. I'll take it now."

Cary bought it, and neither he nor Mary winced. And Mary had a new dress. These things went through Joe's mind, and left no impression beyond the obvious.

He went to bed early that night but couldn't sleep for a long time. And when



he did sleep, he dreamed of Jean. He dreamed he had a bloody brawl with Papa. He dreamed he set fire to the Cody factory.

He was all right, next morning. He'd drawn Harry Dalvesto, and there were too many yards in this course for Harry's game. Joe won, four and three, without ever being pressed.

He learned, at lunch, that Cary had taken Spoon. Which was all right with Joe, though Spoon had been his friend for a long time. But Spoon needed the money about as much as Joe needed another head. And Spoon had more cups, already, than the New York museum could hold.

Then he ran into another long-ball hitter, in his second round, and he forgot about other people's troubles. The gent's name was Ned Hammer and he was a youngster who'd come out of Texas this year to build up a name for himself.

He matched Joe, drive for drive. His irons were sharp and clean, his putting sound. He was a cold potato, and not likely to crack, despite his youth.

They went on, in that August sun, halving hole after hole, matching stroke for stroke like a pair of golfing robots. It was the kind of match that looks tame, but is murder for the contestant. It was slugging golf, and the first error could mean the match. It took the most rigid kind of concentration and chrome-plated nerves.

Spoon was in the gallery, and he looked as tense as Joe felt. This Hammer might not win another round all year, but every youngster has his miracle rounds, and he was having one against Joe. That was the heart-breaking factor in match play; one hot round could eliminate an otherwise superior golfer.

On the fourteenth green, Hammer sunk a twenty-foot birdie putt, to go one up. Joe got it back on the par three sixteenth when his four-iron tee shot stopped a foot from the pin. They halved the seventeenth, with birds.

Joe had the honors, and Joe was going

to make or break, on this one. The sun was too hot for extra holes; the trail had been too rough to extend it, now. He put everything he had into his tee shot, and knew if he was a split-second off in his timing, or a fraction of an inch off at impact, this ball could do any of the horrible things a poorly hit ball can do.

It went out straight, climbing very little. It hooked a shade before falling, and once on the ground seemed to roll forever. This was the longest hole on the course, and this was a long course. But Joe had an iron shot for his second. With any kind of an iron shot, Joe was going to be putting for the eagle.

Young Hammer must have known that as he addressed his ball. He had no way of knowing that was the longest ball Joe had ever hit. He should have known it was suicide to try to match it.

Try, though, he did. And when the hook came, it was horrible, a wild, soaring ball that disappeared into the jungle on the left.

Spoon smiled, and shook his head. Joe pretended not to notice.

Hammer's recovery shot was no more than that, a lofted ball that made the fairway, and no more. Joe was still inside of him, and Joe had a stroke on him.

Hammer put a fairway wood about two feet off the green, and was lying three.

Joe put a three iron twelve feet from the pin; Hammer approached to within eight inches, trying for the stymie, and missing it.

Joe took a reasonable amount of time with his putt, and sent it cleanly home for the eagle.

Spoon walked to the clubhouse with him. "Mr. Golf," Spoon said. "You're a walking hazard, you know that? The kid was foolish, trying to match that drive."

Joe nodded absently. He was thinking of something else. He was thinking of Jean, and it was mixed up with Cary and that sigh of Mary's, back at Gold Crown,



in Indiana, and he began to get a picture. But it wasn't clear, and maybe it wasn't anything but wishful thinking.

"Don't look so smug," Spoon said. "Lot of great golfers here."

"Golf?" Joe said. "Who's thinking about golf?"

Spoon looked at him sharply.

"I was thinking of Jean," Joe explained. "She's a honey."

"She'd be a bad one to lose," Spoon agreed. "Why don't you go to work for Papa, and be happy?"

"I can't do both," Joe said. "This is for me, Spoon."

"It must be a disease, and contagious," Spoon said. "I can't think of a better or worse way to make a living."

THERE was no letter from Jean, that night, but the mail might have fallen behind him; the last two letters had been forwarded from Michigan, where he'd played last.

Nobody in the next two rounds gave him the trouble Hammer had. Joe went into the finals on Saturday, and Cary Helmstead was his opponent. There was no letter from Jean Friday night, and Joe put in a long distance call.

He talked to papa; Jean wasn't there.

"She's gone to see you win, tomorrow," papa said. "She wanted to surprise you, but I don't think she'll make it. The flight was canceled at the last minute, and she's taking a train."

Joe sighed in relief.

"She's carrying an offer from me," papa went on. "Don't lose your temper until you hear it, Joe. It's not charity, by a long shot. I can use you, and it's the kind of offer you should give a lot of thought."

"I will," Joe promised. "I don't want you to think I'm being stubborn, but a man isn't happy unless he's in a trade he likes. I like this one, but I'm not stupid enough to overlook any bets."

Then he went to bed and dreamed of winning the Northern. Only when he stood there, collecting his check and the cup, the donor turned out to be papa, and the check was on Cody, Inc.

Cary looked tense on the first tee, next day. Cary had the honors. He laid a straight ball down the middle about two and a quarter, and then Joe stepped up and hit his.

It wasn't the longest ball he'd hit in this meet, but it was forty yards beyond Cary's, and long enough to bring a murmur from the gallery.

Cary's second was a four wood, and it rolled up the apron of the green, and on, a sweet shot. Cary had learned, since Crown Point.

Joe put a five iron out and up, and when it hit, it stuck, and even from where they stood, it was clear he was well inside Cary.

Cary played it the English way, not going for it, but playing the lag, playing it safe. The ball died inches from the cup.

Joe went out for his. Maybe the memory of Mary's face was still with him, or maybe he'd figured the nap wrong. Whatever it was, the ball went past on the left edge and died three feet away.

He sank it, for the half.

They halved the next four, after that. Cary's second shot was always longer than Joe's, but Joe wasn't getting that birdie putt. Cary was regulation, all the way.

Regulation golf shouldn't be enough for this league. Regulation golf was for county tournaments, for club tournaments, and something to be smashed at this level.

But that's what Cary was playing, and he was holding his own.

They were all even for the outgoing nine. They were all even to the fourteenth, and here for the first time, Cary was inside him in two. Cary was on, about nine feet from the pin. Joe was off about two feet, above the pin and to the left.

Some side hill, mostly downhill, and it was a chip to spend some time on. Joe



didn't give it any more than it warranted, but he gave it all of that.

When he hit it, he felt right. He had one of those premonitions that it was going to be good all the way. Cary seemed to wince, as it dropped, and Joe thought he heard a sigh in the gallery's applause.

Cary's was below the pin. With an uphill putt, there was no reason to baby it; it was the kind of putt to go after.

He was eight inches short—and Joe was one up.

Joe was still one up at the end of the eighteen.

Caution had beaten Cary, Joe knew. A man can be too careful in this game. Most aren't careful enough, but a man can be too careful.

It was hot when they came off the eighteenth green. It was hotter when they went out for the afternoon eighteen. Joe thought about Jean, and about the swimming pool behind Papa's mansion.

Joe stepped up and hit a drive that should break Cary's heart. It went out with a scream and refused to die. It went on and on and on, while the gallery stood silent, refusing to believe their eyes.

Cary smiled, but it was the kind of smile you give a man when he's just beaten you, seven and six. Cary's drive was long enough to look good, if it had been out there alone. Measured by Joe's it was pitiful.

There were still eighteen holes to finish, but Cary was beaten, right there. It was Joe's hole, and now he was two up, and this wasn't a day anybody could get those back from Joe.

Cary lost on the sixteenth green, three and two, though Joe had loafed for the last five holes. Joe shook his hand, and Cary said, "Nobody could beat you, today. I don't mind losing this one, even if Mary does."

"My wife should be here tonight," Joe said. "I want you two to meet her."

"It's a date," Cary said, and went over

to join Mary. Mary looked relieved. It was over, now, and she wasn't a poor loser.

Joe turned, and there was Jean. Looking tanned, looking happy, looking wonderful.

"You didn't even see me," she said. "I was hiding in the gallery. Honey, you were magnificent."

"I can't kiss you here," he said.

"Hardly anybody is looking any more," she said. "They're all going back to the clubhouse. Oh, Joe—"

Her perfume was the same, her lips as soft.

He held her away, and said, "Bribing me, huh? Bringing an offer from papa, I'll bet."

She shook her head. "He didn't make any, that I remember."

He and Jean walked hand in hand, though Joe had to release the hand to take the cup, and the check. He had to pose with Cary, for the newspaper photographers, but Jean waited through it all, proud of him, and showing it.

Then they were alone, and she said, "Slugger, you're back to normal?"

"That's for sure," he said, and looked at her, wondering if his hunch... Then, "I talked to your dad, on the phone last night. He said you had an offer of his to give me."

"We won't even talk about it," she said. "This is for you, and for me. That's why I left, Joe—I wanted you back where you belonged. You forget I'm a golfer, too. Caution was killing you, Joe. Knowing I was there, and needed taking care of. Knowing a long putt could cost you money, or a pulled hook. You see what—"

"I know," he said. "I was beginning to see it, but I didn't think anybody—well, I couldn't believe a woman— What the hell am I saying?"

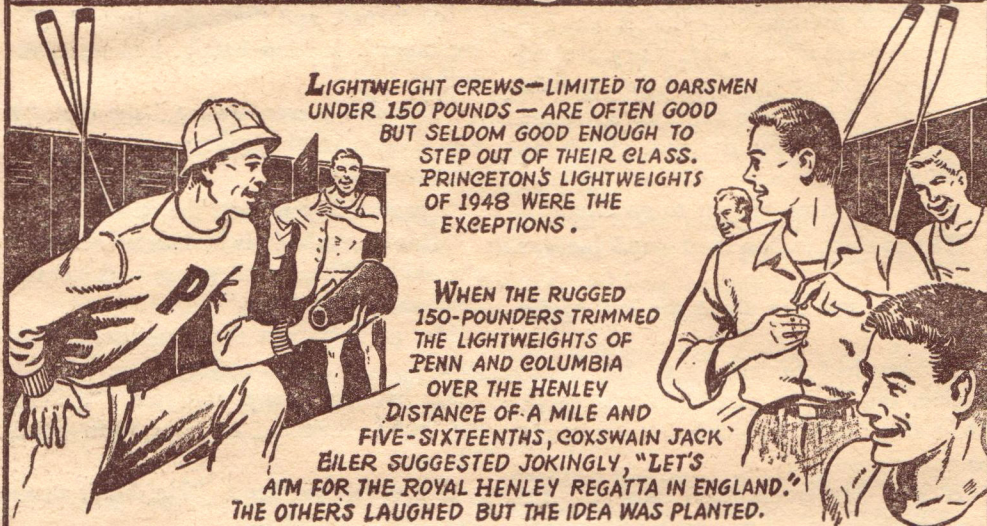
"It doesn't matter, Slugger," she said. "It's no time to talk, anyway, is it?"

And Joe agreed it wasn't.



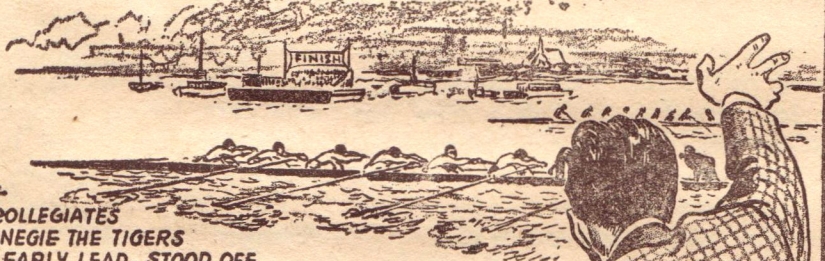
# MIGHTY MEN of SPORT

Ben Nelson  
STOKIE ALLEN



**LIGHTWEIGHT CREWS—LIMITED TO OARSMEN UNDER 150 POUNDS—ARE OFTEN GOOD BUT SELDOM GOOD ENOUGH TO STEP OUT OF THEIR CLASS. PRINCETON'S LIGHTWEIGHTS OF 1948 WERE THE EXCEPTIONS.**

**WHEN THE RUGGED 150-POUNDERS TRIMMED THE LIGHTWEIGHTS OF PENN AND COLUMBIA OVER THE HENLEY DISTANCE OF A MILE AND FIVE-SIXTEENTHS, COXSWAIN JACK EILER SUGGESTED JOKINGLY, "LET'S AIM FOR THE ROYAL HENLEY REGATTA IN ENGLAND." THE OTHERS LAUGHED BUT THE IDEA WAS PLANTED.**



**IN THE LIGHT-WEIGHT INTERCOLLEGIATES ON LAKE CARNEGIE THE TIGERS SWEEPED TO AN EARLY LEAD, STOOD OFF A HARVARD CHALLENGE AND WENT ON TO WIN BY A LENGTH OVER A SPRINTING PENN EIGHT.**



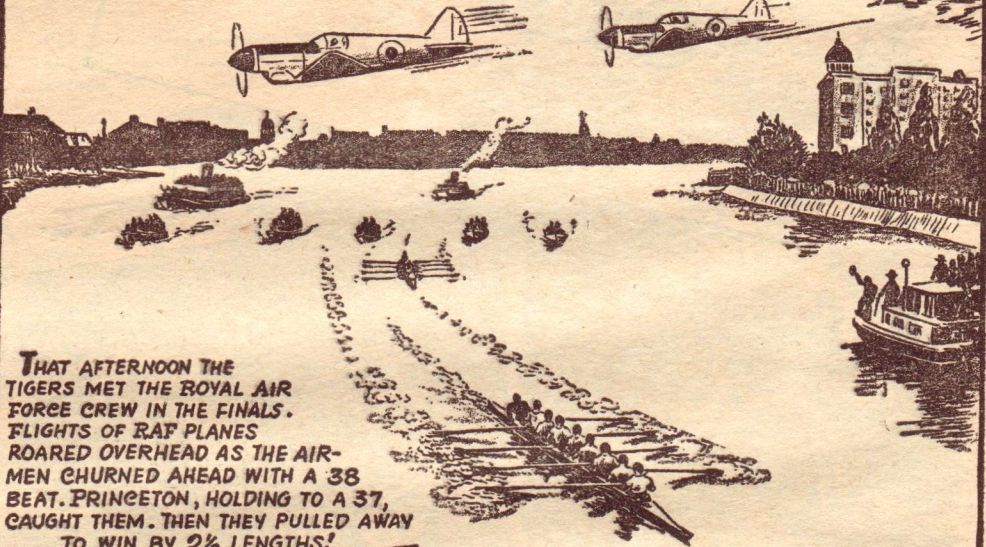
**RAISING FUNDS FROM THEIR FAMILIES AND INTERESTED ALUMNI, THE MIGHTY MIDGETS SUBMITTED THEIR ENTRY FOR THE THAMES CHALLENGE CUP, THE HENLEY'S FAMED 80-YEAR-OLD SCHOOLBOY ROWING CLASSIC.**

**THEY WON THEIR FIRST HEAT OVER THE HISTORIC COURSE AT HENLEY-ON-THAMES FROM THE TRINITY BOAT CLUB OF CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY. NEXT DAY, STROKING BEAUTIFULLY, THEY ROWED THE LINCOLN COLLEGE CREW INTO THE GROUND IN 7:03. EMANUEL COLLEGE TOOK THEIR WASH IN THE THIRD HEAT.**





KENT SCHOOL, THREE TIME WINNER  
AND DEFENDING CHAMPION, BROKE WELL BUT  
THE CONNECTICUT SCHOOLBOYS' SHORT CHOPPY  
STYLE PROVED NO MATCH FOR THE MIGHTY MITES'  
LONG POWERFUL STROKE AGAINST A STRONG WIND.



THAT AFTERNOON THE  
TIGERS MET THE ROYAL AIR  
FORCE CREW IN THE FINALS.  
FLIGHTS OF RAF PLANES  
ROARED OVERHEAD AS THE AIR-  
MEN CHURNED AHEAD WITH A 38  
BEAT. PRINCETON, HOLDING TO A 37,  
CAUGHT THEM. THEN THEY PULLED AWAY  
TO WIN BY 2½ LENGTHS!

#### NASSAU'S MIGHTY MITES

Bow	ANDREW MORGAN
No.2	CARLETON McLAIN
No.3	JIM HITZROT
No.4	BOUDINOT ATTERBURY
No.5	CHARLES COLE
No.6	MICHAEL HUBER
No.7	ROBERT READ
Stroke	JOHN STONE
COX	JACK EILER



WHAT HAD BEGUN AS A JOKE  
ENDED AS A TRIUMPH FOR 8 GOOD  
LITTLE MEN OVER 40 GOOD BIG  
MEN. JUBILANT, THE TIGERS  
TOSSED THEIR COXSWAIN  
INTO THE THAMES.





# **FOUR-FOR-FOUR GUY**



*"We'll make a deal  
with you, cellar boss.  
We'll give you the dirt  
off our sacks—we'll give  
you what's left of nine guys'  
dreams of a flag—if you'll  
get the hell outta baseball  
—all the hell your game has put  
in it!"*



**D**OC WALKED into his little office next to the locker room and came face to face with Thomas J. Corning, who was seated at Doc's desk. It was all right if Corning wanted to sit at Doc's desk, since he was the new owner and president of the Reds; but it was strange that he should be sitting there

now. The president of a club seldom visited before a game, and this was the first time since Corning had purchased the Reds, two weeks before, that he had shown his nose around the clubhouse.

Corning was very affable. He shook hands with Doc and smiled pleasantly. He fiddled with some papers he had on Doc's

"Here's broken-wing Jones," Doc howled. "Couldn't hit a basketball with a tennis racket!"



desk and talked about the weather. Finally his face took on a serious look.

"My duty this afternoon is not a pleasant one, Casper," Corning said. "However, it is one that the stockholders feel necessary to the welfare of the Reds."

"What's that?" Doc asked, as if he didn't know.

"We thought it only fair to tell you frankly that we won't be renewing your contract as manager for next season."

"Oh," Doc said. He didn't know exactly what to say next. It wasn't fair, of course, but it was baseball.

"We feel that in line with a general policy of getting fresh talent and overhauling the Reds, we should have a new manager," Corning said.

"I suppose so," Doc agreed.



"We are releasing a statement to the press and radio after the game today. Perhaps you'd like to see it." Corning handed a mimeographed sheet to Doc.

Doc slowly read the statement, and his face reddened just as slowly. He could see the sure death of his long career as a major league manager in that statement.

