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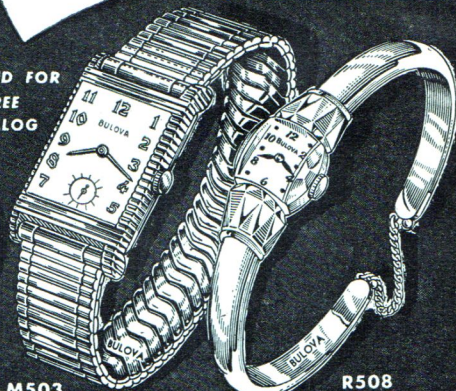
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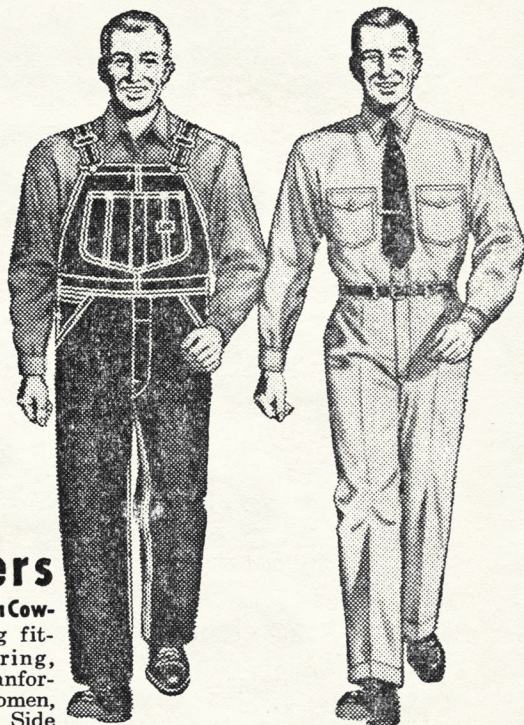
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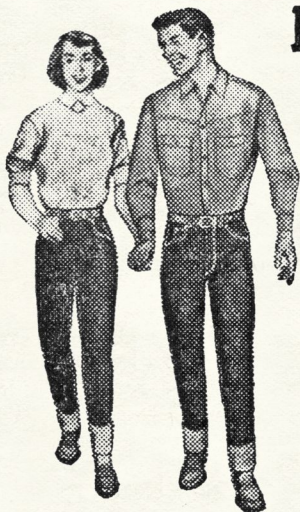
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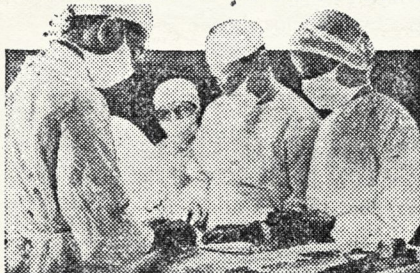
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Unlike spying for the military, there is no danger or physical hazards placed in the way of the football scout. He doesn't even have to pay for his ticket. The home team goes out of its way to see to it that the scout is shown every courtesy, knowing that its own observers are being given similar treatment that afternoon in the scout's home stadium. Scouting has done much to speed up the game. Two teams that know a lot about each other's style of play don't have to waste the first quarter in feeling each other out.

It's only in the last twenty-five years that football scouting has become a dignified, honorable profession. Before that the grid-iron Hawkshaw had to take the same chances as the military spy. He would equip himself with a pair of binoculars and climb a nearby tree, where, properly camouflaged with twigs and leaves stuck into his hat, he would attempt to follow the action on the field. Bands of students would prowl the area surrounding a stadium with the express purpose of ferreting out such spies. If caught, the scout was usually given

(Continued on page 8)

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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 6)

a brisk beating and warned never to set foot in town again.

It is fortunate that good sense has finally prevailed, otherwise the best scout in the business would be unable to practice his craft. He is Jack Lavelle, chief scout for Notre Dame and the New York Giants. Lavelle's weight has been estimated as over two hundred seventy-five pounds, hardly the figure for surreptitiously climbing a tree. Jack played under Rockne, from 1924 to 1928. He goes all the way back to the glorious era of the Four Horsemen. Injuries kept him from clinching a regular berth in the line.

It was Rockne who gave him his first scouting assignment. "That was in 1928, or one hundred pounds ago," says Jack. The target was Army, who was to play Southern Methodist and Yale before tackling Notre Dame. "But I don't know how to scout," Jack says he told Rockne.

"You don't have to know anything," Rockne replied in exasperation. "All you have to do is look at them and come back and tell me what you saw." Evidently Lavelle told Rockne plenty, for he scouted Army every year since then, until the discontinuation of their rivalry in 1947.

Scouting has come a long way since the day when Rockne casually said to Lavelle, "Come back and tell me what you saw." It is now an exact science, complete with blank questionnaires and diagrams neatly ruled off into miniature gridirons. These are bound together and known in the trade as a scout book.

The scout is very particular as to the location of his seat. He scorns the expensive pews, which are low and on the fifty yard line. The fan who pays a scalper his birthright for these supposedly desirable seats is looked upon with amused contempt by the veteran observer. The best place to view the game, they say, is from the press box or at either goal line, as high as possible, so as to give something of an aerial view. Only from this position can an observer get the overall picture and see how each man moves into his assignment. Powerful binoculars bring the field up close when the scout desires to study individual characteristics.

THE EDITORS

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"I signed up for I. C. S. training while working in a plant. Right away things happened. You might say that promotions outstripped my ability to keep up with my I. C. S. lessons. Recently I was made foreman of the welding setup and Assembly Department, and now I'm in charge of training three other men for promotion. Naturally, I'm determined to finish my I. C. S. training."

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MIND OVER MAYHEM



*He never asks the stars for his destiny—
but tells them theirs!*



By JOHN DREBINGER

SOME years ago a veteran baseball scribe, one of the most picturesque of that era, sent an extraordinary telegram to his newspaper.

That afternoon, Harry Neily, accompanying the Chicago Cubs on a mid-summer road tour, had filed his daily stint at the ball park and after the game returned to his hotel. That evening, after a hearty meal, Harry stepped out with some convivial companions, for Harry was one of the most popular scriveners of his time and his friends were legion around the cities of the two major leagues.

He felt reasonably certain that nothing of any great moment in the baseball world would occur that night and he meant to relax in his own inimitable fashion. But that night something momentous did happen.

The Cubs fired Rogers Hornsby as their manager.

Hornsby at the time was one of the outstanding players of the period, a top-ranking second baseman, one of the greatest batters of all time, certainly the greatest of all right-handed hitters. Only a few years previously the late William G. Wrigley, chewing gum magnate and owner of the Cubs, had laid \$200,000 cash on the line, along with five players, to complete the purchase of the Peerless Rajah from the Braves. A little later, having become dissatisfied with Joe McCarthy as the manager of his club, the elder Wrigley deposed Marse Joe and elevated Hornsby into the pilot's seat.

But now the elder Wrigley had passed away and in recent weeks there had been unmistakable signs that all was not going well in the relations between the Cubs' front office and the blunt, outspoken Hornsby. William L. Veeck Sr., father of the young Bill Veeck, who himself later became head man of the Cleveland Indians, was

the president of the Cubs and it was no great secret that the elder Veeck and the Rajah did not see eye to eye on how the club should be run. Apparently, the showdown came that evening and Veeck summarily dismissed Hornsby, naming Charlie Grimm in his place.

It was a whale of a story and the Chicago writers, traveling with the club, bent over their typewriters to pound out their stories. All but the absent Neily.

"Where the devil is Harry?" asked one of his colleagues.

"Do you think we ought to file for him?"