"This business here about a hustling, young manager who can instil spirit and get the most out of his men. I don't like that so well," Doc said.

"That's for the fans, you know," Corning said. "We're rebuilding the Reds, and we want them to get that feeling."

"That's all well and good," Doc said. "I can understand your desire for a change, but you make it sound as though it was all my fault that the Reds were in the cellar three of the five years I managed them."

"Well," and Corning shrugged, "frankly players are players, and while ability counts for something, the way that ability is handled also means something. We're going to get new players, new manager, and new spirit."

"That isn't what this says," Doc said, and he flicked the sheet back on Corning's desk. "You know as well as I do that they wouldn't buy me any players, and when I developed any they sold them. I've got two or three boys on the Reds that ordinarily would have trouble sticking in the Association. My record as a manager was good before I came here."

"It is not our intention to blame you," Corning said. "However, the statement you just read sums up our feeling on the matter and what we wish to say to the public." Corning gave the impression that he found the discussion very distasteful and would just as soon end it.

Doc shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he said. "I'd like to tell the players myself—now."

"You understand there is nothing personal in this," Corning said, and some of

his affability returned. He smiled nicely.

Doc stopped with his hand on the door-knob and thought that over carefully for a few seconds. "Nuts," he said finally. "I figure it's pretty personal, and some day maybe I'll get a chance to cram that statement down your throat."

He made his exit on that line, and got some satisfaction from knowing that he'd wiped the smug cheerfulness off Corning's face.

Doc went to the locker room and surveyed his dressing players. It was a good thing he had Lefty Crosby to pitch today. Crosby was the one pitcher on the team who really belonged in the majors as a starter.

"I have an announcement," Doc said, and the players turned to face him. "The Reds are rebuilding, as you have probably read in the papers. I have just been told that this is my last game as manager. I won't be here next year, and a lot of the rest of you won't be here next year. Wherever we are then, we play against each other and use what we know about each other to win, and once the ball game starts we hate each other's guts. But today, for the last game, I'd like to see us play together and I'd like to win this last one."

There was a heavy silence for a moment. "All right, Doc," Gabby Felt said in, for him, a quiet voice. "We'll win her!"

**K**EARNEY WILLIAMS at short, anxious to get two, booted the ball and the bases were loaded. The handful of fans yelled at him because it was the top of the ninth and it put the lead run at third. Kearney should have been playing class A ball, but he was the best Doc Casper had to fill the position.

Lefty Crosby, on the mound, took his stretch and looked down at the next batter. He was facing a left-handed hitter who crowded the plate, and Doc knew he



should lift Lefty and put in a right-handed pitcher, but he didn't have a right-handed pitcher who would do as well as Lefty.

Lefty whanged the fast ball at the outside corner and missed for a ball. His curved missed, and then a knuckler hit the dirt. Gabby Felt, behind the plate, scooped it up easily and stood up in front of the plate with his arm cocked. The runners scrambled back to their bases. Gabby was one of the few bright spots on Doc's team. Ordinarily Gabby would be up for sale this winter to take care of the red ink—Gabby and Lefty both—but with the new management Doc didn't know what was going to happen.

Lefty put the three-and-nothing pitch over, then missed another fast ball and walked the lead run in. He faced a right-handed batter next, and struck him out to retire the side. The Reds still had the last of the ninth, and Doc beat his hands together insistently. "Come on, let's get that run back!" he yelled.

Lefty came into the dugout. He shook his head. "I always did have trouble with a left-handed batter that crowded the plate," he said mournfully.

Doc didn't say anything. He walked out to the third-base coaching box and kicked some dirt around. Lefty was a good pitcher, he had already won twelve with a last-place club that never had a chance of getting out of the cellar. The other boys were trying hard, but they didn't have it.

Kearney Williams struck out. Gabby tagged a fast ball on the nose and drove it deep into center field. Gabby went to second with a double, and that was the tying run.

Doc talked it up, and the bench came to life a little. "Let's get it for Doc," they yelled. Spud Jones, a fair right fielder who was the team's other hitter, was at the plate. Doc put him on his own and let him hit away. Spud fooled the fans with his home runs, but he was only hitting about .265 this year. He was what

the management had given Doc for a cleanup man.

Spud swung mightily twice, and then walked disgustedly out of the box. "Just hit one," Doc pleaded. "Meet the ball, Spud!" Spud was learning not to try for a homer every pitch and should come into his own during the next season. But he had to be reminded.

Spud took a couple, then met the two-and-two pitch. It was a hit into right, and Gabby scored the tying run. The team woke up and began to shout.

Doc called for Pete Jergens, the utility catcher, to pinch-hit. Pete sometimes hit when a hit was needed, which was more than most of the others did. This time Pete caught a good one and slammed it into deep right for another double. Spud scored and the game was over, with the Reds breaking a nine-game losing streak.

The team was as happy as if they'd just won the deciding game of the World Series. They finally calmed down and one by one solemnly shook Doc's hand.

Doc, now a bachelor in his late years, had no financial problem, but it was tough to be without a job—especially when you loved the work. He didn't know who would hire him as a manager; he didn't even have a decent minor league offer. His team had turned in a miserable five-year record, he had to admit, but he considered it a feat that he had taken them out of the cellar twice in those five years. If he had never taken the job in the first place he would be better off today. But how was a guy supposed to know that?

**D**OC WENT to the major league meetings to see what would develop. He wouldn't have to ask for a job, everyone would know why he was there, and if they wanted him they could talk to him.

Things looked bleak. There were men there who knew that Doc had a deep fund of baseball knowledge, that he had been



one of the game's most successful managers before he went to the Reds; but the sendoff the Reds had given him made him a cold article.

So no one talked to Doc about the three major league manager jobs which were open. He could tell by the way owners ducked him, or hailed him with great affability, that they didn't want to talk business. So Doc sighed and decided that he had a dead year or two ahead of him before things cleared away and he could break back in, perhaps as a coach or scout. He didn't want to go to the minors; once there, it was difficult to get back.

Then Fidgety Joe Weston cornered him. Joe shuffled his feet, rubbed the side of his trousers, twitched his mouth. He was the kind of a nervous, restless man who couldn't sit still. He had worried himself white-haired, managing the Acorns for six years. He had won two pennants and never finished poorer than third.

"How're you doing, Doc?" Joe asked.

"Just depends on how you look at it, Joe," Doc said. "According to some of the boys I'm pretty well off; according to others, I'm in bad shape. The way I figure it, I'm just hanging fire in the middle, waiting to see."

Joe shifted his position nervously. "Kind of a nasty statement they issued," Joe said. "What's the matter there, you cross them or something?"

"No," Doc said. "New management trying to make a splash with the fans."

Joe grunted, twisted and shuffled. "Be interested in a coach's job?" he asked.

Doc looked up sharply. As far as he knew, the Acorns hadn't dropped any coaches. "Might be," he said cautiously. "What's the job?"

"I have to get off that base line," Joe said. "My health's bad. Ulcers, heart, everything. Standing out there in the sun all nervous is too much for me. They're hiring me another coach to take

off some of the work, let me rest."

"Sounds pretty good," Doc said.

"Here's the deal," Joe told him. "Most guys who know baseball could stand out there on third and swing the flag, but every now and then there comes the close play. I want someone who can think it out and know when to make the gamble for home, and when to hold up. Over the season it'll mean five, six ball games, and the way the pennant's been going the last few seasons, that could be it."

"I've been at third for a good many years," Doc said.

"I know," Joe said. "Never saw you pull one, either. The job's yours, if you want it."

There were other things Joe didn't mention, but which they both understood. Doc was a well-known jockey with a good, loud voice, and he was quick to spot mistakes the other team might be making.

Doc took the job.

Two days later, when the news hit the sports sheets, it shared headlines with a deal the Reds had made. They'd picked up a major league shortstop and a fifteen-game pitcher for Kearney Williams and Pete Jergens, both of whom they could do without, and a hundred thousand bucks in cold cash. The Reds were rebuilding, all right, and they were spending money. They were going to be one of the tough teams next season.

**S**PRING training came and went, and the Acorns were opening another season, and another bid for the pennant. Along with the Acorns and the Boston entry, the two teams who had battled for the pennant the previous year, the Reds were rated a contender this season. The Reds had strengthened through the middle, and had new strength in their pitching staff. These, added to Gabby Felt, Spud Jones and Lefty Crosby, made the Reds a formidable foe.

The Acorns stepped off in good shape,



and were leading the league up to their first swing west. There they would meet the Reds in a three-game series. Doc was looking forward to that series. He wanted to see just how the Reds looked, and more than anything he wanted to see the Reds drop three straight to the Acorns.

The Reds were feeling high before that first game. With their new players they were arrogant and loud-mouthed. The boys gave Doc a lot of chatter, which he took in silence, and there were more fans in the stands than the team used to draw in three games when Doc was at the helm.

Thomas J. Corning was sitting in a prominent box, and he made it a point to call to Doc. Doc went over to the box. They shook hands, and then Corning said: "You see what I mean about spirit, Casper?"

Doc glanced out at the infield where the Reds were warming up. They were yelling and shouting because that's what they were told to do. "You can't buy spirit," Doc said. "Let's see how they do down the stretch."

Roy Nicely, a curve-ball artist the Reds had picked up during the winter for a reported fifty-five thousand, started for the Reds against Smoky Farr, fast-ball hurler of the Acorns. Doc, at third, clapped his hands together and boomed out in his fog-horn voice as the game got under way.

Sam Zollner, Acorn shortstop, was the first to face Nicely. Nicely's curves broke all over the place, from all angles, and he had three good speeds. Sam finally golfed one off his knees into the center fielder's hands.

Billy Jungen struck out, and Cowboy Phillips lined one into the hands of the Reds' high-priced shortstop, Stubby Gomer. Doc could see this was going to be a rough afternoon for hits.

Smoky Farr was also mean that afternoon, and the spanking new lineup of the Reds couldn't crack him for a hit in the first inning.

In the top of the second Fin McElroy started something by catching a curve coming in and pulling it down the left-field line for a double. Skip Blaney was out on a ground ball to second, and Fin moved to third.

"That's as far as he goes," Stubby Gomer yelled from short. "He'll never get past Doc, Doc'll never send him in. Old 'Play It Safe' Casper!"

Doc's lips compressed, but he said nothing. As luck would have it, Howie Fritz hit a scorching ground ball to short. Stubby stabbed the ball before the batter was away from the plate, and Doc yelled for Fin to slide back to third. Fin came in headfirst, but Stubby didn't make a play there. He held the ball for a fraction to be sure that Fin wasn't going to try for home.

"Send him down, Doc," he taunted quickly, and then he whipped the ball over to first for the out. "You'll never get any runs that way," Stubby chanted. The whole infield started to hoot at Doc.

Pete Wheeler struck out, and the inning ended without the run scoring. "That's one run we don't have to worry about," Stubby said as he tossed his glove to the outfield grass. Doc got queer looks in his own dugout as he sat down. He knew, however, that Stubby would have had Fin by a country mile if he'd sent Fin down.

The struggle continued. Smoky Farr was tight and stingy, but so was Roy Nicely. In the third Katz, Farr and Zollner went down in order. In the fourth Billy Jungen struck out, Phillips singled, Fin flied out, and Skip Blaney fouled out when Gabby Felt made a nice run and catch.

In the bottom of the fourth Farr gave two straight singles, and Joe Weston paced the dugout nervously, back and forth, as he chewed his fingernails. He gave the sign for the bullpen to warm up. Farr pulled himself together and got out



of the inning without a run scoring.

The battle continued 0-0. The pitchers weren't giving hits, and the two teams were playing air-tight baseball. The big crowd began to yell on every pitched ball as the game went on through the sixth and seventh. It was evident that one run could decide the ball game.

The Reds infield continued to ride Doc when he was at third, but Doc let it pass. He kept booming down to the plate and beating his hands together. He wanted to win this game, then he could talk.

**S**MOKY FARR led off for the Acorns in the top of the ninth. Roy Nicely struck him out with a ball that broke it at his bat handle. Then Sam Zollner dropped a Texas Leaguer over the shortstop's head, and there was a man on first with one out.

Billy Jungen tried to bunt Sam down to second, but the snappy Reds infield cut Sam off and put Billy on first with a fielder's choice.

"How you like the spirit, Doc?" Stubby chanted from short.

Doc said nothing, but passed on the hit and run sign to Cowboy Phillips. Joe evidently felt that Nicely would put the first one in. Billy started with the pitch, and Phillips caught the ball on the nose. He banged a line single deep into right, and Phillips rounded second and came pounding down to third.

Spud Jones in right covered the ball swiftly and wheeled with his arm cocked as Jungen came thundering into third. Everybody in the park thought Doc would hold Phillips there, but Doc had sat in the Reds dugout for too many years wishing that Spud had an arm, so he waved Jungen around third. The fans screamed as they saw what was happening.

Spud threw to the Reds' second baseman, Connie O'Reilly. The ball had a big, slow arch to it. Connie slammed it home on a clothesline, Jungen hit the dirt as

Felt turned to put the ball on him, and the umpire's arms spread flat. Jungen was safe and the Acorns led, 1-0. Phillips had gone to second on the throw.

Fin McElroy banged a long fly into center, but it was too high and the center fielder was able to get under it for the third out. So the bottom of the ninth opened with the Acorns hanging to a 1-0 lead.

Doc stood on the dugout lip and hooted at the Reds' batters as they came to the plate. His big voice rolled over the plate and thundered into the plush box occupied by Thomas J. Corning. "All right, you rejuvenated last-place hoboes, here's where spirit counts. Where's that new fire, that new zip? Yah-hoo!"

Gabby Felt popped up.

"Here's broken-wing Jones," Doc howled as Spud came up. "Couldn't hit a basketball with a tennis racket!"

Spud struck out, angrily trying to knock down the center-field wall.

When Stubby Gomer stepped to the plate, Doc cut loose. "Here's the spirit, himself. Let's see some of that winning baseball, Gomer. Yah-hooo!"

Gomer struck out ignominiously, and Doc let loose one final roar. "Same old Reds," he shouted. "One run, they're all done!"

The angry Reds were swinging from their heels the next day after a caustic note from the front office, and Corning was looking grim in his box. Jack Jameson, for the Acorns, couldn't get his stuff working. The Reds banged away to a 5-0 lead, and fattened up on relief pitchers. They won the game, 8-2, with Lefty Crosby coasting in.

Ziggy Elder started for the Acorns on the third and final day of the series. Georgie Rogers, a lanky fast-ball pitcher, started for the Reds.

The Reds opened the game as if they were going to take up where they had left off the day before. They banged out three



straight hits for a run. Then Sam Zollner gobbled up a hard-hit ground ball and made a sensational throw to start a double play. Ziggy settled down and struck out the next batter.

In the top of the second the Acorns got the run back. Fin doubled and Skip Blaney singled him home. The rejuvenated Reds then turned in a double play to wipe out the rally.

Ziggy was tough on the lower end of the Reds' batting order in the second, and the Acorns went into the top of the third with another tie on their hands.

Jojo Katz, a speedster and a terrific third baseman who was a weak hitter, kept jumping around in the box until he worked a walk from Rogers. Doc had noticed that Rogers turned his toe just a little toward the plate when he was going to pitch, kept it out a little more when he was going to try for the man at first. Doc called time and walked across the infield to Jojo, who came into meet him. The Reds' infield hooted and jeered at Doc, but they were worried.

"When I clap my hands together, you go down," Doc said.

"Okay," Jojo said.

Rogers took his stance, and Doc could see that he was going to pitch, but he didn't give Jojo the sign. Sure enough, Gabby had called for a pitchout and would probably have nailed Jojo. Rogers took his stance again, and this time Doc, seeing that Rogers wasn't in position to throw to first, beat his palms together. "Let's have a hit, Ziggy."

Jojo took off with the start of Rogers' motion, and the ball was inside to Ziggy. Gabby grabbed it and banded a perfect throw to second, but Jojo beat it in with a nice slide.

Then Doc put the bunt sign on, which he had shaken off from Joe before, and Ziggy bunted Jojo to third.

Doc, knowing that Sam Zollner was a good bunter, put the squeeze play on.

Jojo raced for the plate, Sam bunted, and by the time they could get the ball, Jojo slid across. They nailed Sam at first, but the run had scored.

"That's the spirit," Doc shouted at the Red's infield. "Play it safe, never mind the man at home, get the one at first."

The Reds were fighting mad. They got the run back in the fifth. In the sixth they chipped across another run and went ahead, 3-2. Rogers was regularly mowing down the Acorn batters, and things looked rough.

Ziggy held the Reds in the seventh and eighth, but going into the top of the ninth the Reds were still hanging to that one run lead. Cowboy Phillips led off for the Acorns in the top of the ninth.

"Come on, Cowboy, get a hit," Doc told him in the dugout before he went to third. "Start something."

Phillips picked a good two-and-one ball, and beat it through the box for a single.

Joe gave Fin the bunt sign. Stopper Farley, the Reds' third baseman and a boy that Doc had brought up and taught big-league baseball, crept in on Fin, but Doc could see he didn't really believe that Fin, the slugger of the team, would bunt.

Fin dropped his bunt nicely down the third-base line and dug for first. Stopper rushed the ball.

"Let it roll foul! Let it roll foul!" Doc boomed from third into Stopper's ear. "Play it smart, let it roll foul!" he shouted.

Stopper, accustomed to taking orders from Doc, hesitated a fraction of a second and let the ball roll. He saw it didn't stand a chance of going foul, realized he had been duped, and hastily stabbed at it. The ball squirted away a foot, and by the time he picked it up it was too late to make a play at either base.

Skip Blaney sliced a ground ball to O'Reilly, and O'Reilly kicked it all the way back to the mound before he could pick it up. The bases were loaded and



the spirited Reds were rapidly falling apart.

Doc beat his hands together. "That's the way I taught 'em to play," he chortled. "If you don't believe me, read the papers. You'll find it in the index under 'New spirit'!"

Rogers was rattled. Howie Fritz banged a ball off the wall in right and two runs scored. Then Pete Wheeler cleaned the bases with a home run. Rogers, angry, burned them down the middle, and even Jojo Katz got a hit. Rogers was taken out, but the damage was done and the Acorns took the series, two to one.

## 2

### Win-Or-Else Guy

IT WAS a dog-eat-dog pennant race, and every time the Reds and Acorns met, it was fought for blood. Every run, every game might mean the difference between winning or losing the pennant. Joe Weston began to fall apart under the strain. Twice in mid-summer he missed a game because his ulcers kicked up, and both times he told Doc to run the team.

It was a very simple job for one game. The starters were all set, the lineups remained the same, and it was merely a case of exercising judgment if changes were needed on the mound or in a pinch-hitting role.

Therefore it was no surprise to Doc when, toward the end of August, with the Acorns still battling it out against Boston and the Reds, Joe didn't show up for a game. Doc took over as usual, against Chicago, and the Acorns slammed their way to a 7-3 win. It was a surprise, however, when Doc trotted into the clubhouse after the game and found Elliott T. Wilson, president of the club, and Buster Peterson, its general manager, waiting for him. They asked him into Joe's room, and

there they gave him the stupendous news.

"Joe's out for the season," Peterson said.

"The doctor's advising him to quit baseball for good," Wilson added.

"What happened?" Doc asked.

"Ulcers," Peterson said. "They operated this morning. He's in bad shape."

"That's tough," Doc said. "He was a good manager."

"Now we have to replace him," Peterson said.

Doc looked closely at the two of them, but he didn't say anything. They wanted to brush him off politely, embarrassed because Joe had let him run the team whenever Joe was absent.

"Here's the situation," Wilson said. "We don't want to hire a permanent manager this season for a number of reasons. In the first place, the team might be upset by a new man suddenly taking over, and the race is hot. In the third place, we don't want to be rushed in our choice."

"So?" Doc asked.

"So we were wondering what you thought about finishing out the season," Peterson said.

"As manager?" Doc asked.

"As manager," Wilson said. "We'll give you a lift in salary, of course. Joe seems to think a lot of you, and you're the only man in the staff right now who's had major-league managing experience. This is no time to be trying someone new."

"Then what happens after the season's over?" Doc asked.

They both squirmed. "Well," Wilson said, "there's a pennant hanging in the balance. We feel that if we don't win that pennant, the papers and fans are going to scream for a winning manager."

"Meaning that I'm not?" Doc challenged, and his jaw thrust out belligerently.

"Not at all," Peterson said hastily. "We like you as a manager, that's why



we're giving you this chance. If you win the pennant, you can have the job permanently for next year. If you don't—well, you can see how it would be."

It was that damning statement the Reds had put out, again. Well, here was his chance to redeem himself. But if he didn't do it this time, two failures in a row would leave him way out on a limb. The management and the public wanted a pennant. If Doc gave it to them, he'd be a hero. If he didn't, he was through forever as a manager.

"Well, what do you say?" Wilson asked anxiously.

They wanted him to take it. They thought he was as good a manager as they could get, and he was in a position where they could use him as a goat if they failed to win the bunting.

Doc's jaw thrust a little farther forward. "All right, I'll do it. But I want it understood that if I win the flag for you, I'm your manager."

"That's a deal," Wilson said, and he put out his hand. Doc shook with both of them, and then they hurried away to release the news to the press. Doc sat in the office that would now be his, and for a long time, until the shadows were so deep he had to turn on the light, he thought the thing out. It came back to a very simple statement of fact. He either did it, or he was done.

He read the morning papers with a great deal of interest. They told his record, and that he had been let go by the Reds' management. One paper even printed the statement the Reds had released at that time.

Doc knew that if the Acorns dropped the pennant, or looked as though they were making mistakes under Doc's leadership, he would be torn apart and fed to the masses. The papers were giving him a chance to show, but they were poised overhead like vultures waiting for a dying mule to breathe its last.

WHEN Doc moved into Joe's room, several team members came to congratulate him on his promotion. Doc noticed that they seemed uncomfortable, and it occurred to him with a shock that they, too, were reserving opinion. His biggest job was going to be to convince his own team!

Smoky Farr pitched that day, and he was never better. He turned in a two-hit shut-out, and the Acorns won, 3-0. Boston lost, and the Reds won, so all three were tied for first place.

The Acorns hit a hot streak. Doc didn't know what it was, fight, luck or skill, but the Acorns turned hot. They won seven straight games, with the starting pitcher going the route in six of the seven. Doc held down the third-base coach's box when they were batting, and traveled the path Joe had worn in the dugout when they were fielding. His team was winning, but the acid test was yet to come.

In the fifth game of that string they were behind 4-3 going into the ninth, and they were in first place by one game over both Boston and the Reds.

The Boston score had been posted, and they had won. As the bottom of the ninth opened, the scoreboard posted a six-run third inning for the Reds, who were playing in the west.

"All right," Doc said, "we win this game or we drop back into a tie. Come on, let's go. Howie, get on, understand?"

"Okay," Howie grunted. He picked up his big bat and strolled to the plate. He laced the first pitch into center for a hit.

"Now we're rolling," Doc said as he came down the line. "Come on, Pete."

Pete Wheeler, centerfielder and veteran of the team, looked uncertain. "You want me to hit away?" he asked.

"That's right," Doc said. "Let's go."

Pete still hesitated. "Something you want to say?" Doc asked.

"What about a bunt?" Pete asked sullenly. "That's the tying run on first."



Doc held his temper. Pete was slow now, and if his bunt wasn't perfect it would turn into a double play. In addition, the pinch-hitting strength was limited, and Doc figured Pete had as good a chance for a hit as anybody coming up. He was playing the best percentages as he saw them.

"You're the winning run," Doc said quietly. "It's the way I'm playing it."

Pete went to the plate without another word. He fouled several, worked the count to three and two, and then slashed a wicked line drive into right for a hit.

Doc sighed with relief. It put men on first and third with no one out. They decided to pitch to Jojo Katz, and they played him tight to cut off the run if possible.

Doc had been working with Jojo on shortening his grip a little and punching hits through or over the infield. This was a prime spot. "Shorten up, Jojo," Doc yelled as the little third baseman got into the box.

Jojo shortened his bat and just met a ball. It looped over the second baseman's head and the tying run came in.

"That's the way to go," Doc yelled fiercely. "Yah-hooo!" He pulled Smoky Farr and put in Carey Wright, another veteran outfielder who was kept for utility. "Get a hit, Carey," Doc said grimly.

Carey drove a ball into center field and the game was over. Finishes like that killed any talk about lack of team spirit, but Doc knew there was stirring of mutiny among the players just the same. The team had to keep winning or it would break into the open.

They dropped a game, then put together a string of nine wins just before leaving on their last trip of the year. They were three games in front of both Boston and the Reds to start their trip. They had three games against Boston, then went west for their last invasion of that territory, which ended with a four-game series

against the Reds, and then came back home to finish the season. If they could hold their lead through the western swing, they'd be in a prime position to cop the bunting.

Doc started Smoky Farr against the beantown aggregation, but Smoky was facing a hard-hitting team that had to win to stay in the pennant race. When the last of the ninth rolled around, the score was tied, 2-2. Smoky had given eight hits, but had been tough when it counted.

The Acorns had been unable to get a hit in the top of the ninth, and Boston came in with a chance to end it in the bottom half. Smoky worked carefully on the first batter. He broke a curve across the inside corner for strike one. He missed with a fast ball, and then changed up to get strike two on a slow ball. He missed the corner with a curve, shaving it close with a couple to waste, and then missed with a fast ball. With the three and two count and nobody on, nobody out, Smoky reached back and fogged the next one through. The batter swung and connected solidly. The ball whistled past Smoky's ear and into center for a hit.

The next batter was a sure sacrifice, and he laid down a good bunt. Smoky grabbed it out from under Howie Fritz's nose, saw he couldn't get the man at second, and whipped it to Skip Blaney for one out at first.

The winning run was on second with one out. Smoky worked very carefully. He in and outed, and he shaved them as close as he could. The batter was also being careful, and he fouled off two to make a three and two count. Smoky, having trouble with his fast ball, changed up. The batter went for the change of pace and popped up for the second out.

ONE MORE to go, and the game would go into extra innings. Smoky poured his fast ball in, and the batter cracked that first pitch into



right field. The runner on second sped to third, rounded, and dug for home.

Fin McElroy, in right, made a great play. He charged the ball, trapped it on the short bounce and threw on the line to home while running at top speed. The ball came in on a clothesline, right to Howie Fritz. The runner saw he would be out at home, put on the brakes, and dug back for third. Howie made a quick throw to Jojo, but the runner slid under the tag and was safe.

The play put men on first and third, two out, and brought up the most consistent hitter on the Boston club. He was followed by another good hitter. Doc walked out to the mound.

"How do you feel?" Doc asked Smoky.

"I'm all right," Smoky said. "The fast ball ain't what she usually is, but I'm all right."

Doc looked at Howie, and Howie nodded his head. Doc had right-and left-handed pitchers both warm in the bullpen, but he had a lot of confidence in Smoky, and he decided to ride with the veteran hurler.

"All right," he said, "go ahead and pitch."

"Want I should walk this man?" Smoky asked.

"Why?" Doc asked. "You have another good hitter behind him, a left-hander, and there are two out anyway."

Smoky kicked dirt on the mound and Howie stalked back to his post behind the plate. Doc could see they had automatically disagreed with him. He compressed his lips and went back to the dug-out.

Smoky didn't give the batter an intentional walk, but he wasn't making anything good. The batter fouled off one, and then walked after a three and one count. The bases were loaded, and Doc realized that Smoky had come as close to disobeying the order as he could without actually doing it.

Doc made another trip to the mound. "Now you're up against a left-hander," Doc said. Smoky didn't answer. Doc looked at the bullpen and debated pulling Smoky. He decided Smoky was better than anything he had in the bullpen, so Doc subdued his desire for personal satisfaction. "Keep it inside," he warned.

"I know my batters," Smoky growled, still looking at the ground. Doc went back to the bench without retorting.

Smoky wound up, cut loose a fast ball on the inside corner and got a called strike. He wasted another one inside, and then tried the fast ball on the outside corner. The batter smashed the ball between first and second for a clean hit. The winning run could have scored on his hands and knees.

"Was that on the inside?" Doc asked Smoky when the hurler reached the dug-out.

"You gotta mix them up," Smoky said contemptuously. "Sometimes they hit, and sometimes they don't." He went past Doc and up the ramp.

THE NEXT day Doc went with Jack Jameson, lanky left-hander. Jameson's arm cracked like a whip through the early innings, and the Acorns moved into a 2-0 lead. Then Boston exploded. They cracked out a single, a double, and a home run to lead, 3-2. Doc made the weary trip to the mound.

"Nothin' wrong," Jameson grumbled. "They just got lucky."

Howie nodded. "Seems to be breaking in, all right," he said.

Doc let Jameson stay in, but Boston had the range. They hammered out two more solid hits, so Doc pulled the left-hander. Another run scored before the fire was out, and Boston led, 4-2.

It looked as though the game would end that way, until the top of the ninth. Billy Jungen led off for the Acorns, and drew a walk. Cowboy Phillips flied out to cen-



ter, but Fin McElroy singled and put men on first and third. Then Skip Blaney singled to score a run, and there were men on first and second. The tying run was on second, the winning run on first.

Boston changed pitchers. Howie Fritz went for a bad ball and popped up along the first-base line, but Pete Wheeler worked a walk. The bases were loaded with two out, and the run at third had to come on or the game would be over. Jojo Katz was the batter.

Doc had already used Carey Wright, his one reliable pinch-hitter, and he figured that while Jojo wasn't a strong hitter, he was a money player, a good competitor, and just about due. He nodded to Jojo to hit. He could see by the reaction on the bench that they didn't agree with him.

The first pitch was a fast ball that nicked the inside corner for a strike. The pitcher wasted two, and then came in again. Jojo swung and missed for strike two.

"Shorten up, Jojo," Doc called from the dugout. "Any hit will do."

Jojo choked up on his bat a little, and stepped back into the box. He took ball three high and outside. This was it. The ball came in, Jojo cocked his bat, and then took the pitch on the outside corner.

"Strike three, you're out," the umpire shouted, and the fans erupted noisily.

Jojo turned angrily to the umpire and started to argue. Doc ran down the baseline to back him up. But the umpire waved them away and left the field. The game was over.

"Sorry," Jojo said, but his tone didn't carry much grief.

"You can't hit them all," Doc said, and he hid his disappointment. He was beginning to wonder.

The Acorns came to the field the next day faced with the necessity of winning to stay in the lead. The Reds had won both their games of the previous two days, and

both Boston and the Reds were only a game behind the Acorns.

Ziggy Elder started for the Acorns. He looked pretty good. In the second inning Boston slugged him for two hits and a walk, good for one run, but they weren't able to touch him otherwise. In the fourth, the Acorns, still without a hit, had the top of the batting order to start things. Sam Zollner came through with a ringing hit into left field to put him on first.

Billy Jungen was next up, but it was early in the game and Doc, a run behind, decided not to play for one run, but to go for a big inning. He flashed Billy the sign to hit away. Billy promptly hit into a double play.

Howie Fritz led off the eighth with a double. Pete Wheeler struck out, and Jojo grounded a ball deep to the second baseman which allowed Howie to go to third. Ziggy Elder, the pitcher, came to the plate. Doc gave him the hit sign, and Ziggy promptly popped up.

Boston won the game, 1-0, and the Acorns had dropped three straight.

ON THE train west, Doc received copies of the Acorn home papers.

The hovering vultures had swooped to feast. The sports writers were uniform in their complaints of the way Doc handled the team in the vital Boston series. They went at it in different ways, some blunt, some subtle, some sarcastic, but they all arrived at the same conclusion.

They felt that Doc should have changed his pitchers more quickly in both of the first two games. In the first game he should have jerked Smoky early in the ninth.

"A pitcher who had been hit freely all day, who had just been hit solidly, who had walked the previous batter, and yet Doc Casper let Smoky Farr stay in the game to give the winning hit. It doesn't seem logical."



"Why Casper should leave Jojo Katz in the game to hit in a situation such as the ninth of the second game is a puzzler," said another paper. "Katz never has been, and never will be, a hitter of any reliability."

"The third game might have been salvaged," another paper said, "with a little smart play close to the vest. A sacrifice by Billy Jungen in the fourth would have put that one big run in scoring position with only one out, instead of two out with nobody on. Then, in the eighth, again no pinch-hitter. Why not replace Ziggy with a pinch hitter? If you don't believe this writer, ask certain veteran members of the team what they think of Doc's managing ability."

Doc put the papers aside and sighed. Now he really had to win the pennant or go begging. Some of the plays could have been called either way, but most of the criticism showed a lack of real knowledge of the team's weaknesses and of the personality clashes involved.

There was still a chance that the Acorns could come through with the bunting. They were now back in a three-way tie with the Reds and Boston. The Reds, at present, had the inside track. They played more games at home, and their team was tailored for their home field.

The Acorns played a two-game series and won both, but Boston and the Reds matched their gain. The Acorns went to Chicago next, for a three-game series, and Doc hoped to pick up some ground. While the Acorns played three against Chicago, Boston and the Reds met in a five-game series.

The Reds wrecked Boston. The high-flying, cocky Reds whipped Boston five straight games and knocked them right out of the race. It was a blow from which they couldn't recover this late in the season. It put Boston five games behind the Reds, and four behind the Acorns. So it was now between the Reds and the

Acorns, with the two teams meeting in a crucial four-game series in the Reds' home park.

The Acorns took their final two games before the playoff, but so did the Reds, and Doc was still a game behind.

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## 3

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### Dugout Rebels

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THE SERIES opened with a night game, then an afternoon game the next day, and finally a double-header on Sunday afternoon. Doc had juggled his staff so that he had Smoky Farr with his fast ball for the night game, Jack Jameson and Ziggy Elder for the next two. The fourth-game slot was left open; Doc wanted to see how the first three went.

Doc walked up to the third-base coaching line and beat his palms together. "Come on, Sam, let's get things started."

Sam Zollner didn't start anything, but grounded out to Stubby Gomer. Billy Jungen flied out to center, and Cowboy Phillips poked one at the right-field wall, but fell a little short and Spud Jones was credited with a put-out.

Doc watched anxiously as Smoky Farr opened up against the Reds. He hoped the fireballer was right, because if he weren't it could easily mean the game. The Acorns' big weakness was pitching depth. Beyond the three first-line pitchers, there wasn't much to choose from.

Smoky seemed to have it. He mowed down the Reds in order in the first, and they seemed to be looking him over a little uncertainly.

Fin McElroy came through with the first hit of the game in the second, but he died on first as Blaney, Fritz and Wheeler all failed to connect. Doc could see they weren't trying all-out. Smoky, however, continued invincible in the second inning.



Jojo Katz walked to start the third, and Doc had given him the tip-off on Rogers' stance. Jojo went down on the second pitch. Smoky bunted, and Jojo was on third with one out. Then Sam grounded to the pitcher, and Rogers held Jojo on third while he threw Sam out.

Billy went after a big three-and-two hook and struck out.

Smoky began to catch it. He got through the fourth, but in the fifth the Reds got a hit. In the sixth they got two hits. In the seventh they got three and a run.

Doc knew he was on the spot. His strategy called for Smoky to go the route and he didn't want to take the big fireballer out early. But if he left Smoky in too long he'd have the papers on his neck.

Doc's jaw thrust forward. To hell with it! He was the manager of this team. Smoky was still on the hill to start the eighth. They got another hit from Smoky, and he walked a man, but they didn't score.

Doc looked the boys over as they came into the dugout before the ninth inning.

"I've managed several teams in my day," Doc said, "but I never before managed one that carried its personal grudges to the field the way this one's doing. You guys don't want me as manager. You read the papers and you decided that I didn't know baseball. Listen, I knew baseball before some of you kids were born.

"There's one run out there between you and a pennant. All I ask is that you play ball like men, and then when the season's over—win, lose or draw—I'll quit and let someone else have this bunch of yellowbellies!"

Sam Zollner was leading off, and he broke the silence. "All right, I'll play ball," he said.

"Sure," Jojo said, "I'm for you, Doc."

Several of the men looked at Pete Wheeler, and Pete stood. "Doc's right,"

he said. "Let's get out and win this pennant, then we'll worry about the other things. Let's go, Doc, we're with you."

Doc turned quickly to Sam. "Listen," he said, "break his rhythm. Stall him. Make him wait. Then pick a good pitch."

Sam nodded and went to the batter's box. He waved his bat, but when Rogers stretched, Sam stepped out of the box and worked at a piece of dirt in his eye. He turned to the umpire. "You see anything in there?"

The umpire looked. The trainer came out of the dugout to look. Finally Sam was ready again. He took ball one.

Sam knocked dirt out of his spikes, rubbed dirt on his bat handle, shoved the dirt in the box around to suit him, and then finally was ready as Rogers, a fast worker, looked impatient. It was ball two.

Sam waited until Rogers was ready, then stepped out of the box. "Someone out there's got a flashlight," he said to the umpire, and he pointed to the stands.