"Gosh, that's a tough one to answer. Maybe he also has heard about the report and is filing from some other Western Union office in town."

There is at all times a sort of protective spirit among baseball scriveners and when one "steps out" for an evening his pals in the trade will "cover" for him.

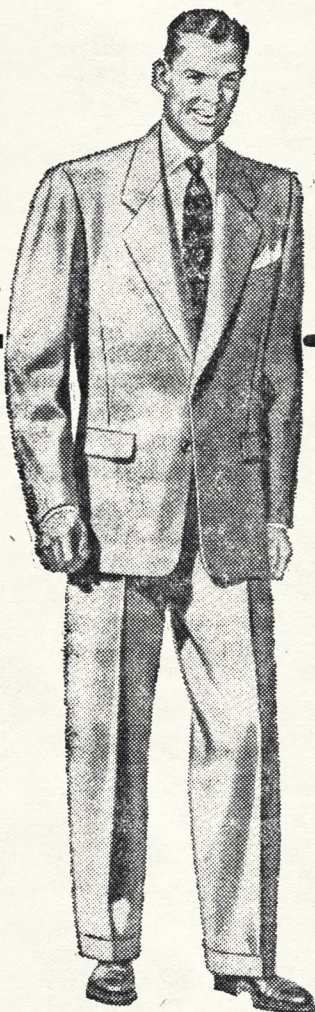
But when the story is of major magnitude, the problem becomes a bit difficult. There is always the chance the absentee has heard the report and is filing on his own. A duplication of stories wouldn't go so well with the fellow's office, either. Neily's colleagues decided to lay off. They were pretty certain that wherever he was he had heard the report and was taking care of the matter in his own matchless style.

Harry, however, filed no story that night. Long past midnight and a trifle the worse for his convivial evening, Harry arrived at his hotel. In his letter slot at the desk was a stack of wires, all from his Chicago office and all frantically asking, "Where is your story? We have an A.P. report that Hornsby is out. Are you filing anything or are you also out?"

Unabashed and with a steady hand, Harry opened and read them all. Then he called for a telegram blank, a pencil and calmly

(Continued on page 12)

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Address

City State

(Continued from page 10)

wrote the following deathless lines to his office:

AS LONG AS THE GAME OF BASEBALL IS PLAYED, MANAGERS WILL BE HIRED AND MANAGERS WILL BE FIRED. PICK UP ASSOCIATED PRESS. GOOD NIGHT.

And with that terse note, Neily, since retired from major league baseball scrivening, posed a question which has been perplexing baseball's outstanding academic minds these many years. Namely: Just how important is a manager?

The Cubs, in shifting their managerial portfolio from Hornsby to Grimm in the thick of a red-hot pennant fight, picked up momentum and went on to win a pennant. Then they took a painful shellacking from the Yankees in the World Series, a reverse that seemingly shocked them so badly that they didn't get around to winning their next pennant for another three years.

The events of 1947 contributed little to providing a satisfactory solution to the importance of managers, for when the World Series rolled around, two managers who had been out of the major leagues a number of years were directing the rival pennant winners in the final shot at baseball's pot of gold. One was Bucky Harris of the Yankees. The other was Burt Shotton, "Old Barney," of the Dodgers.

That Harris should have piloted the Yankees into the World Series was perhaps not quite so surprising, particularly when the Yankees' outstanding rivals, the Red Sox, folded badly. Bucky, the one-time breaker boy of the Pennsylvania coal mines, had long been recognized as a highly capable baseball man.

Back in his youth, as a brilliant second baseman, he had come to be known as the "boy wonder" of managers when at the age of twenty-seven he led the Senators to two successive pennants in 1924 and 1925 and won the World Series the first year.

After that he went on to manage for almost a score of years in the majors as he moved to the Tigers, to the Red Sox and back to the Senators. But always, after those first two years, pennants eluded him. Then he stepped into a real sandhole. In an unguarded moment he accepted a job as manager of the Phillies, then operated

by Bill Cox, who subsequently was banished from baseball by the late Commissioner K. M. Landis on a charge of wagering on ball games involving his own club.

Harris and Cox split in mid-season and Bucky walked right out. He got a job managing Buffalo in the International League. Folks around the major loops regretfully thought they had seen the last of the likable Bucky.

HOWEVER, fortune's wheel take some peculiar turns in baseball as in most anything else. Late in the 1946 campaign Larry MacPhail was looking for somebody to help him in his vast baseball enterprises with the Yankees. Up to his ears in promotional ideas, which included novelty entertainment in connection with the night games at the Yankee Stadium, the installation of swanky lounges and dining salons, MacPhail wanted a practical baseball man to help him run the major part of the business, which, of course, was baseball.

He already had parted company with Joe McCarthy, who had looked with jaundiced eye on Larry's extracurricular ventures, and Bill Dickey, McCarthy's immediate successor also had indicated he probably wouldn't finish out the season as manager.

So, one evening in Buffalo, Harris got a phone call. It was from MacPhail and Larry wanted to know whether Bucky was interested in coming back to the major leagues.

"I still don't know," declared Bucky only recently, "whatever made me jump at the proposition with all the enthusiasm of a rookie about to get his first tryout as a player. I didn't know what sort of job MacPhail was going to offer me. I certainly wasn't looking for another managerial berth. I had had twenty years of that headache and I wanted something a little less wearing on the nervous system.

"I was well fixed where I was in Buffalo. I not only was the manager of the club, but the general manager, so I was practically my own boss. It looked like a mighty nice spot for a bloke going over fifty.

"But I guess the urge which no old ball player ever loses, that of getting back in the major leagues, was too much for me. I accepted the offer on the spot and grabbed the next train for New York."

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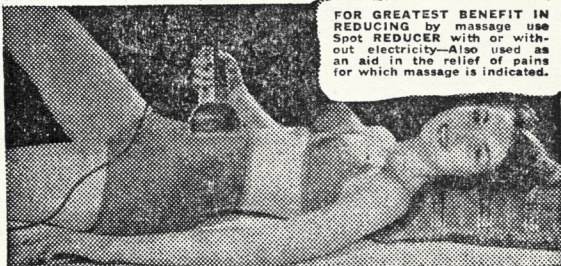
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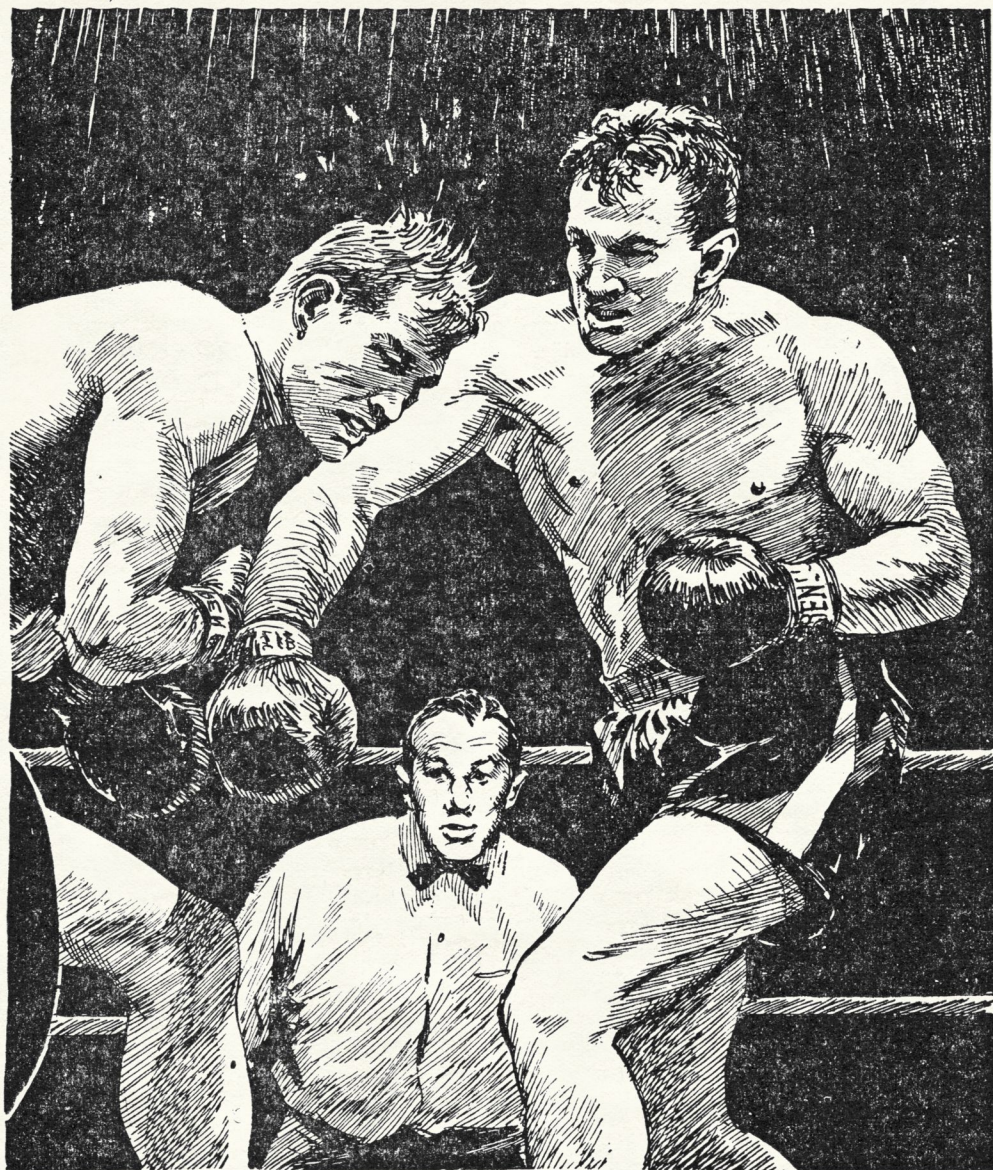
●

*"You may be running the champ,
gents, but remember me—the guy
who makes the champ run?"*

●



HELL'S
BELTER



Ty caught Augie with a right high on the head and knocked him down. . . .

AT TEN in the morning they walked slowly down the shady side of the main drag after the weigh-in. He glanced at the hostile expression on Brownie's pinched little face and felt uneasy. *The hell with Brownie*, he told himself. *Brownie was fine when I was green. Now I know myself, and know what I can do and how often. I'm Ty Sandar. I'm the contender the champ is avoiding. This*

Ravenda, this Mex, I've got to take him.

"Bright-eyed, and a big bushy tail," Brownie said acidly.

"I'm fine. I tell you I'm fine."

"You're fine, laddy. You just set yourself up so you got to catch him, that's all. It goes fifteen and you'll be stepping on your tongue. One thing, he's fast. I told you he's fast."

"Damn it, I'm married to her."

Brownie stopped and looked up into Ty's face. He emphasized each word with a knuckle-thump on Ty's chest. "You win, I don't care what you do. From the time you start training until the ref picks up the cards from the judges, you're married to me. I tell you what to wear, where to go, what to do, what to eat and how much to sleep."

"Look, I phoned Ruthie because I was lonesome. And she'd found the place we've been looking for. Forty acres, with a barn and a trout stream. She had the pictures of it. We talked about it half the night."

"Trout stream!" Brownie said. They walked on.

Ty looked in a store window and saw a gadget. Like a power mower except you could mount a small plow blade on it. Or a cultivator. Or discs.

He stopped. "How about that!"

Brownie stared glumly at it. "Farmer at heart."

"I've told you that enough times, haven't I?"

"The only green stuff I want to see is the kind you get in a bank."

"All my life," Ty said, "sidewalks. Asphalt. Stick-ball, stoop-ball. Zip-guns in the alleys. People shouldn't live like that."

They turned into the hotel. Brownie headed for the cigar counter and Ty followed along, slowly. As Brownie bought cigars, the young big-bosomed blonde behind the counter flapped her eyelashes at Ty and said, "I'll be yelling for you to-night. My guy got us tickets ringside."

"Don't strain your glamorous tonsils," Brownie said.

She stared at the little man. "A law against yelling for him?"

"He doesn't need anybody yelling for him. He doesn't need anything. Me, or sleep or clunks betting on him. All he needs is a farm and straw in his hair."

"Don't mind him," Ty said. "He gets like this."

They turned away from the counter and found the way blocked by sportswriters wearing the mashed hats which are a badge of office.

"Going to name the round this time, Ty?" the tall one asked.

"He's going to kill the Mex in the sixteenth," Brownie said.

"What kind of an answer is that in a

fifteen round go?" a little fat one demanded.

"He's going crawl across the ring and bite hell out of Ravenda's ankle."

"I'll get him just above his shoe laces," Ty said.

"Give us a break, boys," Brownie said. "I got to let Farmer Boy here get some sleep. He's stopped sleeping nights. He thinks it's a bad habit."

"What's with this Farmer Boy routine?" the tall one asked.

Brownie ignored him. At the elevator he turned and said, sourly, "If by any chance Mister Sandar should clobber Mister Ravenda, we will appreciate it if you help us yell for the champ."

The fat one grinned. "That poor old man don't want any part of Ty's right hand."

THEY went up in the elevator to the suite. Brownie unlocked the door. "I hope to hell she checked out and went home."

"She did."

Brownie sat on the couch and lit a cigar. "Boy, at nineteen you could stay up all night and fight all day. My records have it that you're twenty-eight. At twenty-eight you don't bounce so good. Suppose you draw with the Mex, or even he out-points you? Do I have to draw pictures? The Mex has a punch, but not like yours. So the champ gives the Mex a match. Much safer than you. And it takes us another year to come this close again. By then you're twenty-nine."

Ty walked to the windows, looked down on the midmorning traffic. "You worry too much."

"I'm a sickly old man. All sickly old men worry. Bring out the violins while I tell you for the seventy-third time I never managed a champ."

"Ruthie says the place is a steal at that price."

"Give me strength," Brownie moaned softly.

"I don't know why you worry so much. I'm odds on. Five to one."

"The Mex is twenty. He's got legs. With a little start he could run up the side of this hotel."

Ty Sandar yawned. The old day-of-the-fight feeling nibbled at the edge of his mind. Tautness. Skin-crawl. Suddenly it hap-

pened again. He was looking down into the traffic. Everything doubled up. Two pedestrians, overlapping, where there had only been one. Vision went off and the pain came, like broken glass sliding behind the backs of his eyes.

Brownie was speaking and the words came hollowly through the pain, resonant, far away. Something about taking a nap.

"Sure," he said, keeping his teeth clamped against the pain. He kept his face turned from Brownie as he went into the other room, afraid that some of the pain would show. Sweat was sticky on his body. He closed the door and stretched out on the bed. The pain slid away, slowly at first, and then quickly. When he opened his eyes again, vision was normal. He felt weak and sick. He counted back. Only three weeks since the last attack. The one before that had been longer in coming.

He hadn't told Ruthie and he hadn't told Brownie. Hell, when there's only one trade you know, you have to stick with it until you've hacked out the measure of security that you want. Your kids aren't going to hammer themselves against the sterile concrete of city canyons. Green fields for your kids. Animals. Go out in the kitchen garden and yank up the supper.