**S**AM FINALLY got things settled with the umpire, who had to walk to the backstop to talk to the chief usher, and Rogers pitched. He hurled angrily, and Gabby had to go into the air after the ball. It was ball three for Sam.

Rogers hurled ball four, and Sam trotted down to first.

Billy Jungen stayed in the box for two pitches, and Rogers settled down. Then Billy suddenly got out of the box to tie his shoestring. On the next pitch, Rogers missed the plate for a two and one count. Billy shortened up for a bunt, and Rogers almost threw the ball away. Rogers hit the strike zone to make the count three and two, but then Billy stepped out just as Rogers took his stretch, and complained about the mythical flashlight.

The umpire ordered him back into the box. Rogers threw ball four. Men were on first and second, nobody out.



Doc put the bunt sign on Cowboy Phillips, and the Cowboy laid down a beauty. Doc's strategy of yelling at Stopper Farley didn't work this time, and Stopper nailed the Cowboy at first, but the tying and lead runs were on.

Fin waited for Rogers to come in with a good one. Rogers missed the first one, then hooked a corner with a curve. Then he missed two straight and had a three and one count. He got a sign from the bench to put Fin on, and the fourth ball was a pitchout.

Skip Blaney waved his big stick back and forth and dared Rogers to put it over. Rogers knew he had to come in with the bases loaded, and so did Skip. Skip picked the one he wanted and blasted it into centerfield for a hit. Sam and Billy both scored, and there were still runners on first and third. The Reds changed pitchers. They put out the fire, but Doc had his two runs.

Smoky had the tough end of the Reds lineup to face, but he was back on edge now. Stubby Gomer, first up, was looking for his first hit of the afternoon and got it on the two and one pitch. It was a

whistling line drive off Smoky's best pitch and it snapped past Smoky's whiskers into center. Stubby was on first.

O'Reilly sacrificed Stubby to second, and Smoky was facing a rejuvenated Spud Jones.

Smoky laid in a fast ball for strike one. Then he pulled a cutie and snuck another one down the slot when Spud wasn't expecting it. He had strike two on the big slugger. Spud got out of the batter's box and rubbed dirt on his bat handle. Smoky tried to sucker him on a curve, but Spud didn't bite. Smoky wasted a fast ball, missed the corner with a change of pace, and then walked Spud.

Doc went to the mound. "What's up?"

"No use giving him anything good on the three and two," Smoky said. "I missed with my two and two, and that's the one I was counting on."

"How about Felt?" Doc asked.

"Maybe, and maybe not," Smoky said.

"All right, put him on," Doc said.

So they walked Gabby Felt to load the bases with one away. Then they faced Stopper Farley.

*(Continued on the next page)*

## ALL-SPORTS QUIZ ANSWERS

*(Questions on page 69)*

1. If the opposing catcher interferes with his swing, he takes a base.

2. Billy Hamilton, Ty Cobb.

3. Chicago Cubs.

4. Claude Passeau, for the Chicago Nationals, Oct. 5, 1945. Ed Reulbach, same team, is credited with the same feat by some, but others dispute the score.

5. Cincinnati Red Stockings.

6. 1-0.

7. So their teammates could haul them toward the goal; under the old rules this was legal.

8. The 1886 Harvard team, with a total of 765 points.

9. 41 points.

10. \$10, aside from expenses.

11. Young Stribling, with 127 knockouts.

12. A, Stanley Ketchel; B, Jack Sharkey; C, Willy Pep.

13. 33⅓%.

14. True—53 years.

15. Bob Fitzsimmons, with K. O. Sweeney in Philadelphia in 1914—six rounds, no decision. Fitzsimmons had been in the ring 35 years.

16. Sixty to 90 miles per hour, depending on steepness of the hill.

17. Frontenis. It's one of the fastest and most exciting of court games.

18. Philadelphia, with seats for 102,211 persons. (The Rose Bowl accommodates only 93,000).

19. Water which is not frequently replaced. It is not as buoyant as fresh water, and top speeds are impossible in it.

20. A draw, or close to it. The world's records for both events are almost exactly the same. In a longer race, the skater would win hands down.



*(Continued from the preceding page)*

Smoky threw a curve at Stopper that broke away at the shoulders. Stopper ducked back out of the box, but the umpire shot his right hand into the air. "Strike one," the umpire said.

"Yah-hooo!" Doc yipped from the dug-out. "Duck, Stopper, here comes the bean-ball!"

Farley dug in angrily, but he was unnerved and swung at a bad pitch outside for strike two. Smoky shaved his chin with one that caused him to hit the dirt.

Smoky threw the curve at his shoulders again, and Stopper swung, but missed badly for strike three.

Mannie Corcoran, the center fielder and one of the new men on the Reds, was next in. Smoky threw a slow ball down the middle, and Mannie took a good pick at it. He kissed the ball hard, and it went deep. Doc took a long breath, but old Pete Wheeler was running like a gazelle. Wheeler made the catch look easy and the game was over.

"That's one," Doc said grimly to himself.

**D**OC STARTED from the first inning the next day. He had the whole bench riding the Reds.

Lefty Crosby was pitching, and he looked hot. For three innings neither side got a hit. Doc called Sam over to start the fourth. "Listen," he said, "crowd the plate. He gets his range on a left-handed batter. That's his target. If you crowd the plate, his ball breaks too far."

Zollner crowded the plate. He stayed close and leaned over the dish. Crosby walked him on five pitches.

Billy Jungen batted right-handed, and Doc had him bunt. The ball skidded down the third-base line and it was good except that it was going to roll foul. "Let it roll," Doc bellowed at Stopper. "Let it roll!"

Stopper, not to be fooled again, pounced

on the ball and cut it to first. His hurried throw was wide and pulled Paulson off the bag. There were two men on.

Phillips, McElroy and Blaney all batted left-handed. Doc gave them the same instructions as he had Zollner, and they all pushed the plate. Crosby walked all three of them, forcing in two runs, and the Reds took him out.

Howie Fritz singled and two more runs came in. Pete Wheeler hit a long fly, and it scored another run from third. Jojo Katz hit into a double play, and Jameson was out on a pop-up. But the Acorns had a five-run lead, and the Reds couldn't get them back.

Doc decided to hold out Ziggy Elder until the nightcap and use Flowers.

"Well, all we have to do today is split," Jojo said before the first game.

"Whaddya mean, split?" Doc bellowed like an angry bull. "We're taking both games and putting this flag in the bag to-day!"

"Sure, Doc," Jojo said immediately.

"If you say take two, we'll take two," Howie Fritz said happily.

"All right," Doc said. "Now let's see you guys get Flowers some runs."

They knew what he meant. They swung from the heels in the first inning. Zollner was out to short, and Jungen flied to left, but Phillips singled and Fin hit a home run. Skip Blaney almost hit another homer, but Corcoran pulled it down.

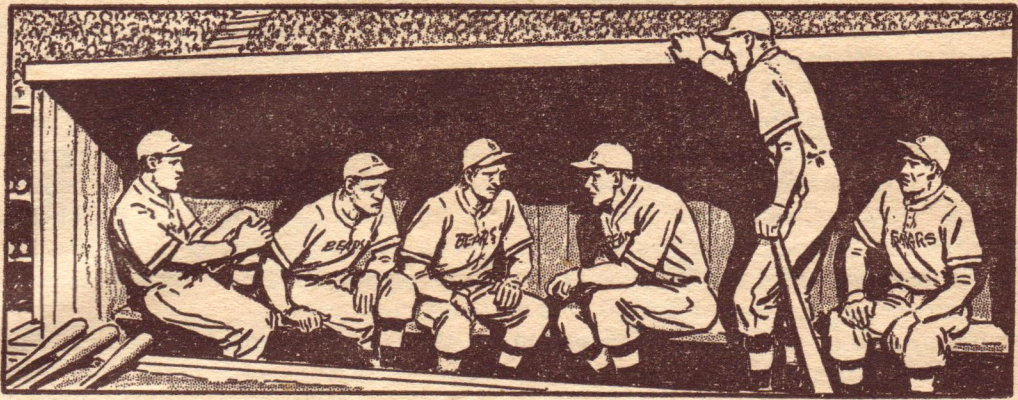
Flowers gave a hit, but got through the first without damage. Howie Fritz got a double to open the second for the Acorns, and Pete Wheeler drove him in with a single. Jojo Katz singled, but Flowers hit into a double play, Wheeler scoring. Zollner grounded out of short again.

Flowers got through the second when Zollner and Jungen teamed up on a fast double play.

In the third Jungen opened with a hit, and Phillips followed with another, and

*(Continued on page 127)*





# IN THE DUGOUT

**W**HETHER you're full of pop and sunburn from an afternoon in the grandstand, and want to take it easier—or whether you couldn't make the ball game and want to talk about it instead—makes no difference; pick yourself a shady spot in the dugout, and unlimber your ears for a session in the open-shirt league. Any sports fan is welcome, and a copy of *Fifteen Sports Stories* is the only admission ticket you need.

Watching a hot ninth inning, if you're like us, you sometimes forget that you're not just witnessing a contest of athletic skill and coordination—that every player out there has to carry an encyclopedia-sized hunk of baseball savvy in his head: averages, weaknesses of opposing players, and so on and on, including seventy complicated rules with up to twenty sections each.

We're grateful to you guys for helping us keep tabs on our own batting average. The job of editing *Fifteen Sports Stories* is plenty complicated too, making sure that every story and feature is tailored to your exacting requirements—the best sports fiction and fact that can be had. And when you write, as J. B. Crawley of San Francisco puts it, that “*Fifteen Sports Stories* is tops in its field—more variety

and better stories—the best sports fiction magazine I ever hope to read,” we get as big a kick as if we'd helped pull down a pennant.

Thanks for those friendly letters, chums—and for the heavy play you've been giving your favorite magazine at the newsstands. We'll see to it that the magazine keeps on being worthy of your enthusiasm.

Theodore Newsome, Box 45, King, N. C., has a sports problem and writes to see if we can help him. We'll start the play—can any of you guys finish it?

Dear Editor:

Can you advise me where I can get pictures or descriptions or both of the uniforms worn by the Knickerbocker Club of New York along with pictures and descriptions of uniforms worn by other clubs during the early days of baseball history?

Yours truly,  
Theodore Newsome

They wore cricket uniforms, Ted, and their colors were blue and white. Probably the other teams of that day (around 1850) did the same, although we wouldn't swear to it. On the pictures, we can't help—but maybe one of the other readers can. How about it, guys?

The Knickerbockers, by the way, were the first team to adopt the diamond-shaped



playing field. Before that, an almost square field was used—the line from first to second was 12 feet shorter than the line from third to home; and was joined by a 48-foot line from the plate, which was called the “striker’s box.” The pitcher was called the “thrower,” and was pie to hit. The old rules called for the game to end when one side had scored 21 runs, and it usually took no more than nine innings to pile up that total.

Al Noyland, a friend of ours who sometimes likes to claim that he laid out that original baseball diamond, and is almost ancient enough to make the claim stick, sends us this yarn:

Ray Schalk, the old White Sox catcher, was one of the hustlingest ball players to wear a uniform. Because of his pepper Ray owns a record which will probably never be equaled. He is the only catcher on record who has made a putout at second base!

Hal Chase was Ray’s team mate in 1913 and 1914 and it was he who instructed Ray to follow the runner down to first base, now a common baseball procedure. “Some day we’ll catch a runner rounding first,” Chase told Schalk. “He’ll be looking at me standing off the base and thinking he’s safe but you’ll be there to take a throw and nail him.” This maneuver worked so well that Ray also began backing up third when runners came into that bag.

Ray’s unique record was established against St. Louis. The Browns’ Ray Demmit was on first when the hit-and-run was flashed. The batter hit a long fly to Shoeless Joe Jackson, in right. Demmit was on his way to third when the third-base coach sent him back.

The alert Schalk, who was wandering about the infield in all the excitement, saw that Demmit had neglected to touch up at second. He ran to second and screamed for the ball. Eddie Collins, regular second sacker, couldn’t understand what Ray was shouting about but threw him the ball anyway. Ray stepped on second and the umpire declared Demmit out.

Ray expected praise for his alertness from his teammates but Collins chased him out of the infield. “Stay at home where you belong,” he yelled. “I’ll make the putouts at second base.”

**W**HEN Ben Hogan won the National Open championship at the Riviera country club in California, he became undisputed golf king. Yet, great

as Ben is, he has some little way to go before being bracketed with Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen and Gene Sarazen, who carried their triumphs through a far greater span of years. Sarazen, the stocky squire of Germantown, N. Y., is still able to hit his shots as well as anyone, but his legs bog down under the strain of tournament play.

Gene turned in two of the most amazing shots in the long history of the game. Apparently out of the running in a Masters’ championship, he faced a long, tough par five that had baffled many of the best shot-makers. There had been a light rain, and the grass was gemmed with moisture. Sarazen’s ball rested in a poor lie, some two hundred and forty yards from the green. It was invisible from where Gene stood, because he had to shoot over the crest of a hill.

Yet, with all the difficulties of the course and the nerve strain of such a tournament, Sarazen hit a spoon shot that will never be forgotten. His ball not only reached the carpet, but rolled into the cup for a double-eagle two! Knocking three shots off par with a single stroke, he tied Craig Wood, and beat him in the play-off.

In a Ryder Cup match in Toledo, Sarazen hit a bad, sliced shot on the short ninth hole. His ball wound up in a wooden refreshment hut, and lay on the floor behind the counter in a welter of ice chips and other debris. His British opponent was safely on the green fifteen feet from the pin.

Quite coolly, Gene chipped over the counter to within a foot of the hole. His opponent was so upset that he three-putted, and lost a hole that seemed safely in his pocket.

That’s all for this time, gents. Next issue we’ll be looking forward to seeing all of you in the dugout—and if you haven’t written us before to put your two cents’ worth in, how about doing it now?

—The Editors.



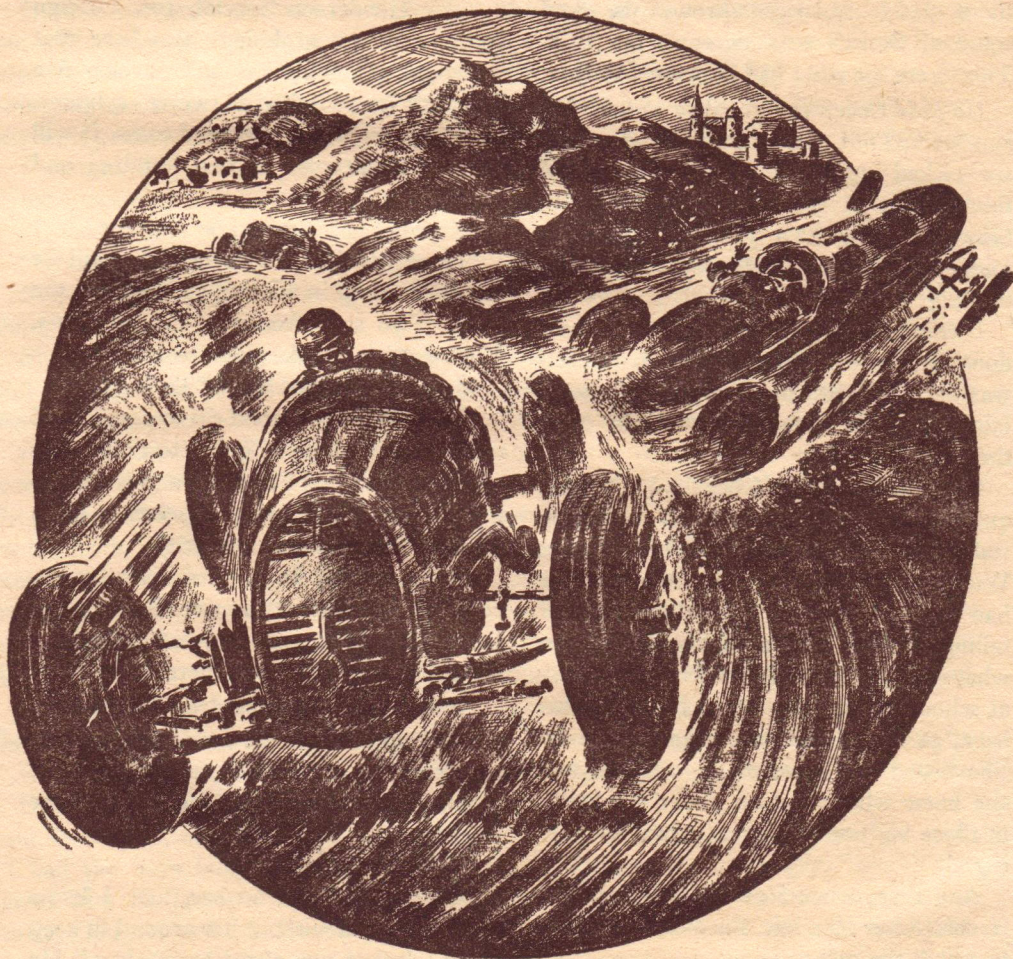
# THE THUNDER ROAD

By PETER REED

*Riding a ton of hell-roaring iron, fighting a crazy wheel for the inches that add up to a two-mile-a-minute finish, no man can afford to remember yesterday's terror—if he wants to see today's checkered flag!*

REX HAD been riding high on the outside on the north curve that day, way back in April of last year. It was the thirty-seventh lap of the Florida Cup, and Will Karnery, his buddy, had hit the oil slick just as he straightened out.

Will's wagon had twisted and hurtled up at Rex Dorman. Rex had yanked down



The Alta swung, bounced twice. . . .



toward the inside rail and Will had cleared by inches, smashed through the high outside rail. For one horror-filled moment his car, his body, were separate against the pale sky, soaring out to fire and death.

Rex went into a flat spin that ended against the inside rail at a dead stop. Fourteen thousand spectators saw him climb out, throw down helmet and gloves and walk steadily across the infield toward the gate.

And if he'd kept going he might have won. He would certainly have placed.

Steve, my red-headed daughter, stood beside me at Will's funeral. We saw Rex there. He looked right through us. And some of Steve's tears weren't for Will. They were for what had happened to Rex.

He didn't even say goodbye to her. He just walked out. Later on, in other meets, we picked up track gossip. How he'd flunked out of stock car competition in Georgia. How he'd yellowed out of a midge race up in Bridgeport. And then nothing.

I couldn't forgive him for what he'd done to Steve. What he did to himself was all right with me, but it didn't seem fair that Steve should have to take it on the chin.