This fight with the Mex and then the one with the champ. The last one. Take Tunney or Dempsey. They could make it and they could keep it. Now the tax boys always left you with the short end of the purse, win or lose. All the wise boys kept wondering what was happening to the fight game. No good boys coming up. That was the answer. The good boys were too smart. As a machinist, you could make almost as much with nobody hammering you in the mouth while you worked.

He ran his fingertips gently across the tiny ridges of scar tissue that cut whitely across the jet eyebrows. He wondered how he had snared a package like Ruthie. Ruthie with the merry eyes, with the lithe, strong, young, exciting body, with the unexpected depths of hungry passion, with the smartness. Hell, a college girl. She insisted that normal school wasn't college, but they took the same courses, didn't they?

One word to either of them about this eye business and they'd blow the whistle on him.

Thirty-one thousand bucks for the farm.

And the guy had made a living off it. They could put twenty thousand cash into it. It looked like the gate on the Mex fight would finish the payment. But leave them flat. Then the deal with the champ would give a nice cash cushion to go along on while he made a couple of years of mistakes on the farm. The little house in Jersey would bring an all right price and that would help, too. Ruthie had been so excited.

He remembered the soft touch of her fingers on his face. "Brute," she whispered. "Beast. Ugly old thing! We'll buy it, darling, and then they won't hit you any more. No new marks to get used to. Have you told Brownie about quitting?"

"Not yet. But I think he suspects it."

"Why not quit after this one, darling? We could swing it."

"It would be tough. Too tough. Nothing in the bank. No, Brownie ought to have a champ. Just once."

"Ty! It's after three! I shouldn't have kept you up like this. Go back to the suite now. I'll check out of this room in the morning. Can you sneak in without Brownie finding out?"

"Sure."

"Run along, then."

He kissed her. "Farmer's wife," he said softly. And he went up the stairs two flights to the suite to find Brownie sitting on his bed. Brownie listened to the halting explanation, his eyes venomous as a cobra's. And went off to his own bed without a word.

He thought about his eyes. Fighters always worried about that optic nerve. It can't take too many years of jarring. Six months ago he had gotten by Bunny Hobe. He had Bunny on his pants twice in the third, and then got careless in the fourth. Got careless, and found his cheek against canvas while rockets went off in his head. The bell for the end of the fourth saved him. He came out for the fifth murderously calm, stabbed Bunny with the tentative left until Bunny tried that trick of bounding off the ropes. Bunny hit the floor with his face and they could have counted to seven hundred over him.

Brownie had given him hell. "Very neat, boy, the way you hit him in the glove with your chin. Moved right into the punch. And he clocked you twice between the eyes while you were on your way down.

A pretty exhibition . . . and the fans roared."

After the Hobe fight the eye trouble had started.

Hell, little spells of double vision didn't mean you were going blind. He fell at last into an uneasy sleep.

THE fight was in the ball park. The dressing room was dark, subterranean. He lay on the table, breathing slowly, easily, eyes closed. Thousands of feet were stamping in cadence in the bleachers, a protest about the semi-final, where the boys were not making a battle of it. Sometimes it was like that. You met a boy who couldn't walk into your style without killing himself. And maybe he was a counter-puncher and you hated to give him an opening with a normal lead. So the crowd thought you were dogging it. Some brass-throated comic always yelled a falsetto request for the next waltz. And the ref kept circling, imploring you to mix it up, mix it up, get in there.

The stamping stopped abruptly and the kill-sound started. Low, sweeping up and up to a constant pitch. You never heard it when you were in there. But when they yelled like that for the other boys, there was something spine-chilling in the sound. So the boys had stopped waltzing out there, and brain jelly was smacking hard against the inner walls of its sphere of bone. Thought had stopped, and the survival instinct of the organisms had taken over. Grunt and swing. Stagger, grunt and swing. Grunt and swing and fall under the white-shirt arm that pendulums down. *Sevan! Eight! Ny-an!*

Stay down, baby. Don't get up. And later, in the shower, you will know that you could have gotten up but you didn't, and where no one can see, there under the needle spray you can cry silently and bleed inside.

"Upsy-daisy," Brownie said acidly. Ty swung his legs off the table. Brownie held the robe. Ty belted it with his taped hands, liking the feel of it on his shoulders. Lucky old blue robe. Ten years old, now. Held together with spit and hope. Two more bouts for the robe, and then honorable retirement.

Tinker, his pockets bulging with the tools of his trade, surveyed Ty with his wise, mild, old eyes. He said in his raspy voice,

"He open that left eye, you stay out of range 'till I fix, eh?"

"Sure, sure. Let's roll it," Ty said, suddenly irritable.

He went out. They'd tarped the turf of the infield. Down the aisle between the temporary benches of ringside, the turf felt springy under the canvas. He guessed it was treated somehow so it wouldn't catch fire. A billion bugs made dizzy circles under the ring lights. The crowd gave him that big roar. The crowd loves a man who can hit and a man who won't stay down.

Ruthie saw him fight once. And almost didn't marry him.

"You scared me," she said.

"I was trying to scare the other guy. Not you."

"No, I mean you changed. I could see it. I could see you wanting to hurt that other man, wanting to knock him down."

"That's the object, baby."

"I can't say what I mean. You wanted to hurt him, and it wasn't a cold and objective thing. It was . . . instinctive."

It made him embarrassed to have her talk that way. "Look, I'll be honest. I'm a mild guy, except in that ring. Then I feel that I have to hammer the guy down. More than anything in the world, I have to clobber that one guy. I forget the crowd, forget everything. When the bell sounds for the end of the round, it surprises the hell out of me. If I didn't feel that way, I wouldn't be a fighter. I wouldn't be any good."

"It scared me."

"Baby, don't look at me like that."

"I . . . I'll get over it, I guess. But I'll never watch you fight again. Ever. That man in the ring is somebody I don't know. Somebody I don't want to know."

Ty bounded over the ropes, responded to the ovation. Ravenda was already in the ring, holding the top ropes, rubbing his feet in the resin. A brown chunky boy. A rubbery, bouncy, clever boy. A liquid-eyed, white-tooth smiling, curly-haired boy with shoulders.

When the new gloves were on, Ty worked at them and broke the padding across his knuckles. You could feel the intensity of the crowd. Out in the middle of the ring, as the ref gave his instructions, the bugs whacked annoyingly against Ty's vaselined cheeks. Ravenda kept grinning at

the ref with that frozen, nervous grin.

They broke up. Ty went back and Brownie lifted the robe. Tinker held out the mouthpiece. Ty chomped it into place, yanked once on the ropes to loosen his shoulders, went out at the bell and touched gloves with Ravenda who, at last, had ceased to smile.

2

Low Dive—or Die!

THERE were no movies of Ravenda available. They'd watched him fight once. That wasn't as good as a movie to study. Ravenda fought from a semi-crouch, sometimes weaving down with his face almost at knee level, gloves nearly touching the canvas. From that position he could bound up, hooking with either hand.

Ty was working at his trade. He performed automatically while he watched Ravenda closely. Something new had been added. Ravenda carried his left higher than before, carried the left shoulder higher too. Insurance against Ty's right. Well, there was a built-in answer to that one, and it would be well to start to work on it promptly.

So he maneuvered into a clinch, tore his right arm free, chopped hard at Ravenda's waist on the left side. In the next mild flurry he found a chance to plant a right under the heart. In the clinch he worked on that left side some more. Ravenda was fast and hard to hit. Ty took two sharp left jabs to the mouth, and rolled the sting out of a right cross, taking the punch for the sake of chunking a round-house right into those ribs on Ravenda's left side.

The bell sent them back to the corners. He rinsed his mouth, spat into the bucket. "Agree?" he asked Brownie.

"Sure. Best thing. Only don't waste too much time over it."

"I'm fine. I feel fine."

In the second round Ravenda got in one that wobbled him a little. He clung until his knees stiffened again, tying Ravenda up, consciously glad that Ravenda had gotten a shade too eager when the punch landed. That was experience, for you. Another year or two and Ravenda would have

known enough to move in smoothly for the kill. Before the break he slammed that left side again.

Enough was going on to keep the crowd content. Taut and content. Big warm beast-noises when the flurries came.

In the third round he saw that Ravenda was reddening under the brown skin, from left armpit to the top of his trunks. But the arm and shoulder were still high. Near the end of the third he caught Ravenda with a left right and left to the head, and the crowd yelled, then moaned in disappointment as he moved back. Trouble was, he knew the punches had looked good, but hadn't hurt. Ravenda had rolled the sting out of them, and they had landed too high.

In the first minute of the fourth, Ravenda landed a beaut. Ty, remembering the eagerness, pretended that it had done more damage than it had, which was considerable. As Ravenda barreled in, he knocked up the overeager right and slammed a right hook into Ravenda's short ribs. It boomed like a drum and he saw the greyness spread from Ravenda's mouth, saw the liquid eyes panic a little.

Back on the stool Ty asked, "That do it?"

"It better had, before he rocks you again, laddy."

He came out for the fifth. It was working. The shoulder was down a bit. Not quite far enough yet. By now Ravenda's side would be feeling like a boil. He checked up on that in the clinch, using a precious reserve of strength to rip his right arm free and chop Ravenda again and again and again, swinging him around to prevent the referee breaking them too soon. With each chop he heard Ravenda's whistling gasp.

The fifth round was dull. He was waiting, now. When they came out for the sixth, he knew the fight was over. Ravenda could no longer keep his left arm and shoulder high. The pain in his side was too great. And now the left side of his jaw was exposed and the arm would be very slow getting up to counter the right.

In the first clinch he chopped the left side for luck, winking over Ravenda's shoulder at Brownie. Brownie gave a terse nod.

After the break he went to work. He waited until Ravenda went into his low

crouch. Then he stabbed the left into Ravenda's eyes, using the tiny interval of blindness to come down hard with the overhand right on the now unprotected jaw.

Ravenda rolled over twice and scrambled up at the count of three, liquid eyes frozen. The rubbery muscular legs were still working. Ty took another shot at the unprotected jaw, knowing that it was now safe to lead with the right. Ravenda went back into the ropes but did not fall. As his arms sagged, Ty measured with a steady left against Ravenda's forehead and whipped the right across for the last time. He turned, not waiting for the boy to fall, and walked to a neutral corner, wading through the crowd sound as though walking under water. He winked again at Brownie. Brownie was re-lighting the stump of a cigar. He stood in the corner, then came out to center ring for the ref to lift his arm.

Over the P.A. the brass voice sounded. "The winnah . . . in one minute and twenty seconds of the sixth round . . . that outstanding contender for the heavyweight crown . . . Ty Sandar!"

The cops wedged him through the enthusiastic crowd, fending off those who wanted to hammer on his back. Ravenda sat on his stool, robe over his shoulders, face blank with misery, disappointment. Within his limitations, he had fought well. Ty knew that he did not want to meet Ravenda in another year.

BACK in the dressing room, after Tinker scissored off the wrappings, Ty took a long shower. He stood with the water stinging his chest and felt the leaden weariness in his legs. The legs go first. Brownie had been right. If it had gone the distance, he would have been immobile and helpless from the eleventh or twelfth round on.

He dressed in the pale slacks, tweed jacket. Outside of a swelling of the left side of his lower lip, a discoloration of the left cheekbone, he was unmarked . . . this time.

"Bright eyes and a big bushy tail," Brownie said.

"Didn't I tell you?"

"You fought a smart fight. You earned the win. If he ever meets you again, he'll be circling fast to his own right and he'll have learned to hook with that left while he's moving, and he'll keep the glove high and open, the elbow tucked close. Then

what do you think the farmer will do?"

"I lay down like a lamb and let the man count."

"You sure as hell do. Let's get that steak."

Ty flexed his right hand. The flesh between the knuckles had swollen from the force of impact until the knuckles were dimpled. By morning the swelling would be gone.

Between them they handled the sports writers. The restaurant was big and noisy. The steaks were vast, perfect. Brownie checked his watch. "Two hours to check out and get to the station. I've got the reservations, but I ought to pick up the tickets. You want to go back to the hotel while I stop by the station?"

Ty nodded. He walked slowly through the warm night. He knew that on the train he'd sleep as though he rested at the bottom of a deep, black river. He wondered what would have happened in the fourth or fifth round if the eyes had gone bad for that familiar interval of pain and double vision.

The two men were waiting in the lobby. They blocked his way to the elevator. "What is it?" he said with weary annoyance.

"Just a chat. Been trying to catch you alone," the bigger one said. He had a hard, florid face, bristling white eyebrows, small shrewd blue eyes. He looked like Ty's conception of a cattleman.

The second man was of a more familiar type. Small, dark, quiet, watchful. One who has learned to walk gently through the city jungles, has learned to feed discreetly with the larger beasts without angering them.

"Anything you have to say to me you can say to Brownie too."

"This is about a fight with Augie Saybo."

"Are you booking the champ? I thought he had a manager."

"Do you want to talk to us? I've got a suite on the seventh floor."

Ty shrugged. There was nothing to lose. If they had an angle, maybe it was something Brownie could use.

The suite was bigger than the one Brownie had rented. It seemed to have at least three bedrooms. A shale-eyed wet-mouthed girl in a pale blue robe stared at them with neither interest nor curiosity.

Red-face made a thumb-jerk toward a door. She stood up and yawned and went through the door and closed it after her.

"Drink?" Red-face asked.

Ty glanced at the bottles on the table by the windows. "Rye and water. Do you have a name?"

"On the register it's Smith."

"John Smith?"

"What else? Sit down, Sandar. Be easy. We're nice fellows. Right, Coop?"

"Nice fellows," Coop said in a husky whisper.

"You can have the champ, Sandar," Smith said.

"Gee, thanks!"

"Don't get sassy, Sandar. Because I can put it the other way and say you can't have the champ. Believe me."

Ty looked at him and believed him. "Keep talking."

"Don't try to find out where I fit, because you won't find out. I'm just a guy with a string tied to Augie's manager. When I yank the string, he jumps. When he makes a buck, I make half of it. Nice fight tonight. You can take Augie."

"That isn't news."

Smith had been making the drinks. He brought Ty's over and handed it to him, sank heavily into a nearby chair and took a long pull at his own drink.

"He'll make a battle of it. This is June. You can have him in November in the Garden."

"Isn't he scheduled with Helvey for Labor Day?"

"Helvey is a clown, as you know, and Helvey can get too sick to fight."

"All right, Smith. Now tell me what the catch is."

"You can have Augie, and take him. He'll know he's going to be taken, so it won't be too tough. The son-of-a-bitch won't dare win. But you'll give him a return go in April. Augie is going to violate the old rule about heavyweights never coming back. He'll take you. And the following November, you can have him again and take him for keeps."

Ty stood up. "A thing like that smells. You can't fool the public that way and keep it quiet. The sportswriters will be on to it, too. The Boxing Commission will throw us both out on our pants."