One minute she had been a happy gal, quick with a gag, known to all the racing stables and tracks. She had been dating Will and Rex, but it was obvious that she had favored Rex. I hadn't wanted her falling in love with a racing driver, but what can you do? After I'd had her away at school for six long years, she had come back, as full of love of the game as ever. She tested out some of the wagons, and she knew what went on under the hoods in those big power plants. Always laughing.

And then, when Rex left, she was different. After Rex left, she didn't even like to watch the races.

She became very quiet and her color wasn't as good.

I knew that she needed a change. Badly. So it was a break when R. K. wired me to come into the main offices. That's my boss—R. K. Henderson. Henderson Motors. I'm in charge of the stable of drivers and mechanics and the iron we drag around to every track in the country.

He grinned, shook hands, and with loving care, took a wooden model of a car out of the case on the floor and set it on his desk.

"What is it, Joe?" he asked me.

"Basic airflow is for the track. But it looks like you could use it on the highway too. Sports car?"

"The Henderson Special, Joe. Foreign sports cars are grabbing sales here that we could get. This kid will develop five hundred horse with a twelve cylinder, twin, supercharged, overhead cams. It will purr at twenty, or at two hundred and twenty."

"So what has it got to do with me?"

"Good question. Two of these will be out of the shop in a week, stripped for the track. Two and two spare power plants. You're going to take them to Italy."

My mouth sagged open. "To Italy!"

"Yes. With two good drivers and good mechanics, and we're going to enter ourselves in the Sanzi Cup Race and we're going to win it and grab ourselves a large hunk of international publicity."

"Some of our boys tried those cross-country races before the war, R. K. And they didn't make out so good. Maybe I should hire drivers over there."

"Nonsense. We have drivers who have cleaned up all over the country. Pick any two from our stable. But the time is short. You'll sail from New York in three weeks."

"How about Steve?"

"I'll pay the shot on her, too. I know you're no good without her around to keep yammering at you about your ulcer." He leaned back in his chair. He said softly, to himself, "Buy a Henderson Special.



You can own a sports car like the one which won the Sanzi Cup."

His dream was too pretty to disturb. I tiptoed out.

WE SAILED in three weeks on the Napoli, with the two beautiful cars, finished off in gunmetal and bronze, nestling side by side in the hold. As drivers I took Billy Husk and Razor Ingle. Neither of them had ever raced in foreign competition on a cross-country route. I knew some drivers who had tried it. When I approached them, they gave me the cold eye and changed the subject.

I didn't see much of Steve the first day out. Whenever I did see her, she had a funny glazed look in her eye, and a secret smile on her lips. Which, if you know Steve, is pretty ominous.

I caught her in our cabin and said, "Just exactly what goes on?"

"Does it show that much?"

"Of course it shows. Give, baby."

She sighed. "You'll have to know sometime," she said. "Come on."

She led me down to the third-class deck and over to a deck chair. "Here he is," she said simply.

And there he was. The Rex Dorman I knew was a big husky kid with good shoulders, wrists like a coal heaver and laughter in his eyes. This was a thin guy, with pouches under his eyes, cheekbones that looked about to punch through his skin, and hands that trembled as he tried to light a cigarette.

He stood up and shook hands. "What the hell are you doing here?" I demanded.

Rex shrugged. "Ask her."

He sat down again as Steve pulled me over to the rail, out of earshot. She said, "I had the boys looking for him. They found him in Jersey City and he was stinko. They helped me. I arranged about his passport, bought him his ticket and had him brought aboard."

"Why?"

"Because maybe something will happen to either Razor or Billy. And then he can drive one of the cars."

"In the first place, Steve, we can only enter one. I'll eliminate either Razor or Billy. In the second place I wouldn't let him drive a kiddy-car across my bedroom rug."

"Once upon a time you wouldn't have said that."

"Once upon a time isn't now. It was your money. You wasted it. But when we get off this hulk, he can head on back to the gin mills."

She got her hands tangled somehow in the front of my coat and she looked up at me, and her blue eyes were full of tears. "All right," she said. "It was stupid. But don't hurt him again. Let him come along. Pretend you might use him. Please. Oh, please!"

Butter in the sun, that's me.

NAPLES was our base. We got the garage space, then, armed with a map, went out in an old rented touring car to drive around the sixteen-mile lap. I drove the touring car, with Steve in the front beside me, Razor, Billy and Rex in the back. Rex puzzled me. He had gained weight on the boat, as well as better color. He was apparently on the wagon. At least, the shakes were gone and his eyes had cleared up. But he seemed absolutely and completely indifferent to everything, including Steve. The mark of his indifference was showing on her. I wanted to beat his head in for him.

When I had tried to tell him that maybe we could use him, he had said softly, "Oh, sure."

Steve had the map in her lap. She said, in a voice too bright and gay, "Here's the kickoff, boys. Starting line here. Right down this road. Four miles of four-lane straightaway. Just like glass."

Razor said, "I've always wanted to let one big iron all the way out."



We went, along with the rest of the traffic, down the stretch. "Boy, oh boy!" Billy Husk said softly. Rex yawned.

I swallowed hard, turned to the left, leaving the blue sea behind, turning onto a two-lane asphalt road that wound up into the mountains.

"We climb for two thousand feet," she said.

"It hardly seems enough," Razor muttered.

At the top was a right-hand turn, followed by a hairpin. Billy groaned audibly. We doubled back along the crest of the hills, went through three villages that boasted of pitted cobblestone main drags, and then turned back down the slope. The road was a continual succession of curves.

"And ahead is the finish line again. Sixteen miles around," Steve said weakly.

"I don't even want to *watch* anybody driving that killer," Razor said.

"Ten times around?" Billy asked, a slight tremble in his voice.

"Ten times," I said, trying to make my voice cheery. "Race day, they block off the road and every person entering gets two trial laps for starting position. Both you boys can go two laps the morning of the race, and I'll decide who goes in."

"Maybe I'll oversleep that day," Billy said.

"The guy who won last year driving something called a Cisitalia averaged one hundred and four miles per hour," Steve said. "I looked it up."

"Is he entered this time?" Razor asked.

"He's dead," I said. I turned to look at Rex. Rex was staring sleepily out at the blue sea.

**W**E GOT the two wagons out there an hour after dawn on race day.

Even so, we weren't the first. A big blue Bugatti roared by, followed by a dull black Auto-Union, a gray Pengeot and a cream-colored British Alta.

I told the timer that we weren't ready

for the trial laps. Rex sat on the running-board of the old sedan, yawning from time to time. Billy and Razor had an argument about who'd lead off. Billy won. They were pale as they adjusted crash helmets, pulled on their gloves. The big cars were both purring, a low note of power sounding from the triple tail pipes.

Steve leaned into each car and kissed them.

They took off, sounding like a squadron of light planes. They dwindled to nothing, going down the wide straight stretch.

Steve turned from watching them, her face taut. I had clicked my own watch on them. We could expect them in ten minutes.

She walked over to Rex. "Nice wagons, aren't they?" she said.

He stood up and stretched. "Sure." He walked away down the shoulder of the road. Steve stood looking after him for a moment, a small girl out of whose hand somebody had just knocked an ice-cream cone. Her shoulders slumped. She turned and gave me a weary smile.

"Samaritan down for the count," she said.

More cars appeared and shoved off, some for official timing. I saw a Mercedes-Benz, a Maserati and an Alfa-Romeo. Also one of Ferrari's Cisitalias.

The dead slow minutes ticked by. Nine, ten, eleven. Then twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Steve and I stopped glancing at each other.

I picked out the distinctive motor roar as one of ours came down the hill. My heart sank as I saw that both Razor and Billy were in it. I had my hand on the door cowl before the car was completely stopped.

Billy said flatly, "The second village. Little kid came creeping out. I swerved and the cobblestones kept the brakes from catching right. I piled it into the side of a stone church."

"Are you hurt?"



"Shook up. Nothing else. They've wrestled it off the road. It's out of this race, Joe. Frame out, cooling system smashed, right front suspension tangled all to hell."

They got out of our remaining wagon. Other cars came pounding wildly down the mountain, swerving and screaming onto the straightaway, straightening out to slam off into the morning haze.

I got a look at Billy's right hand. I grabbed it before he could twist away. He said sullenly, "I sort of stabbed my fingers against the dash when she hit. Sprained 'em a little."

"Too much to race with. So it's your baby, Razor. Sorry, Billy."

Razor looked at me. His mouth was set in a stubborn line. He kicked the front tire of the Henderson.

"You think I got no guts, Joe?" he asked.

"Did I say that?"

"I know the ovals, Joe. Dirt, asphalt and brick. I know the guys I race against. I know what they'll do. On that hairpin up there, a big blue job barreled through, inside me and outside Billy. He hung on the edge of that drop before he got it under control. These people are nuts, Joe. My national rating is high enough so that I can get in another good stable. You tell Henderson what he can do with his Special. Mr. Razor Ingle isn't taking it across country with a bunch of maniacs."

I said soothingly, "These people race all out, Razor. I know that. But a smart driver like you can stay out of trouble."

"On an oval, he can stay out of trouble."

I looked at his set face and knew it was useless. To make matters worse, Billy said, "You weren't on that hairpin, Joe. You didn't see it. Razor's got something."

Steve said, her voice almost shrill, "Mr. Henderson left the selection of the drivers up to Joe. And now you're letting him down. What'll happen to Joe's job?"

Razor grinned. "Joe can hand-lap more

speed into a tricycle than most men could get out of a skyrocket. Don't make me cry, Stevie."

I growled, "Okay, so I drive it myself. At least it has to be in the race."

Steve grabbed my arm. "No, Dad. No! It would kill you!" her words tumbled over each other as the idea hit her. "Why not me, Dad? Think of how many laps I've gone."

"But not in competition."

"I've seen the road. And it would be good publicity, Dad. I'll stay safe. I'll play it that way."

I glanced over toward Rex Dorman. He stood over at the side, his face expressionless.

Rex would never race again. I couldn't let my daughter try to drive on that killer road. I turned to Billy. "Give me the helmet and gloves," I said wearily. "I'll go around once and then try for time."

As the Special was built as a sports car, it had a neutral gear. The motor idled softly.

I pulled on the gloves, went back to take a look at the rear rubber. As I bent to touch a place that looked ragged, the tire spun violently. I jumped back.

The flame of her hair was vivid as the car roared down the straight stretch.

"Stop her!" I yelled.

"With what, Joe?" Razor said softly.

But for his backing out, she wouldn't have stolen the car from under our noses. I planted my fist on the point of Razor's jaw. He sat down in the dust, looked up at me without animosity. He picked himself up and walked back to the aged sedan.

Rex Dorman stood beside me and stared out to where the Special had disappeared. He had not changed expression, but there was a little hard lump of muscle protruding at the corner of his jaw. Then he relaxed, said softly, "Crazy kid." He went back to sit beside Razor. Our truck, with the fuel, the hand pump and the new rubber, was off in the field.



As we waited and the tension thickened around us, a little red Alta came down out of the hills, a big German Auto-Union so close behind it that the two cars almost touched. The Alta swung wide and the Auto-Union came up on the inside. The Alta, faintly off balance on the wide swing, cut back. There was a tiny thudding metallic sound as the two cars nudged. Then the Auto-Union was alone. The Alta swung, tipped, bounced, jumped a good twenty feet into the air, throwing the driver out at the peak of the leap. It threw him like a stone on the end of a string. He shot out ahead of the car.

We saw him land full length on the hard-packed soil off the road, saw him stir weakly just as the bulk of the car landed on him, bounced again, rolled to a flaming stop. I looked away quickly.

Rex was swallowing hard and his face was the stone gray of death itself.

Then that familiar motor song, and her red hair in the breeze and she pulled up, triumphant.

Then she saw the flaming hulk of the Alta, the thing that had been a man, and her mouth trembled.

Rex shouldered me roughly aside. "Get out of that iron!" he said horsely.

"But I can—"

"Get out!"

Her eyes widened as she saw him snap the crash-helmet strap under his jaw. She said, "You can't—"

"Shut up, Steve. Shut up!"

He turned and yelled for time as he got under the wheel. The man came up with his watch, clicking it smartly as Rex hit the black starting line. Behind us the useless sirens wailed a song of mourning.

**A**T ONE O'CLOCK the new rubber was on the car. It was in the starting lineup, and the throb of the power plants was heavy as a blanket around us. The crowd was heavy and the Italian sun was hot and direct.

His place in the lineup was poor and his time had been so bad on the morning run that I hadn't wanted to leave the car in. But when I spoke of withdrawing, he had given me just one long look and I had shut up.

The flag dropped and they roared by the starting line. Steve's fingers sank into my arm as we watched Rex yank hard to the right, take the special out onto the rough shoulder, gun it out ahead of two cars, forcing his way further ahead in the formation.

One hundred minutes of pure torture. Thirty-six curves in each lap, one hundred places to shift gears in each lap.

The first car around was the black Auto-Union, the green Maserati tagging it closely. And Rex was fighting the Cisitalia for third place. They came out onto the wide pavement in a screaming power slide, side by side, wheels turned away from the direction of the curve, steering with the throttle.

The driver of the Cisitalia made the mistake of correcting the backwhip at the end of the slide with his wheel. Rex straightened with a power thrust, opening up daylight between his deck and the Cisitalia. It was crazy, reckless driving, but he was not alone in that.

On the second lap and the third and fourth, he still clung to third place, the Cisitalia dogging him closely.

From where we stood we could see two hundred feet up the narrow downgrade, to the last curve they had to make coming down the mountain. A minute or so after Rex had gone by in the fifth lap, nosing up to the green Maserati, we saw the blue car blow its head on the downgrade, saw it spew the sleek deadly oil onto the asphalt and out onto the curve.

The crowd, race-wise, began to scatter away from that curve.

The race was so spread out that it was impossible to get the cars out of the way.

(Continued on page 129)



He went up in a shower of spray—five hundred pounds of blue marlin.



# BLUE WATER FURY

By **SCOTT O'HARA**

**I** WALKED down the length of the curved concrete pier at Acapulco, passing the charter boats getting ready to take off across the sparkling blue morning water, after the sail and the marlin.

Pedro Martinez, skipper of the shabby-looking *Orizaba*, was standing on the pier coiling a line. I have gone out many times with Pedro during the season for the past four years. Other craft are prettier, but

*When the big blue strikes and you wrench your arms half out to keep him from running to China, it's more than a battle between a fish's courage and a man's . . . It's sometimes the fight every man must make, sooner or later, against the coward in himself!*



Pedro's equipment is good and he knows where the fish can be found. Pedro did not look happy. Not at all.

Lew Wolta sat in one of the two stern fishing chairs under the canopy. He looked up at me, waved the half-empty bottle of beer in his big hand and said, "What the hell kept you, Thompson?"

I had met Wolta the afternoon before. He and his friend, Jimmy Gerran, had stepped up to Pedro to sew him up for the next day at the same time I did. We had joined forces. I knew that Wolta had wanted the *Orizaba* because he had seen the four flags flying, the hard, lean, black bodies of the two sails on the tiny deck forward of the cabin.

When we had gone across the street to seal the bargain over a beer, I had begun to regret my decision. Wolta was a tall, hard, heavy-shouldered man in his late thirties with a huge voice, white teeth gleaming in a constant grin, and washed-out eyes that never smiled at all. He kept up a running chatter, most of which seemed designed to inflict hurt on the younger, frailer Jimmy Gerran, a quiet lad with a humble manner.

Over the beer, Wolta said, "Yeah, I ran into Jimmy up in Taxco and it was pretty obvious that he needed somebody to get him out of his daze. Hell, I've never been in this gook country before, but I've got a nose for fun. Leave Jimmy alone and he'd spend all his time walking around the streets."

At that he had slapped Gerran roughly on the shoulder. "Tomorrow we hook a sail, boy, and it'll make a man out of you."

Pedro stepped down onto the fantail and I handed him my lunch and equipment. Pedro said, in quick, slurred Spanish, "This man talks to me, Señor Thompson, as if I were his gardener."

"What did he say?" Wolta asked suspiciously.

"He said that he thinks we'll have a good day."

"That's fine!" Wolta said, his eyes still holding a glint of mistrust. "How'd you learn this language?"

"I've lived here," I said shortly. "Where's Gerran?"

"I sent Jimmy after cigarettes. Hope he can find his way back to the boat. Here he comes now."

Jimmy gave me a shy smile and said good morning as he climbed down into the boat. Pedro's two hands were aboard, his engineer and his sailor. The sailor went forward and got the anchor line. The marine engine chuckled deeply as Pedro moved ahead away from the dock. We were about fifth or sixth away from the dock.

Wolta examined the heavy boat rods curiously. He fingered the heavy gimbal set into the front of the chair. He said, "You set the rod butt in this thing, eh? Universal joint."

Jimmy said, "I've never done this before. What happens, Mr. Thompson?"

"You sit and hold the rod. Your bait, a fish about eight inches long with the hook sewed into it, will ride the surface about fifty feet astern. See, the sailor's dropping the bamboo outriggers now. The line will run taut from your bait to a heavy clothespin at the tip of the outrigger. Then there'll be twenty or so feet of slack between the clothespin and the tip of your rod. The sail'll come up and whack the fish with his bill. That's to kill it. It'll knock it out of the clothespin and it'll lay dead on the water. Then the sail'll grab it. As soon as the slack is all gone, hold tight and hit three or four times. Not hard. Like this." I took the rod and showed him.

"How will I know if he's hooked?" Jimmy asked.

Wolta roared. "He'll rise up and talk to you, boy. He'll come up and tell you all about it."

Jimmy flushed. He said, "Thanks, Mr. Thompson."



I was assembling my equipment. For sail I use a five foot, five ounce tip, 4/0 star drag reel carrying five hundred yards of 6-thread, 18 pound test line. Wolta looked on curiously. He said, "That's a lot lighter outfit than these, Thompson." I nodded. The boat rods carry 32-thread line, 14/0 drag reels. Wolta said, "That rod won't fit in the gimbal, will it?"

"No," I said shortly.

Wolta frowned. "What the hell! If you can use that stuff, why should we fish with rope and crowbars?"

I said, "If you never fished for sail before and if you hooked one with this equipment, you'd have a thousand to one chance of bringing him in. He'd break your line or your tip every time."

Wolta gave me that grin. "I guess you know what you're talking about," he said.

The bait was all sewed. It was taken off the ice and Pedro helped rig the lines. As soon as we rounded the headlands, the bait went out. I said, "You two fish. As soon as you've hooked one, the other man reels in. Fast. I'll take the place of whoever hooks the first one."