"Sit down. Do you mean two old pros

like you and Augie can't make it look good? Hell, boy. How many more fights have you got in you?"

"Public opinion will force Augie to fight me."

"You've been listening to too many press agents. Public opinion doesn't count. If you don't want to play, Augie will fight Helvey in September, Hobe in April and Ravenda in November. You'll be a year and a half older, maybe two years older before you get your shot at him. In two years some kid on the way up could knock you off."

"I've played it straight, all the way," Ty said softly.

"And what has it got you? A little cash. No title. Hell, Sandar, this'll give you enough to retire in style. Those taxes, they can kill you. I've got the right connections. I'll place your money for you on each one of the three fights. Payoff in cash. No tax problems. Anybody can use a few hundred thousand. Especially a nice fellow like you. Pretty wife. No other trade to take up."

Ty said softly, "I don't know."

"Think it over. There's plenty of time. I'll get in touch. But do yourself a favor. Don't give me a quick no. I've got some friends who are interested. I'm not one for the rough stuff, am I, Coop?"

"No rough stuff," Coop said in his sepulchral whisper.

"But you remember Ace Aaron?"

Ty remembered the Ace. Right up there as a welter. Nobody could ever prove anything. Ace had been getting into a cab after coming out of the bar of a Times Square Hotel. The sidewalks had been crowded. He ducked to go into the cab, and nobody knew what had happened when he started screaming and rolling around on the rainy sidewalk. The knife blade had been pulled across the back of his knee and he never fought again.

"I don't like being threatened."

Smith patted his shoulder, chuckled. "Now don't get me wrong. I told you I don't like the rough stuff. But I have to associate with people who get a little excited. Sometimes they won't listen to reason. They won't stay in line."

"I'll think about it."

Smith patted his shoulder again. "That's my boy. The hero-type can afford ethics."

We know how the world is and what you've got to do to get along, don't we?"

"You pat me again, friend, and I will sit you on your pants. I don't like being touched."

The blue eyes twinkled. "We'll be in touch."

TY WENT up to the suite. Brownie straightened up by the suitcase. "Where have you been?"

Ty stared at him for a moment and then turned away. "Trapped by a couple autograph hounds."

Brownie continued packing. "Now we get us a date with Augie."

"We try."

"We get the date. Poor Augie. He probably listened. I didn't see him ring-side. End of the gravy train for old Augie Saybo."

"Sure," Ty said.

Later, as the train rattled them through the night, Ty lay with his hands linked at the nape of his neck. He thought of many things, of eyes going bad, of a knife that slashed tendons, of the hopeless look in Ravenda's eyes. He thought of ten years in the ring. Golden Glove finals. Tank town tours by bus. The stale ammonia smell of a hundred dressing rooms, a score of gyms. At twenty-three you think you can lick any man in the world. And then you meet boys who are too smart, too old, too cagey. They set you back and you start up again, a little smarter than before, but a little older, too. The body responds to the unceasing demands on it, and then, at last, the machinery begins to falter a little. It has to be now. It has to be this time, because the years have run out.

He took a light workout every morning in the garage behind the little Jersey house, taking a dour workman's pleasure in the whappeta-whappeta of the light bag, the slap of jump rope on the concrete, the whip-chunk of the good right hand into the heavy bag. And every morning he performed for the gallery of the neighborhood kids.

Then, in the afternoon he hit the books. Driving the knowledge into his stubborn brain the way a carpenter drives nails. Acid soil, phosphates, crop rotation, marketing of farm produce, farm accounting methods, drainage and contour plowing.

You thought that all a guy had to do was go out and plant stuff. A lot more than that. Bulletins from Cornell, from the Department of Agriculture.

But Ruthie knew that something was wrong. The shadow of something wrong was reflected in the depths of her eyes.

"You better tell me," she said softly.

"Tell you what? Tell you what?" he demanded with too much irritation.

"Never mind, Ty, darling," she said, smiling, making him ashamed of the irritation.

They paid the option price on the farm, drove out often to look at it. Apple trees that slanted up the hill beyond the kitchen windows. Willows bending low over the dark holes of the creek.

And he could not take the joy in it that he wanted. He could not understand why they had left him alone for so long. Brownie made ceaseless bitter excuses about not being able to get a match with Saybo. The sportswriters seemed to have entered into a conspiracy of silence. For the first two weeks after the Ravenda fight, he had planned to say no. Automatically, definitely.

But time was the enemy, and time went on its way, making small sticky footprints across his heart. The next time the pain came it was like a wood rasp being twisted behind his eyes.

The next day the call came. "Thought it over?"

"Yes."

"Going along with it?"

His hand was sticky on the phone. He breathed slowly.

"Sandar! You still there?"

"I . . . I'll go along with it."

"Saybo's people will get in touch with Brownie this afternoon." Click of the line going dead. It was done. Over and done.

"Who was that?" Ruthie asked.

"I think I'm going to get that last fight, honey."

That was the angle. Tell her it was the last one. After the win over Augie it would be time to talk about just one more. And then just one more after that. For the large-scale dough.

Brownie came roaring out at six o'clock. Though he stood very still, he gave the impression of jumping up and down. "We got him! We got him for November in the

Garden!" He gave Ty a slam on the back. "Ty knew that this afternoon, I think," Ruthie said.

Brownie's eyes became very still. "Yeah?"

Ty shrugged. "Just a hunch. Some jerk called up asking about it."

The stillness did not leave Brownie. "I would hate to think there's something I don't know."

"What could I know that you don't know?"

It satisfied Brownie. The excitement came back into him. It was celebration. Three of them around the kitchen table. Celebration until Ruthie set her jaw and said, "It's going to be his last fight, Brownie."

"The hell you say! Excuse my French."

"It is. It is," she said.

"What's with her?" Brownie asked Ty, round-eyed.

She stood up and her face had gone pale. "What's with me! A child is with me. That's what's with me!" She stormed out of the room.

Ty stared blankly at Brownie and at last the words penetrated. He stood up and the kitchen chair fell over behind him, unnoticed. "Hey!" he said.

Brownie winced. "First you heard?"

"Go away, Brownie. Come back tomorrow. But right now go away."

"Sure, laddy."

He went up to her and lay down on the bed beside her and held her very tenderly in his arms and kissed the salt wet eyes.

"Brute," she whispered. "Great ugly beast."

"She'll look like you."

"No. He'll look like you."

"What a fate for a kid!"

THEY laughed at nothing at all. Love was around them like the glow of firelight. The next day they exercised the option and took the farm. It was July. Brownie was a bug on training. The end of August he would have to leave for the lake. Ruthie would be a widow through September and October. They moved out to the farm. The Jersey house sold readily. After the snows of spring melted, Ty would begin to farm in earnest. That was the plan. Now it was a case of fixing, fixing, fixing. Blue paint in the kitchen. New

wire for fences. Whitewash on the out-buildings. Rip out the battered tub, put in a shower. Tear down the pump house and put up a new one.

He was walking over a hill toward the house in middle August and when the pain hit him, it knocked him down as though he had been clubbed. He writhed in the grass for a time, then lay panting, exhausted. It was the most frightening attack of all.

And that week he went to New York on a pretext and, under a name he made up when the nurse asked for one, he saw a lean-faced doctor with a bitter weary mouth.

After the long examination in the darkened room, after the questions, the doctor leaned against his desk, lit a cigarette.

"You're Ty Sandar, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You plan to fight again."

"Yes."

"I can send a transcript of my record to the Commission. You won't have to fight again."

"But you won't do that."

"Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be blind, Sandar?"

"Don't try to scare me."

"Blind people are very sensitive. They don't even like the word. They insist on being called sightless."

"I'm paying for an opinion, not a big talk, not a big bull session."

"Okay. Here's the opinion. Stop fighting. Don't take any more knocks in the head. Here is a simple explanation of what's wrong. Your eyes still focus all right. Eyes are the instrument. There is a sensitive portion of the brain that acts as the plate in a camera. When you look at something, you take a picture. The optic nerve is the communication channel between eye and plate. That nerve is just damaged enough so that it gets tired. It doesn't interpret the message of the eyes properly. It sends a double image to the brain, and sends out pain as a warning signal. If you jolt it some more it may get tired enough to send no image at all. Your eyes will still be mechanically perfect, but the communication system will be shot, like a phone with a cut cord."

"Am I good for three more fights?"

"Don't be a damn fool!"

"All right. Listen to this, then. I've put

myself on a spot. I can't tell you how or what. But I *have* to fight. I *have* to."

The doctor stared at him for long seconds. He sighed. "All right. It's your baby. I'll give you a prescription for the pain. You're averaging two weeks between attacks. Rest your eyes as much as you can. No reading. No bright lights. Avoid sudden changes in the length of focus. If you're looking at something close, don't suddenly look at something far away. Take it in easy stages. And I would suggest no sparring partners while you train for the Saybo bout."

3

Dark Victory

BBROWNIE raised hell at the lake. "How do you expect to sharpen the timing? I never heard a thing like this. You're not punchy. You are the most unpunchy boxfighter I ever saw. With a headguard, what can happen? I got good boys for you to bang around. Devers knows Augie's style like a book."

"No sparring partners."

"Give me strength."

"Just the bags, the rope, the roadwork, the shadow boxing. That's all."

"You think maybe Augie is a bum? For the first three or four rounds he'll be the roughest, meanest man you ever saw. I got to get you by those rounds, and then you can take him."

"No, Brownie. I told you. I mean it. No sparring partners."

Brownie took hold of his arm, shook it with irritation. "Look at me. Is anything wrong with you? Something you aren't telling me?"

"I'm fine. Fine."

"You're nuts!" Brownie said with vast disgust, his pinched little face corroded with lines.

He tried for two weeks, and then he gave up.

Ty knew how grievously he was handicapping himself. But it didn't matter. Not with the arrangement already made. Not with Augie all set.

Smith was very clever about arranging the little chat.

"Doing yourself any good, boy?"

"I'm getting along."

"It has got to look good, you know. The best."

"It will look fine."

"Got money for me to plant on you?"

"No."

"Hell, we could call the round and make a mint. We'll call it anyway. It is all checked through with Augie. You win by a knockout in the fourth. Early enough, see, so that Augie can claim a fluke. Think of the odds we can get on calling the round. A straight bet will be no good. You're three to one over him now, and the smart money says that it will go close to five to one at ring time."

"I'm not betting."

Smith shrugged. "Suit yourself. You're a strange guy."

"How do I knock him out? Is that all set, too?"

"You know how he works for those early rounds. He used to do it the whole distance, but now he has to get to them fast. Always coming in. Always swinging. Early in the fourth he'll swarm you into a corner. He'll uncover enough for you to lay that right in there. Make it as good a shot as you can. Don't worry about covering. He'll be hitting you high on the head and on the shoulders. We know he can't fake being knocked out. It has to be legitimate, and he's willing."

"A hell of a way to beat a champion."

"He's champion only because he's avoided fighting you. Don't ever forget that."

Smith drove away. Ty watched the big car rock into the turn, sway, and level off for the run back to New York.

Two days before the fight. Brownie said, "Okay, tomorrow we top it off. The weight is just right. Want to stay here tomorrow night or go down to the hotel?"

"We can stay here."

"The whole thing smells," Brownie said.

"How do you mean?"

"Why should it be eight to one? Augie is better than that. It smells like fix. I don't like it."

"If it was fixed, would they let it get out, that kind of information?"

"I see what you mean."

"Don't worry so much. Always worrying."

"I'd hate to think you got yourself lined up with. . . . Oh, skip it. I know you better than that, Ty."

"Sure, Brownie," he said. The porch of the camp was dark. Brownie's rocking chair creaked. The night was crisp with the taste of winter coming. Ty felt cheap, confused, betrayed. The last attack had been over two weeks in the past. When it had happened, he had gobbled down the medicine. It had taken effect almost at once.

"You're in good shape, but you're too calm. That's another thing."

"Maybe I've just waited too long for this one."

"Maybe. Want to watch the movies again?"

"I know them by heart."

"And you know how we do it, laddy. We ride out the storm for four rounds. Save the legs. Lean on him in the clinches. Then what?"

"When he comes out for the fifth," Ty said wearily, "I let him bull in. I foot-feint him to the right, pivot, and put everything into a right hook to the gut. It ought to catch him moving to his left. If it works, it

will double him for a moment. So I lift him straight with the left and cross the right to the jaw. Then I go home."

"And if it doesn't work?"

"I try it twice more, making sure it doesn't work the next two times. Then the fourth time I try it, he'll drop his left to cover his gut and leave me a shot at the jaw, we hope."

"And keep away from the ropes in the first four rounds. Keep moving. Don't let him bull you into a corner. He can throw a ton of leather a second."

"Sure," Ty said.

"Okay. Go to bed. Eight to one! Jiminy!"

AT RING time it was nine to one. The odds were too fat. Suspiciously fat. It made Ty uneasy. He was in the ring. Augie made him wait, wait there under the eyes of the TV cameras, under the eyes of the ring-wise announcers, sports writers, under the sloe eyes of the enameled women. Waiting in the crowd roar, the smoke drift, the eddies and ripples of excitement that twisted across the crowd like a random wind through grain fields.

Tinker said, "Keep his paws off that left eye." Brownie said, "Keep away from the ropes." "Tuck those laces in," said the ref.

Ruthie was at the farm. She had told him how it was on the nights he fought. House silent. All the lights on. And she walked, from room to room, touching things, straightening things, waiting.

Augie came shouldering through the crowd sound. Half cheer and half boo. Not a popular champ. Not a champ who fought often enough to be popular. And no color outside the ring. Blue-white skin, the color of watered milk. Long hollow-cheeked face set on the slanting shoulders without benefit of neck. Ridges and pads and chunks of muscle constantly aboil under the white smooth skin of the back. The mouth of a matador. A nose like a pudding.

Augie glanced across the ring at him. Cold appraisal. Like a couple of stone masons working with each other for the first time. The introductions of celebrities were interminable. Excitement rolled down the long hill, gathering speed.

In a crowd silence as startling as a shot, the bell clanged, the roar started, the gloves were touched. Light stabbing lefts, slow wheel, circle, pause. Stab, stab. And then Augie pounced. Came in the way Armstrong used to. Leather all over the place. Snorting through the mash of nose. Throwing it so hard and so fast you couldn't counter-punch. Just weave and block and pedal and pray. Slip some, roll with some others, take a few solid ones because they came too fast to avoid them all.

The crowd was a rusty siren, stuck on a high note.

Ty stayed away from the ropes. He shook off the few that landed solidly. He rode out the storm. His timing was off. He took more than he should have. But he rode it out, dropped on the stool, breathing deep as Tinker held the waistband of the trunks away from his belly.

Round two. The storm started earlier. Unabated. Ty clinched when he could, leaned heavily on the grunting, snorting Augie, delaying the break. Augie could punch and hook with either hand. He got the left eye. At the end of the round Tinker patched it with the collodion, made warning mumbles. Ty let the water run out of his mouth and down his chest. It felt good.