"Hooks or catches," Wolta said suspiciously.

I looked him squarely in the eyes. "Hooks!" I said.

"Okay, okay," he mumbled, turning away. I had learned something interesting about Lew Wolta.

**T**HE FIRST half-hour was dull. Pedro headed straight out and the shoreline began to recede, the dusty brown hills began to appear behind the green hills that encircle Acapulco. The swell was heavy. I watched both Jimmy and Wolta and saw, with relief, that neither of them seemed conscious of the movement of the boat. A seasick man aboard spoils my pleasure in the day, because I know how badly he wants to return to the stability of the land.

The bait danced and skittered astern,

taking off into the air at the crests of the waves, sometimes going under the surface for a dozen yards.

Wolta called for more beer, called loudly again as the sailor was uncapping the bottle.

The engineer, acting as lookout, yelled and pointed. Pedro took a quick look and heeled the boat around. The sail was a dust-brown shape dimly seen a few inches under the surge of the blue sea.

We dragged the bait by him, and he seemed to shake himself, move in a big circle, come in on the bait with arrow-like speed. He was headed for Gerran's bait. For a moment the sail knifed the water a few yards behind the bait and then there was a boiling spot on the flank of a wave and the line snapped out of Gerran's clothespin.

I watched the line tauten as Pedro cut speed.

"Now!" I said.

Jimmy hit him just a shade late, but hit him with the right force. The line whined out of the reel as the sail, about seventy pounds of angry, startled temper, walked up into the air, three feet of daylight showing under his bullet-lean tail.

Jimmy gasped. The sail jumped high again, ten yards further. High in the air he shook his head and we saw the bait snap free, fall out in a long arc. The fish was off the hook and, somewhere under the surface of the sea, he was heading for distant parts.

There was that letdown of tension that always comes with a lost fish.

"Absolutely beautiful!" Jimmy said softly.

Wolta gave his hoarse laugh. "Absolutely butterfingers, pal. You had him and you lost him."

"I've never seen anything like that," Jimmy said.

"I'd have liked to see him boated," Wolta said. "What the hell good is it to look at a fish?"



Pedro smiled at Jimmy and said, in his thick English, "Bad luck. Next time you get heem." Then he turned to Wolta. "You reel in too slow, meester. Faster next time, eh?"

Wolta, smiling, said, "You run your boat, pop. I'll reel in like I damn well please."

I threw my bait out over the side toward the stern. I was learning about Wolta. I said, in Spanish, to Pedro, "This one is all mouth, my friend." I said to Wolta, "I just told him that if I hook a fish, he's to cut your line if you don't bring it in fast enough."

Wolta said, "Okay, okay. Don't get in a sweat, Thompson."

I sat down. I had the drag off, my thumb on the spool. Jimmy said, behind me, "You don't use the clothespin?"

"No. When I get a strike, I let the line run free, then throw on the drag when I hit him. It's harder to do it right this way, but when you get onto it, you can figure the time to fit the way each fish hits."

Wolta said, a faint sneer in his tone, "Don't bother the expert, Jimmy."

I let that one pass.

Ten minutes later Wolta said, "I hear it takes about a half-hour, forty minutes to boat one with the equipment I'm using. How long does it take with your rig?"

"Longer. Maybe an hour with the same size fish."

He still wore the smile. He said, "That's great! I pay a third of the boat the same as you and then when you hook one I got to stop fishing for an hour."

"That's right," I said mildly.

Pedro had gotten to the area he liked. He began to zig-zag back and forth across the area. The Spanish word for that maneuver is, very neatly, the same as the Spanish word for eel.

I was first to see the fish coming in toward Wolta's bait. I said, "One coming up." Pedro slowed a little as Wolta

tensed. It was as unreasonable as any sailfish. It cut by Wolta's bait and, instead of hitting mine first to kill it, it gulped it whole. It was one very hungry fish. I hit it immediately.

When it jumped I saw that it was probably a shade smaller than the one Jimmy had hooked. As it ran I saw Wolta reeling in rapidly.

Any sailfish could find freedom if it had the sense to run on a straight line, take all the line, break the line at the end of the run. But five hundred yards is a long way to go, in a straight line. I stood in front of the chair. When it jumped I kept the line taut, pulling it off balance, slapping it down against the sea before it could shake its head.

It headed for the Orient; then, as I was getting worried about the line, it began to cut around in a vast circle and I won back a little line. It stopped jumping. Bringing in the line was the usual tough problem. A hundred yards from the boat, and twenty minutes later, it walked on its tail for a good dozen yards and then, as I had expected, it sounded. I horsed it up, a few feet at a time. It made one more jump close to the boat and then came in, dog weary. Pedro handled the gaff. The sailor grasped the bill and Pedro belted it across the back of the neck with the weighted club.

It was hauled in over the side, glistening with a hundred impossibly beautiful iridescent colors. Jimmy squatted and watched the colors slowly fade until the fish became the usual shining gun-metal black of the dead sail. He turned glowing eyes up toward me and said, "That was wonderful!"

"The experts are always wonderful," Wolta said. He grinned at me. "Do I have your permission to fish?"

He got his line in first. Fresh bait was put on the other line and Jimmy took his place in the chair. It was not over five minutes later that a sail, without warning,



came up from downstairs and slapped Wolta's bait. I was behind his chair. He waited the proper time until the line straightened and then hit, much too hard. But it didn't do any harm because he wasn't hitting against the fish. The sail was waiting longer than usual.

Instinctively I reached down over Wolta's shoulder and released the drag so the spool would run free, allowing the bait to remain dead on the water.

Wolta pushed my hand away hard, saying in a tight voice, "Catch your own fish, Doc."

It was a comedy of errors. The fish took the bait and then Wolta tried to hit it with the drag off and without his thumb on the spool. The spool whined and the line snarled. Pedro came running and grasped the line ahead of the rod and yanked hard three times, setting the hook. The fish went high. It was one fine sail. I guessed it close to ninety pounds. The world's record is one hundred six pounds off Miami in 1929. Pedro managed to click the drag back on and ripped at the snarled line while the sail jumped wildly, lashing, fighting.

With the snarl gone the fish hit the end of the slack with a jar that made Wolta grunt and yanked his arms straight, lanked the rod tip down. When the fish jumped again, Wolta horsed it so hard that he spun the sail in the air.

I yelled at him, "You'll bust the line!"

He worked with a tight hard grin on his face. The sail took line on him, but took it with the full drag and with Wolta's hard thumb on the spool. I don't know why the line didn't break. It would test at 96 pounds.

I'LL SAY this for Wolta. He was a powerful man. Cords like cables stood out on his brown forearms as he horsed the fish toward the boat. Pedro began to look worried. Boating even a tired fish is rugged work. Last year just

as a man reached for the bill the fish took one more leap, freeing himself of the gaff. The bill entered the brain of the sailor through his left eye. And Pedro saw himself trying to boat a fish that still had a lot of fight left.

Pedro worked the boat, turning it perfectly, keeping it so that Wolta had free play of the fish. The fish made short savage lunges close to the boat. Pedro left the wheel, handled the gaff himself, sunk it neatly. The fish gave a convulsive heave that nearly lifted Pedro over the side. The sailor went half over the rail, grasped the bill with his gloved hand, slammed the fish twice behind the eyes. Pedro heaved it aboard.

The fish lay there. Reflex muscles made it quiver. Wolta grabbed the club from the sailor and hit it again. It was an understandable thing to do. But the way he did it, the way the club smashed against the hard flesh, revealed something savage and soul-naked about the man. Pedro looked disgusted.

Wolta turned to me and said, "I got it in spite of you. Next time keep your damn hands off my rod and reel, mister!"

I said, "Wake up, Wolta! If I hadn't thrown off the drag you wouldn't even have a fish. He didn't have the bait when you hit him. I let the bait free so that it stayed back there. You kept me from putting the drag back on. That's why your line snarled."

He smiled at me. His pale eyes still held anger. "If you say so, expert. Anyway, this one will outweigh yours." He kicked the dead fish. I didn't like that and neither did Pedro. A sail is an honorable opponent, a brave fish, a gentleman of the sea. Even dead he isn't to be kicked.

"It probably will," I said.

We had the two flags up for the two sails. I took Wolta's place while he went inside to have another beer. I had noticed that his thumb was raw where he had pressed it against the escaping line.



Jimmy Gerran got his bait back into the water. Wolta hollered out, "Both the men have got a fish, kid. Now let's see if you can lose another one." He laughed hugely. Jimmy smiled weakly. I smiled not at all.

We fished without result for over an hour and then we ate. Even without another strike, it would have been a good day. But I was pulling for Jimmy to latch onto one. And I had a hunch that when he did, he'd do a better job than Wolta had. Only Wolta seemed oblivious to the fact that enormous luck had kept his line from snapping.

We were out a good dozen miles, and the sun was almost directly overhead, making a dazzling glare on the blue sea.

The time went by, slowly. Wolta said, "Somebody catch something. I want some more fishing." He waited a few minutes. He said, "Jimmy, if you don't have anything by three o'clock, I'm taking over."

I said, "Don't you think we ought to stick to the rules?"

"Okay, Jimmy?" Wolta said. "Three o'clock?"

Jimmy didn't look at me. He said, "Sure, Lew."

The older man had him buffaloed. I knew the signs. I liked Gerran. So all I could do was to think that it was just too bad.

While I was wondering how Gerran got himself tied up with Wolta, Pedro hissed and said, in Spanish, "There is a monstrous fish to starboard, señor."

I searched the sea until I saw it. It was too close. There wasn't time for me to reel in and change to the boat rod. This fish wasn't going to be brought in on my tackle.

For a moment I had a yen to try for him, anyway. But I reeled in quickly.

Wolta said, "What's up? Why're you reeling in?"

At first the sun was in my eyes. And then I saw him coming in like a freight train. He slapped Jimmy's bait out of the

water. It fell dead, free of the clothespin and the fish took it. Jimmy hit it perfectly, four times. The huge fish was on his way out to sea when he felt a nasty little jab inside his jaw. He felt a jab and a tugging weight. To free himself of it, he went upstairs. He went up in a shower of spray—five hundred pounds of blue marlin.

Wolta yelled in astonishment. A wide grin split Pedro's face. The hands gabbled in excitement. There aren't many fish like that one off Acapulco. Jimmy didn't give him any slack when he jumped, again and again. Then the big blue headed for off and beyond and the reel sang a high shrill song of irresistible power.

Jimmy should have been using a 30 ounce tip, a 16/0 reel and 54-thread line. In relation to the blue, his tackle was as light as mine was for sail. Jimmy held the rod and gave us one taut, startled look as Pedro and I grabbed the straps and strapped him to the chair.

The reel continued to sing and the line going into the water was a white hissing streak. I began to pray to Aztec gods for the big fish to get tired of that straight line. Pedro was back at the wheel. He jammed it into reverse and backed along the line of flight of the fish. The power song diminished in pitch a few notes, but still the monster drove on, trying to run from the pain in his jaw. He made a leap that was a full fifteen hundred feet from the boat. He was so far away that he looked like a minnow. Pedro stopped backing instantly to keep from piling up slack.

Jimmy began to pull on the fish. It was going at right angles to the boat. Pedro kept the boat in a small turn to keep the fish centered over the stern. With both hands on the rod, Jimmy pulled slowly, pulling the rod from a horizontal to a vertical position. Then, as he lowered it quickly, he reeled in a few feet of the precious line. It was heartbreakingly slow compared to the speed at which it had



gone out. Fifty times he strained to pull up on the rod, gaining a few feet each time, and then the fish, undiminished in power, took it all away from him again.

We were covering a lot of ground. Every time the fish took off, Pedro would keep after it, conserving that precious line. Once the spool showed as the fish stopped his lunge and jumped.

I glanced at my wristwatch. Forty minutes so far. The sweat poured off Jimmy Gerran, and his shirt looked as though he had been doused with a bucket of water. I kept encouraging him in low tones. I knew what the fight was taking out of him. Heave up and reel in, heave up and reel in. Minute after minute.

Then the fish came like an express train, right for the boat, its miniature sail cutting the water. The line came fast then. Too fast. Jimmy's hand was a blur as he reeled to keep the fish from getting slack. It passed the boat within fifty feet and went on out in the opposite direction. I was afraid of what would happen when it hit the end of the temporary slack. Jimmy was smart enough to stop reeling and wait, rod level. The spool jumped from complete stillness into whining speed as the line went out. But this time the fish turned and tail-walked some three hundred yards from the boat.

Once again the laborious process. When I saw the blood on Jimmy's wrist I knew what the blisters were doing to his hands. His face was set and death-pale and there was more blood on his lower lip.

Wolta sat in the other chair and said in a wheedling voice, "Kid, you're bushed. You're not tough enough for that baby. Next time you get a chance, slip the rod over here. Old Lew'll bring him in for you."

The kid didn't answer, but he didn't seem to be working so hard on the fish. I know the feeling. I've been hooked into fish who have almost convinced me that it is impossible to bring them in.

Yet he worked on, his arms trembling each time he pulled. I looked at my watch. An hour and fifteen minutes of heart-breaking, muscle-ripping, back-bending labor.

"Come on, Jimmy. Hand it over," Wolta said. I wanted to tell him to shut his face. But it was the kid's problem, not mine.

**J**IMMY began to rest for little intervals when he could have been regaining line. But the big marlin wasn't as eager as he had been. He was fighting doggedly, but without that first, wild, reckless speed.

Wolta said, "Tell you what. I'll slip into your chair and you slip out. Take the rod butt out of the gimmick just long enough to slip your leg under."

Jimmy made no objection. I moved back. Wolta came over and began to fumble with the buckle on one of the straps. Jimmy sat without trying to regain line.

The fish was about a hundred and seventy yards out. Suddenly his first fury seemed to come back to him and the fish shot out of the water at an angle, covering what seemed to be twenty yards in a straight line, leaning up out of the water at an angle, lashing the sea to foam with his enormous tail.

I saw Jimmy's hands tight on the rod, saw the dried blood on his wrist. "Lay off, Wolta," he said thickly, hardly speaking above a whisper.

Wolta laughed his great gusty laugh and continued to work on the buckle. Jimmy told him to lay off again. Wolta paid no attention, only said, "I can bring that big baby in."

The fish was taking out line slowly. Jimmy took his right hand off the rod butt, swung it in a short hard arc. His fist hit Wolta in the mouth. Wolta took two stumbling steps back and sat down hard. Jimmy didn't even look around. He began



to fight back a few feet of line at a time. Wolta got up with a roar deep in his throat. For once that mechanical smile was gone from his bruised lips. He started toward Jimmy, big fists clenched.

The sailor, a hundred and twenty pound Mexican with dark soft eyes, suddenly appeared between Jimmy and Wolta. He looked mildly at Wolta and his hand was on the haft of his belt knife. Wolta stopped as though he had run into a wall.

He gave me a mechanical smile and said, "Okay, okay. Let the kid lose the fish."

Jimmy labored on. He looked as though he would keel over from exhaustion, sag unconscious in the harness.

One hundred and fifty yards. One hundred and twenty. One hundred. And he had been on the fish for over two hours. When the fish was within seventy feet of the boat it spun and went on out again, but only back to a hundred yards. I heard Jimmy's harsh sob as he began once more to bring it in. The marlin sounded, going down two hundred feet, laying there like a stone. Jimmy brought it up, foot by foot. The blue came up the last thirty feet at enormous speed and shot high into the air, seeming to hang over the boat for an instant, living beauty against the deep blue of the sky. When it hit the water the spray shot up against us.

It came in slowly from twenty yards, rolling to show its belly, all fight suddenly gone.

Two hours and forty-three minutes. Pedro gaffed it and it was killed and the sailor with a line around him went down into the sea and got a line on the fish, got a firm loop around the waist of the tail.

Wolta had to be asked to get on the line with us. Jimmy sagged limply in the harness, his eyes half closed, his hands hanging limp. A heavy drop of blood fell from the palm of his hand to the deck.

We got the monster over the side. It was the biggest blue I had ever seen. Not record of course. Record is seven hundred thirty-seven pounds, Bimini 1919.

Wolta made no sound of praise. Phlegmatic Pedro forgot himself so far as to pound Jimmy on his tired back with a brown fist, saying, "Muy hombre! Muy hombre!"

Literally translated it means, "Very man." But the sense is, "You are one hell of a man!"

We unstrapped Jimmy, and I actually had to help him in to the bunk. He gave me a weak, tired grin. We headed in.

Wolta said, "How about letting me fish on the way in."

Pedro said, "Too late, meester."

Wolta said, "Lot of fishing I got today. Just about one damn hour."

"You got yourself a big sail," I said.

The blue dwarfed our two fish. Wolta snorted and went and got a beer out of the ice locker.

Boating the blue should have been the high point of the day. Or even that punch in the mouth. But it wasn't.

The high point came after we had gotten up onto the pier. We were the last boat in. Dusk was coming. A man waits near the pier by the big scaffolding where they hang up the fish. He takes pictures, good pictures, for a moderate fee.

The crowd was beginning to drift away. They came back in a hurry when the big blue was hauled up onto the pier.

Wolta answered the questions. Wolta stuck out his chest. Though he didn't have the nerve to say so, he answered the questions in such a way that the crowd was led to believe that it was his fish.

The line was thrown over the scaffolding and it took four men to haul the blue clear of the ground. Pedro brought the rods up, leaned them against the side of the scaffolding. The blue was in the middle with the two sails on either side.

*(Continued on page 130)*





The instant the ball left his hand,  
Jud knew it was too good. . . .

*"There's only one spot open on this team — for a ninth-inning glory guy who'll throw away his tomorrows to make eight other guys' dreams come true. Are you big enough to take it?"*

## SUICIDE CHUCKER

AL MACHEN said, "Nobody takes you on waivers in your own league. The Owls release you outright. So you come over and ask *me* for a job." He laughed harshly. "That's one for the book, Conner."

Jud Conner, big and lean and sober-eyed, looked at the smaller man. Machen hadn't changed much. The same hard-lined features and cold blue eyes. The lines a little deeper, maybe, a little more bitter.

Machen smiled crookedly. "You figure the Falcons would try anything. Is that it, Conner?"

"Your outfit is short on pitchers, Al, and short on money." The big man shrugged, hiding the dull hurt inside. "I'd come pretty cheap, of course. You couldn't lose much."



Machen's face went bleak. "I lost plenty on you once, Conner." His voice cracked hoarsely. "I lost about everything."

Jud Conner flushed. It was true, in a sense. The day he'd pitched that final game for the Owls, Al Machen had lost a pennant, and his job as Owl manager. And now he'd sunk about as far as a man could go—boss of the futile Falcons.

Machen sat there a moment, his face turned aside. They were in the manager's office. Above them sprawled the ancient stands, deserted now in the gathering darkness. Not in thirty years, Jud was thinking, had those stands seen a pennant waving from the flagpole.

The manager turned, the bitterness lingering in his voice. "You never was anything but a busher, Conner. You oughta quit prowling around the big leagues and go back where you belong." He paused, eyes narrowing. "But I'll give you a trial, with one thing strictly understood. No matter what detail you get, there'll be no complaints. You'll handle the chores I assign, and like it."

Jud said, "Fix up a contract, Al. I'll sign."

He signed slowly. He was a Falcon, for a while at least—under the whip hand of a man who hated him. It wasn't a pleasant outlook, but it was the last escape from the downhill road to the bushes. He was nearly thirty now, and if he ever hit that road again, he'd never come back. . . .

He met the Falcons in the dressing room next day. They were all he'd expected—a motley patchwork of misfits, doubtful rookies, has-beens who never had been much. After a month of the season, they were resting solidly in last place.

Hank Norman, the paunchy first baseman, looked up and leered, "Welcome to the junk heap, Conner. From what I hear, pal, this is where you belong."

A bulky, graying man growled, "Shud-dup, Norman." He turned to Jud with-

out warmth. "I'm Burnett, the catcher. We'll be seein' each other."

"Right regular, I hope," Jud said. He knew all about Ox Burnett. The man had been a great receiver once, before he'd started hitting the bottle too often.

Two kids came around. One was tall and dark, the other stocky and blondish. The dark one said, "I'm Tony Fuqua. Play shortstop. This is Buddy Mayer, second base." He stuck out a hand. "We're right proud to see you."

Jud shook hands. They were nice kids, he could see, and very young. He knew about them too. They'd been brought up together this year from Class AA.

Mayer spoke up. "Them Owls must forget easy. I remember how you pitched that no-hitter last year."

Fuqua said, "I dunno what happened, mister, to put you in a slump." He flushed, a little abashed. "But we'll be pulling for you to make a comeback."

"Thanks," Jud grinned. "It'll be a help."

When they were gone, his grin faded. What had happened was something he alone knew—and something he'd like to forget. But the memory was too vivid, even now. . . .

For a while, his first year in the big time had gone well. Seven wins in his first ten starts, one of them a no-hitter. The papers had made a lot of that no-hitter. The big man had suddenly found himself, they'd said, after seven toiling years in the minors.

Then he'd had a three-week layoff with an ankle injury. And after that he'd never seemed able to regain his winning stride. His percentage hadn't been too low, but the contrast with his earlier triumphs had made it look bad. And the press had backed up. Perhaps, they'd suggested, the pennant pressure was too much for the lanky boy from the bushes. Still a fair chucker, they admitted, but certainly not a man to put in there when



it counted—when the blue chips were down.

That was how things stood when he walked out that bleak October afternoon to pitch against the Bears—for the pennant.

IT WAS one of those rare things. The Owls and the Bears had finished in a tie, and this was it. Sudden death. One game—for the flag.

Before it started, Al Machen, third-base playing manager, came to the mound. "It's all yours today, kid. I'm counting on you to go the route."

And seeing the man's harried look, Jud understood. Machen, never a crowd favorite, had been under heavy fire as a manager. The fans had seen an eight-game lead melt away in the closing weeks, and they didn't like it. They didn't like the choice of pitchers today either, Jud realized. They didn't know that the crippled mound corps was actually down to the last man—Jud Conner.

The game began. For three innings Jud marched the Bear hitters back to the dugout, allowing only two men to reach first. In the third he broke the hook past the first man for a third strike, got the next one on a feeble pop fly, and fanned the last one swinging.

"You got it today, kid," Machen told him as they went in.

Then in their half the Owls bunched a pair of hits with a walk and a Bear error to score two runs. And Jud went back with a good warm feeling. He'd lost quite a few ball games this season, but today he was going to win the big one.

Later, it seemed like a weird, grimly comic blunder that couldn't have happened. He had one man out when he and Machen ran together on a dinky pop fly—and Machen stepped on his foot. It wasn't much. No spike tear in the shoe, no wound to show any damage. Just a broken toe, that was all.

Only Jud didn't know it then. He pitched on, trying to ignore the little stabbing sensation in the foot. He had to finish this one.

And as it grew into a numbing throb, he failed to realize what he was doing to his arm. Later, he understood. To compensate for the weakness in his foot, he was putting an unnatural jerk into his pitching motion—slowly tearing precious ligaments with every throw.

It was crazy, of course. But he kept going, prodded by the fiercely pleading chant from Al Machen. The Bears began to touch him often. He was in trouble almost every inning. Yet somehow he got through the bad spots, yielding a run only once, holding that slender lead.

In the ninth it happened, with fearful quickness. The shoulder alive at last to the knifing agony, the cold sweat pouring, his control suddenly deserted him. And before a snarling Machen rushed a relief in there, the Bears had blasted five runs across the plate—and the game was lost.

He walked inside, moments later, amid the stunned, bitter silence of his mates. It wasn't much consolation, but they'd soon know the reason anyway. When the trainer got a look at that foot—

Machen's voice sounded harshly behind him, "In my office, Conner."

In the little room, the manager turned, his face oddly twisted. "You were all I had today, Conner, and you knew it . . . and you let me down." His voice cracked with hoarse anger. "I'm letting you know right now—you and me are through. Don't count on being with the Owls next year."

Jud opened his mouth. He was going to say, "Okay, I made a big mistake. I should have let you know what was wrong out there. But I'm not the only one to blame. You hogged my fly ball, for no reason. And when you did—"

And suddenly he knew he'd never say it. Machen was a bad loser, well known



for his black moods. He might cool off and get over this later. But if Machen learned about the injury, the guy would drop him for sure. There was no sympathy or sentiment in the man's makeup. To him a crippled ball player was simply a piece of damaged goods.

Or suppose Machen did let him go anyway. If he spoke up, the "lame arm" report would get around. He'd be shunned by every manager in the league.

So he'd say nothing for a while. When he was ready to prove himself physically sound again, there'd be time for everyone to learn the whole story. And Machen could eat those words. They ought to have a pretty sour taste by then.

AS IT turned out, it didn't matter about Machen. Two weeks later, the Owls fired Machen. Pressure from the irate fans, the papers said. The manager had pulled one boner too many—keeping a faltering pitcher in there, with a pennant in the balance.

By that time, however, Jud faced a new worry. He'd gone to a private doctor and learned the full truth. The toe was fractured. Worse, the strain on his shoulder had done serious damage to the deltoid muscle. Would he be able to pitch next season? Possibly, the physician told him, with proper treatment and rest. But it was no certainty.

So Jud kept silent. Maybe it wasn't smart—but he'd spent a long time in those bushes, and he didn't want to go back. The minors hadn't much future for a married man with two kids. If he wasn't ready by spring, they'd find it out soon enough.

He wasn't ready; he knew that as soon as he hit camp. The foot was okay, but heat and massage and the months of rest hadn't fully restored the shoulder. It needed more time, with moderate exercise.

He worked the arm cautiously, holding back the heavy stuff. And as the days

passed, he found Rouse, the new manager, watching him with a critical eye. Several times Jud was about to confide in Rouse, but something in the man's cold, calculating manner stopped him. Rouse was rebuilding the Owls, and he had a lot of good twirlers on the string this year. Somehow Jud got the idea Rouse wouldn't bother to take chances on a sore-arm chucker.

They went back north and opened the season. The arm was stronger, but not strong enough. Jud lost five games in six starts. And Rouse called him in.

The manager was brief and to the point. "You're coming too slow, Conner. If you were a little younger, maybe—" He shrugged and finished bluntly, "I'm asking waivers."

And after that, Jud figured, it was a little too late to start making explanations. . . .

So now he was right back where he'd been before, playing ball for Al Machen. Only things were different now—and the difference was all bad.

It had been a bitter dose, going back to Machen. But he had a stubborn notion that there was plenty of big-time pitching left in that wing. Rejected everywhere else, he had only one place left to find out. This was it.

They went outside. Ox Burnett came over to Jud and said, "We might as well go over the signs. No telling what might happen on this outfit. You might even pitch today."

Machen appeared suddenly. "Never mind the signs. Conner lobs 'em over for batting practice today." He scowled at Jud, as if inviting an argument.

Jud shrugged and walked to the hill. He didn't mind the lowly job. His arm had reached the stage where it needed more work. In three of his games with the Owls, he'd got in less than five innings. Tossing them up to the batters would help.



Later, he watched them play the Cats. The Falcons put on quite an exhibition. They got a four-run lead and then proceeded to blow it with a display of farcical errors and bush-league pitching. The final score was 13-5.

They were a pretty hopeless outfit, Jud reflected. There was power in spots, but little speed or defense. At third, Machen was solid, but a step slower than last year. Hank Norman could hit, but his work at first was sloppy. The kids at second, Fuqua and Mayer, were fast and eager, but erratic. In the outfield, only Howell, a youngster, could cover his territory. Schein and York were castoffs, and looked it.

Yet the greatest weakness of all, Jud decided, was the pitching. Carnahan, the only winner, was out with bone chips. Three of the hurlers were past thirty-five, three others wild kids who belonged in Class C.

And that, Jud hoped, was where he came in.

A WEEK went by, and he didn't come in for anything more strenuous than warming up the batters. There was one consoling fact. He could feel the old looseness creeping back into his shoulder, the sense of power without straining for it. He began to turn one loose now and then, just to see what would happen. And nothing happened. The arm felt fine.

He knew, then. For the first time this year, he was really ready to go.

Another pleasant thought followed. Perhaps Machen had planned it this way. Maybe the guy, for all his personal enmity, had somehow sensed that Jud needed this work to recover his touch.

He spoke to Machen about it. "I could go in there any time, Al. The wing is really right."

Machen looked at him coldly. "You don't like working for batting practice?"

"It's okay," Jud said. "It's just that—"

"We can fix that," Machen cut in. "Tomorrow you hit fungoes." He walked away.

Jud stood there, a little pale with a sudden, fearful knowledge. Machen didn't intend to pitch him at all. Machen had hired him for a flunky around the place. With the dough he was paying, Jud thought grimly, the guy could afford to use him to carry bats.

He recalled Machen's words: ". . . no complaints . . . you'll handle the chores I assign, and like it."

And that didn't leave him much choice, Jud reflected bitterly. He could stay on—or he could quit, and be out of baseball for good.

He considered the latter idea. And the answer was pretty simple. His young family had been expensive, his salaries modest. He'd saved little, certainly not enough to start a business. He knew nothing but baseball. Out of the game, he'd be a man without a skill or earning power to give his wife and kids a decent living.

So he'd stick. Somewhere, sometime, Machen would have to use him.

His chance came two days later, but not exactly the kind he had in mind. They were playing the Hawks, losing in their best sandlot style. And in the seventh Machen called him in.

"You been wanting to show your stuff, Conner," the manager told him. "Let's see it now."

Jud smiled bleakly. A fine spot, indeed, to show anything. The score was 10-0, two men on, nobody out! But he was in the ball game, and that was something.

He took his practice throws and signaled he was ready. Ox Burnett squatted and asked for the straight one over the inside. Jud stretched, eyed the Hawk runners, and whipped it in there. It was a nice fast pitch. The only trouble was, it hit the dirt about ten feet in front of the



plate. The crowd howled in derision.

Ox managed to stop it and hold the runners on first and second. He walked out, frowning. "Don't strain yourself, pal. This ball game's already down the drain. Just gimme a little control, and maybe we can get home by dark."

Jud smiled soberly. "I guess I had to get that one out of my system, Ox. I'll pitch you some ball now."

He pitched some very good ball. He chipped a corner with the hook. He fed a close one across the letters, and the hitter popped to Mayer at second. The next man took a strike and a ball, then tried to blast the curve. The ball came to Jud with a handle on it. He whirled and threw to second. Tony Fuqua, coming from short, relayed swiftly, completing the double play in style.

The kid shortstop came in grinning at Jud. "You're going great in there, mister. We coulda used you a lot sooner."

Norman laughed. "Them Hawks got all the hits they want today. Hell, if they didn't ease up, they'd miss their train tonight."

The Falcons went up and took their cuts. Nobody hit one past the infield, and Jud went back.

It was all very hopeless and futile, but he pitched as if the game hung on every throw. His arm felt good, and he obeyed Ox's signs with careful accuracy. He had a mild flurry of trouble in the eighth when York juggled a fly in right and the next hitter singled. But he retired two men to prevent any scoring. In the ninth he didn't allow a Hawk to reach first.

They came in for their last bats, and Ox said, "At last, a chucker with some control. What you been savin' him for, Machen—the world series?"

Machen glared, "You're paid to catch, Burnett. I'll handle the fine points."

The Falcons didn't score and it was a 10-0 whitewash. But Jud went in slightly heartened. It had been a creditable per-

formance, he thought, one that should entitle him to work again.

They traveled west, and he waited hopefully for an assignment.

On the fourth day he got one. He entered the game in the eighth against the Cats, with the Falcons trailing 12-3. He finished it without giving a base hit.

Twice more while they were on the road, Machen called him to the mound. He took over in the sixth against the Blues, facing a 14-5 deficit and loaded bases. He yielded one run before he got out of that hole, but pitched the rest of the game without further scoring. The Trojans were leading them 9-1 when he relieved three days later, in the seventh. He retired six men in order, two of them by strikeouts.

By that time, the whole thing was very plain. Always the pattern had been the same—a relief call in the late innings with the game already hopelessly lost. Machen was using him for one purpose only—to save the other pitchers, to allow them a little extra rest when the game was given up anyway.

It was incredible that a man would carry a personal grudge that far. But there was no other explanation.

And it was, Jud decided, a little more than a man could take. A season of this and he'd be a forgotten man in baseball. Machen could discard him, and there wouldn't be a manager in the country above Class C who'd have him. As a free agent, he might have a chance to land with some Triple-A club and work his way back. But his years were against him, and he didn't have much time left to get started. He had to get loose now.

**H**E WENT to Machen that night in the manager's hotel room. "Al, I want a release."

Machen looked at him narrowly. "I've decided to keep you, Conner. You're gonna be a help, after all."



"I know," Jud said. "Pitching out the string when it don't count." He knew it was useless, but he added, "I'll be thirty in October. I gotta have my chance before it's too late."

Machen looked at his cigar. "I gave you a chance once, Conner—to win a pennant. Remember?"

Jud felt a quick pulse of anger. That line was wearing pretty thin. He said, "I could tell you something about that game, Machen. It might surprise you—"

Machen sneered. "Go on. What's the big alibi?"

"Skip it." Jud shrugged. "I'll make you a trade—"

"You can skip that too." Machen tamped out his cigar. "You belong to the Falcons. You signed a contract. What can you do?"

Jud said, "I can quit baseball."

"For what?" Machen snorted. "Riding a plow at day wages?"

Jud winced a little. The guy had hit it pretty close, at that. But he said, "I couldn't be any worse off, Machen. I'll make you a proposition. Before the week's out, give me a starting assignment, a reasonable chance to finish the game. If I win, I get my regular turn. If I lose—"

He didn't finish. But he knew he wouldn't stay on to take the kind of duty Machen would hand out.

The manager's eyes smoldered with something like hatred. "It's an idea, Conner. I'll think it over."

Jud left. As he stepped into the hall, he heard a door closing softly. He stood there a moment. This section was all occupied by the players. He wondered if one of them had been outside, listening.

He discarded the idea. His and Machen's voices couldn't have been heard through the heavy door. The real explanation was something else, he decided. It was a bit after hours. Somebody, coming in late, was being very quiet about it.

He spent four anxious days waiting for

Machen's answer. They finished the trip and went home. Then suddenly the answer came. They were opening the home stand against the Grays, and before the game Machen walked up to him and said, "Warm up, Conner. You pitch today." Then he was gone, giving his attention elsewhere.

Hank Norman laughed mirthlessly. "That guy really picks the spots for you, busher. This one he figures to lose, anyway."

Jud said quietly, "Meaning what?"

"The Grays are tough any time, my friend. Today they use Farmer Jones." Norman shrugged. "This outfit beat the Farmer once, about three years ago. An accident of some kind."

Jud said grimly, "Watch close today, fat boy. You might see another accident."

It was good talk, but he felt shaky as he walked to the practice rubber. Machen had picked him a spot indeed. These Grays were leading the league. They had a murderers' row stacked seven deep. And Farmer Jones was their best, a man who rarely lost, even to the best teams.

His jaw tightened stubbornly. He'd asked for it, and he wasn't backing down. As long as he had to beat somebody, it might as well be the best.

He was still holding on to that at game time. He'd given the arm a good workout, and it felt warm and loose. These Grays, he told himself, would work for their base hits today.

Ox Burnett came out. "Try throwin' 'em past these guys, Conner, and they'll undress you. Just gimme that thing right where I ask for it, and we'll have a ball game."

Jud nodded. A dour character, that Ox, but a good man to have back there. Too many trips to the bar had softened the big man's body, but not his brain. He still knew every hitter in the league as he knew the palm of his hand. It was going to be a big help.



The leadoff man stepped up, a short, stocky kid named Noblock. Jud threw the fast one, a touch low. He tried it again and nicked a corner. Noblock fouled the hook into the dirt. Ox called for the floater, high and wide, and Jud tossed it in.

It was clearly a bad ball, but Noblock swung on it. Mayer took the tall fly at second. Jud smiled to himself. Ox had called the turn perfectly.

The second man, Starnes, gave little trouble. He dribbled one to short, and Fuqua threw him out. Joe Libke, the Grays' center fielder, was tougher. He fouled off half a dozen good ones, then got hold of the fast ball and peppered it inside first. Hank Norman's half-hearted lunge was a step short, and the ball went for a single.

Jud hid his disappointment. He'd have to allow a certain amount for that loose defense.

Mick Hogan came up. Ox walked out and told Jud, "This guy's got no weakness. All we can do is bait him with a change of pace and say a prayer."

The count was two-one when Jud served up the slow one to order. Hogan measured it coolly and took an awesome cut. The ball rocketed. It was a tremendous clout, but too high for damage. Ross Howell took it in deep center, and the inning was over.

AT THE dugout, Buddy Mayer chirped, "Let's get started. Shucks, them guys are just about our size—against that kinda pitching."

Norman drawled, "Don't get excited, sonny. Them Grays nearly always hold their guns the first time around—to keep the crowd from leaving too early."

Jud sat down, soberly thoughtful. He wondered how many of them, like Norman, had conceded this game before it started.

He shook it off and watched Farmer

Jones. What he saw wasn't encouraging. The fabled redhead was a smart, tireless pitcher with power to burn. Easily, almost casually, he disposed of the Falcons in order. He made one pop up and struck out two more, and he'd hardly got up a good sweat. Beating the Farmer, Jud reflected, would be quite a feat.

But if it could be done, this was the day, he was thinking two innings later. The Falcons still hadn't touched the Farmer for anything better than an outfield fly. Yet Jud felt a strange hope. He'd been doing all right himself. No Gray had reached first since that opening round. His arm was strong and his control had never been better. If the Falcons could eke out a run or so somewhere—

He pitched to Starnes. The hitter got a piece of the half-speeder and splatted it down the third-base line. The ball bounded high, and Machen had to wait for it. Starnes beat the throw by half a step.

Jud shook off a tiny finger of doubt. It had been a difficult play. Machen might use dirty methods in his office, but the guy would play it straight on the field.

Libke took a fast one and two curves. And they were all balls. Jud got the cripple over, then tried to break the hook in there. It missed by a hair, and Libke walked. The stands moaned, and the Grays dugout yammered noisily. Machen stood at third, making no move.

Jud faced Hogan. He fed the slugger a hook over the outside. And the Mick slammed it into the right field bleachers—foul by less than ten feet.

Ox waddled out slowly. He squinted at Jud. "The slow one won't work twice on this guy. Can you put a little more fuzz on that fast ball?"

Jud considered. Come to think of it, he hadn't really cut loose with the old swift once this year. Maybe he still had it; maybe he didn't. But this was a good time to find out.



He stretched slowly, letting the muscles relax for an instant. Then he gathered the sinews of body and shoulder and poured them into the pitch. The ball streaked in, knee high. Hogan swung and missed. Jud wafted a curve, a bit outside, then exploded the heavy one in there again, right across the letters. Hogan cut at it murderously—and he was out.

And Jud had his answer. You didn't throw them past that Hogan without having something on them. The power was there again, to use when he needed it.

He employed it once more that inning, after he'd got one man on a fly ball. Klinger, the batsman, waited out a full count, and Jud let him have the high hard one. The ball was in Ox's mitt when Klinger swung.

The stands applauded heartily as Jud walked in. It was a strange sound, he reflected, one he hadn't heard in a long time.

There was a subtle change in the air at the dugout, too, a moment of awed silence. Then Machen snapped, "Get on them bases, Schein. We got to have runs to win a ball game."

Schein didn't get on; but Howell did, whipping into one of the Farmer's best curves and slicing it down the third-base line for two bases. Norman was out on a lofty pop-up, and Machen stepped in there. He swung himself into a one-two hole, and then when the Farmer tried to sneak the hook by for a called strike, Machen laid wood into it. The ball skittered to right center, and Howell raced home, hitting the dirt with yards to spare.

York's lusty swing got him nothing but a flyout, but the crowd was still yelping gayly when they took the field. The Falcons had scored on Farmer Jones.

They went through the fifth, the sixth, the seventh—and the run stood up.

In the eighth, fresh trouble threatened. Libke singled and Norman fumbled

Hogan's twisting ground ball and was late to the bag. Then Schein dropped a shallow fly, and there were three on and nobody out.

Jud went to work. He struck out Klinger on five pitches, made the next man pop to Mayer, and when the next hitter slashed one through the box, Fuqua made a brilliant stop and forced the runner at second for the third out.

He went back for the ninth.

IT WAS the Farmer himself who led off in that ninth. He got a handle on one, and the ball slithered between first and second for a hungry single. Noblock blooped a tall one deep behind third. Jud heard Machen sound off, but evidently Schein didn't. The pair of them crashed.

Schein got up, shaken but unhurt. Machen tried to get up, and crumpled.

The Falcons gathered. The trainer's verdict was swift. "Probably a fracture. Take him inside."

Machen couldn't argue. The ankle was swelling rapidly. He said, "Burnett's in charge." He looked at Ox, cold eyes intent. "Conner stays, no matter what."

They carried him in, and the game was resumed.

Jud toed the rubber grimly. He had his work cut out. Men on first and second, nobody down. All he had to do was get Starnes, Libke, and Hogan—just three of the greatest clutch hitters in the leagues.

He fired three of the fastest pitches he'd ever thrown, and two of them were strikes. Then he broke the hook a good foot over the outside corner. Starnes struck at it vainly and walked back.

Libke cut into the second pitch. Howell loped in and took the skyer.

Mick Hogan came to the platter, clear-eyed and calm. It was the real clutch, and that was the Mick's dish.

There wasn't much use fooling with the guy, Jud decided. So he poured the fast



one down the slot, too good to pass up. Hogan swung. The ball shot up, a twisting foul toward the Grays dugout. Ox swept off his mask and went after it. Jud measured the distance with his eye and knew the catcher had it. The third out . . . the ball game . . .

Then, suddenly, he saw something else. Two bats someone had carelessly left lying there, crossed on the ground. They were directly in Ox's path. The big man would make the catch, but his momentum would almost surely carry his feet into those bats . . . he'd fall crashing into the corner of the dugout . . .

There was a great hush. No one seemed to see the danger.

Jud's voice shattered the brittle silence: "Watch it, Ox—the bats!"

Ox wavered, his concentration broken. The ball skimmed off his glove. His eyes diverted downward, he saw the bats and skipped over them.

A murmur, half complaining, half puzzled, drifted through the stands. Ox walked back slowly, almost dazedly, retrieved his mask, and took his squat. He signaled for the hook, inside.

The instant the ball left his hand, Jud knew he'd made it a little too good. It broke across the plate, and Hogan gave it the business. A little sick, Jud stood and watched the white dot disappear.

He turned back, his brain cleared by a sudden wave of anger. A smart guy he'd turned out to be. He'd tossed one wrong pitch—and bought himself a ticket to oblivion. But before he left, he'd do one more little thing to carry with him.

He did it, fiercely and quickly. He mowed the hitter down on four pitched balls.

But it didn't matter much, he was thinking as he walked in. They were behind 3-1, and nobody took that kind of handicap and beat Farmer Jones.

Fuqua clapped him on the shoulder. "Forget it, mister. You pitched a hell of

a game. Win or lose, you're the top chucker in this outfit from here out."

Ox said, "Wrong again, sonny." They all looked at the catcher, startled. "Conner made an agreement with Machen," Ox told them. "He has to win today, or he's through." He turned to Jud. "The ventilator in that hotel door was open, pal. I heard it all, and all I got to say is you're one hell of a chump—" he grinned solemnly—"and just to show you the kind of chump I think you are, if Machen lets you go, he'll be huntin' him a new catcher too. I've played for that heel about as long as I want to, anyhow."

Hank Norman frowned. "Wait a minute. You mean the guy hollered you outa taking that last out—just to save your worthless hide—knowin' alla time he had to have this game!"

"Do I have to draw diagrams?"

There was a heavy silence.

Schein spoke, "If winnin' the ball game is all you need, Conner, take a seat and quit worryin'. Hell, we got our cuts comin' up, ain't we? What else do we need!"

Norman said gravely, "If somebody'll get on them sacks. I'll blast that Farmer's nothing ball into the cheap seats."

Mayer said, "I'll be on there, fat stuff. And you better keep that promise."

He grabbed a bat and strode out. He swung twice without touching the ball, then stepped into a bad one, completely off balance, and connected. The ball rolled feebly down the first-base line. Mayer ran like an antelope. He beat it out by an eyelash.

Later, it seemed funny, and a little incredible. Schein picked on the Farmer's fast one and drove it solidly over second for a single. Howell struck out swinging from the heels, and Hank Norman stepped in there. He looked terrible, missing two of the Farmer's neatest curve balls. And then the Farmer, grinning a little, rifled the fast one down the groove.

(Continued on page 126)





# NO-COUNT CHAMP

By JACK KOFOED

*Champion and untried bum, they faced each other in the makeshift ring—to write, in blood and red leather, one of the most thrilling and least known chapters in fistiana's long history!*

OVER fifty years ago a red-headed, sparrow-legged young man sailed from Australia to the United States. When he talked, which wasn't often, his accent was the Cockney dialect of the Liverpool docks.

In those days the voyage was a long and wearisome one. To kill time, some of the more energetic passengers arranged a boxing show. Since the sparrow-legged young man had the shoulders of a heavy-weight, and had shown more than a little skill at deck games, he was asked if he would take part. He agreed reluctantly, and was matched with a passenger named Parsons. The gimmick in this arrangement was that Parsons was the best amateur fighter in Australia and New Zealand, and had even held his own in exhibitions with top professionals.

Naturally, everybody wanted to bet on Parsons, because his fame had been bruited about. There was only one taker—a little, sly-eyed man in a checkered cap who, when odds of five to one were offered, wagered something better than two hundred pounds. He was considered simple-minded.

A ring was pitched on the main deck in the hot sun. Parsons, a solidly built, athletic young man, jumped in, grinning

widely. When his opponent appeared, there was a burst of laughter.

The redhead's shoulders and chest were tremendous, but he tapered away to a narrow waist, and he had the skinniest pair of legs ever seen on a human being. More than ever, the man in the checkered cap was considered a complete fool for having risked so much money on a freak.

When time was called, Parsons rushed confidently. Sparrow-legs sidestepped, whipping in, almost simultaneously it seemed, a left hook to the body and a right cross to the jaw. He didn't seem to put any great effort into the blows, but experts noticed the tremendous wrist snap that went with them.

Parsons crashed to the deck, so completely out that there was no need for the referee to count. He was carried to his corner, and the fellow in the checkered cap collected his winnings of a thousand pounds.

The rueful losers began asking questions.

"You'll be hearin' of this lad," the little man said. "Strike me blind if he ain't the heavyweight champion of the world some day. You wait an' see if Bob Fitzsimmons don't beat the best they've got in America!"





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## FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 124)

It was a mistake. Norman's bat flashed—and the ball rode serenely into the farthest left field stands—for the ball game. . . .

Some time later, after the noisy glee had abated, they were gathered around the rubbing table. Al Machen was saying, "They're gonna put a cast on this thing. I'll be back in a few weeks. Meantime, Steck can handle that third base."

He looked up at Jud. There was a strange difference in the manager's face. The cold blue eyes weren't so cold any more. "It's a funny thing, Conner. It came to me all at once after I got inside. That run-together we had last year . . . Schein stepped on my foot . . . and I remembered, I stepped on yours."

Jud said, "You mean your toe was broken, too?"

"No. Ankle fracture." Machen smiled solemnly. "So it was a broken toe . . . and you hurt your arm throwing after that, didn't you?"

Jud nodded, a little embarrassed somehow.

Machen growled, "And you kept quiet about it afterwards." He shook his head. "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard of." But he was smiling, a funny, misty sort of smile. "I dunno what to say, kid. I guess apologies would sound kind of silly . . ."

Schein broke the awkward silence. "You know what? We just beat the best pitcher in the league. Hell, we must have a ball club and didn't know it!"

Machen said, "I got a feeling we're gonna be a long way out of that cellar in a month or so." He turned to Jud. "Starting now, kid, your pay goes up. We can't have our meal ticket worrying about money troubles."

Jud grinned contentedly. He wasn't worrying about anything now. He was back in baseball—to stay.



(Continued from page 98)

that was all for Near. Fin drove Jungen in with a long fly, and the knuckle-ball pitcher the Reds were using shackled the rest of the lineup. It was 5-0, however.

The Reds got one back in the fourth, and two in the sixth.

"Come on," Doc shouted, "let's get some more runs." They couldn't buy a hit off the flutter ball, and the Reds got another run in the seventh. That made it 5-4. Doc began to sweat, but he kept riding the Reds. Dock sent Smoky to the bullpen.

In the eighth the hard-hitting Reds put the first man on with a single, and that was enough for Doc. He pulled Flowers and put Smoky in. Smoky, with only two innings to go, bore down. He struck out Jones, got Felt to pop up, and struck out Farley.

The Acorns didn't get a thing in the ninth, and Smoky had the bottom half

with a one-run lead. He was still rolling, and Corcoran went down hitless.

They threw two pinch-hitters at Smoky, but they might as well have been pitchers as Smoky was concerned. One of them grounded out weakly to second, and the other fouled out to Howie Fritz.

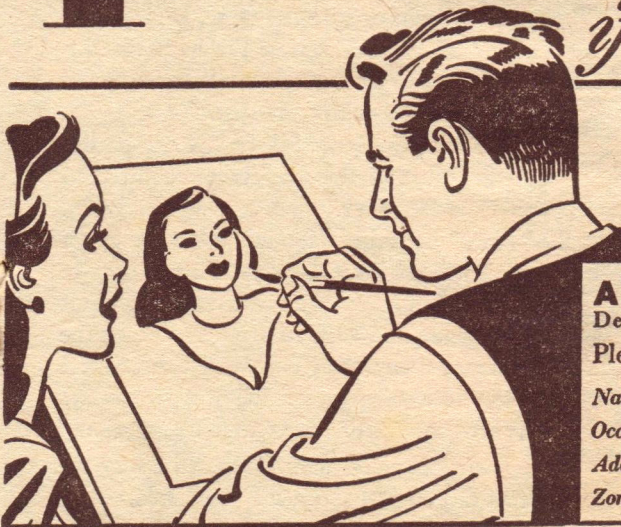
**T**HE ACORNS' locker room was jubilant between games. They had won their three out of four.

Ziggy pitched the game of his life that day, but the Reds were sullen, grim, and determined. They fought for every inch, battled every ball. Roy Nicely, on the mound, was putting his arm into every pitch.

The fifth came and went, and still the game was a scoreless deadlock as Ziggy and Nicely fought it out.

Cowboy Phillips led off for the Acorns in the top of the eighth. He drove a hot ground ball at Stubby Gomer.

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## FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

"Look out," Doc screamed as though Gomer were about to get run down by an express, "it bites!"

Gomer took his eye off the ball for just a fraction of a second, and it hit the heel of his glove. Stubby scrambled after it, but by the time he picked it up Phillips was in.

"There they go," Doc chortled from third, and he was right. The Reds infield fell apart under the tension and the jockeying. McElroy drove one at O'Reilly, and he let it go through his legs in trying to hustle it into a double play. There were men on first and second.

Doc called for the bunt, and Blaney dragged a nice one. Nicely and Watkins both went for it, and collided. They fell down with the ball between them, and the bases were loaded.

Nicely lost his edge, and Fritz doubled. When the dust finally settled, the Acorns had scored six times.

The Acorns mobbed Doc in the dressing room. They hugged him, beat him on the head with newspapers, and carried him around the locker room.

Doc held up a hand and finally got quiet. "Boys," he said solemnly, "I told you that win or lose the pennant, if you'd play ball in this series I'd hand in my resignation. You played ball, and I'm a man who keeps my promises."

An uneasy silence fell on the clubhouse. Again most of the glances were directed to Pete Wheeler. Pete stepped forward. "Doc," he said, "sometimes a bunch of guys will do funny things. Things they're ashamed of later. You called the turn that first game and kept us from throwing the pennant away. On behalf of the team, I want to apologize for the way we acted. We want you to forget that resignation."

Doc looked at them. "That the way the rest of you feel about it?" he asked.

And by the cheer they gave him, Doc knew that his team was with him!



## THE THUNDER ROAD

(Continued from page 106)

The black Auto-Union roared around the upper curve and down the hill. He used a lot of brakes on the dry pavement before he hit the oil. He went into a power glide that took him out onto the rough shoulder. He bounced high, and fought it back onto the straightaway. Rex, nose and nose with Maserati, hit the oil with sickening speed. Oil spray rose high as they slid. The Maserati bounded, end over end, out across the wide field and Rex straightened slightly, turned to hit the wide shallow ditch at a better angle. The Special bounded high, landed on all four wheels, still under power. He swung it in a long rough curve back through the ditch and up onto the highway. The front right corner sagged from the broken suspension, but the car still ran.

It was then that Steve fainted.

As it turned out later, the broken suspension cut Rex's speed on the curves. In the remaining four laps the Auto-Union stayed well ahead. If the race had been two miles longer, the Cisitalia would have nosed out Rex, forcing him back into third place. As it was, he took second.

He climbed out of the Special, his legs shaking. We had to cut the gloves off his hands because his pulped flesh clung to the glove linings.

And while we did that, he stood and grinned at Steve.

He told us at dinner, as he ate gingerly with his bandaged hands. His words didn't mean a lot. Something about seeing her in the car. Something about feeling dead inside ever since Will had taken the fence. And he said that after the cross-country race, ovals would be tame, that is, if I'd take him back on.

I looked at Steve's face, at the softness of her lips, at the answer in her eyes as she looked at Rex.

I sighed with heavy resignation and wound up another fork-load of spaghetti.

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(Continued from page 114)

The man had his camera set up. I wasn't interested in being in a picture with Wolta. The crowd got back out of the line of the picture. Wolta put his heavy arm on Jimmy's shoulder and said, to the crowd at large, "Tomorrow the kid and I are going out and get another one." And he laughed.

Somehow he had edged over so that he was closer to the blue than Jimmy was. I smiled wryly as I thought of Wolta showing copies of the picture to his friends.

Jimmy said tightly, "Hold it!" He held up his hand. The photographer ducked out from under his black cloth looking puzzled.

Jimmy shrugged Wolta's arm off his shoulder. He said, "Wolta, we aren't going out tomorrow or any other day. Together. And suppose you have your own picture taken with your own fish and get the hell away from mine!"

The crowd was hushed and expectant. A woman giggled. Wolta looked pale and dangerous. He said, "Kid, you shouldn't talk that way to me. I'm warning you!"

Jimmy doubled one of his torn hands and said, "Move off!"

Wolta slowly relaxed. "Okay, okay. If that's the way you want it." He went off into the crowd.

Jimmy looked directly at me and said, "Mr. Thompson, I'd like you in this picture and Pedro and the other two men."

Just before the camera clicked I glanced at Jimmy beside me. Tears of anger still stood in his eyes, but his chin was up and he was smiling.

I still have the picture. It's before me right now. And when I look at the expression on Jimmy's face I'm reminded of the expressions I saw on many faces several years ago.

The faces of the men when we dropped into that prison camp in the Philippines and liberated them.

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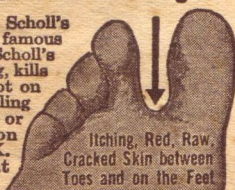
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