His legs quivered a bit.

Round three. Same fury. Same stomping, chomping, snorting rain of gloves that came in from all angles. In his eagerness to keep the eye out of the play, Ty took a left hook to the throat that nearly strangled him. As he struggled for breath a right hand whistled by within an inch of his jaw.

In the clinch he said, panting, "How good do you have to look?"

Augie ripped and strained at his middle and did not answer.

Round four. The round. The fix. He knew what he had to do. Let Augie bull him into the dangerous corner. His legs didn't feel right. The timing was still off. As Augie bore him back, Ty could get a glimpse of Brownie's startled, frightened face.

The world was full of gloves. They all hurt. Ty covered as well as he could, not moving out of the corner, waiting for the shot at the jaw, holding the right cocked. Waiting for that shot. Waiting and waiting until he opened his eyes and there was the mouth guard six inches away on the canvas, and it seemed a funny place for it and a funny angle from which to look at it. A hand flashed in front of his face, all fingers splayed. So that was a five count. He pushed the ring floor down and away from him. He shook his head, hard. At eight he sat on one heel. At nine he came up slowly, to get his gloves wiped on the glaring white shirt of the ref. The ref stepped back and Augie came roaring in like a bucket of bricks falling downstairs.

He fell on Augie with putty arms and wrapped him up, smiling all the while in a bemused way while the cursing ref strained to unwrap him.

Augie came in again and Ty felt his heels go up. He hit on the seat of his pants and rolled back, the bottom rope burning the back of his neck.

At nine he came up again, and Augie hadn't quite gotten to him when the bell ended the round.

Tinker and Brownie met him, swung him onto the stool, went to work. Acid smell at his nose that brought tears to his eyes and sent little sharp needles up through the fog.

"I told you, I told you," Brownie hissed. "And you go into a corner."

Ty shook his head and a lot of loose

jumbled, bright-colored pieces fell into place. The picture was clear. Augie's crowd had used him as a sucker. Led him into what he thought was a fix, just for the sake of giving Augie his early chance to level his big guns on a sucker. And at nine to one. He looked across at Augie. The man's bitter face was intent. He sat forward on the stool and tapped his gloves together.

Ty chomped on the fresh mouth guard. Suddenly a vast weight was gone from him. Guilt was gone. There was a certain amount of self-respect lost that could never be completely regained, but at least he was now free to fight as well as he could, and win or lose in his own fashion.

He walked out into a straight hard left that brought the fog back, brought back the vacant, rubber-legged smile and the putty arms. He hung on until the crowd noise blew the mists away. He wobbled in apparent helplessness after the break, pulled the foot-feint so assiduously practised, and tried to break Augie in half with the right.

Augie pranced and grinned and showed in that way that he was badly hurt. Ty moved in as fast as he could, taking the play from Augie. But he missed with a left and a right and a left, and Augie sucked steam back into the tired engine and bored in again. At the bell Ty caught him with a right that spun him half around.

"How lucky can you get?" Brownie asked. "Maybe you've got him."

"I've got him."

Sixth round. No more steam in Augie. Not many more punches. A few good ones. He was treasuring them. Saving them. Waiting for the shot. Quiet now, and still dangerous. Now Ty had to take the play to him. Ty had to take the counterpunch risk as he assumed the offensive.

He pulled the foot-feint again and boomed in the right, but Augie was moving away, softening it. They clinched, both weary now. Augie hit him on the break and in the next clinch tramped on Ty's foot, tried to rub laces up across the left eyebrow. He butted and broke Ty's lip. The crowd booed him.

No one had assumed the fight would go the full distance. Looking at them, no one in the crowd was simple enough to think either man could last nine more rounds.

So one man had to go down and it could be either one, and because it was that kind of a fight, Augie's rounds that he had won now meant nothing.

Seventh round. Ty caught Augie with a right high on the head and knocked him down. Augie took the nine count, came up slowly. As Ty moved cautiously in, pain smashed across his eyes like a whip-lash. Two Augies danced wearily in front of him. Two gloves floated toward Ty's face as he stood frozen there. He floated down to the canvas, bounced off in slow motion, rolled up to his feet. Augie got eager again, and tapped his last reserves. But he was slow-handed, heavy-legged. Ty moved up through the thump of the leather and clung hard, eyes closed, stomach churning with the sickness.

And the round ended, and the world began to fade.

"Something wrong with . . . lights," Ty said thickly.

"The lights are fine. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm fine. Fine."

"Go get him," Brownie said, slapping his sweat-slick back.

Ty moved out into a grey world. A negative of an old photograph. Not much time now. Things fading. You're a workman. You do what you can. Like a carpenter working into the early dusk of winter, hitting the nails more through instinct than vision. Augie was a grayness, dancing at the end of an invisible string. No time for being fancy. No time to outsmart him. Bull him into the corner. Like this. Squint into grayness. He's hitting you with pillows. No punch left. Bring over that big right. Missed him. Measure with the left. Try again. Hit him that time. And this time, and this time, and this time. And nothing there. Did he get behind you? Turn around. White thing moving. The ref. Pushing you. White arm flashing down and down and down. Must be counting. And the darker shadow is Augie.

All the lights went out.

He stood there. "Brownie!" he screamed. "Brownie, help me!" And cried like a child.

There was confusion. That was the thing about the darkness. The utter confusion of it, and not knowing where anything was, and people undressing you like a baby.

"My Lord," Brownie said, and his voice

was an old thing full of torn places. "Laddy, if they'd been bothering you why—"

"My problem, Brownie. All the way."

"They're coming, laddy. The docs. The best. The damn best anybody's money can buy."

"Ruth, is she—"

"On the way. I phoned her. I told her over the phone. What a thing to tell her! But, hell, it's only temporary. That's what the docs will say. It will go away. Maybe by tomorrow. Maybe before they get here."

"Sure."

"Some little pressure or something in the wrong place. They'll fix it."

"Sure, Brownie."

SHE was gay during that winter. Gay, the way violins will sometimes sound out above the mellow tragedy of the French horns.

"It's a good thing you can't see me, darling. I think it is going to be twins." And, "He's very good. He worked for Mr. Leymann and they say he knows farming backwards and forwards. He can run the place until you're ready to take it over." And, "This is the kind of a snow I like, darling. Big fat flakes falling slowly, melting on the window. The little pine looks like a big white mushroom." And, "I really don't mind reading to you, darling. Really."

Twice he awoke in the night and heard the kitten sound of her smothered weeping.

He sat in blackness of the world and of the soul, and something within him bled endlessly.

Steve Sandar was born on April third. It brought Ty out of his apathy for a time, but not for long. He slid back down into dark places where Ruthie could not reach him. Brownie came often, and then did not come as often any more.

In early June she said, "Come on, Ty. I'll help you get out onto the back porch. Did you know we have cherry blossoms? On the little tree. They're late."

"No thanks."

She forced a laugh. "You can't stay up here in this room the rest of your life."

"Why not?" he asked evenly.

There was a long silence. When she spoke again there was a note in her voice he had never heard before. "I don't care,

as far as I am concerned, Ty. I can take care of you the rest of my life. I'm willing to do that. But there is a child. A boy child with sturdy shoulders and laughing eyes, Ty. A merry child. What's ahead for him? A house full of gloom and self-pity. I don't want to watch what that will do to him. I'm afraid of what it will do to him."

"So?"

"I'll tell you when I've made up my mind."

She left the room. He heard her go down the stairs. He knew the child was asleep at this time of day. It took him a long time to feel his way down to the small room adjoining hers. He went in and stretched his hands out and found the bars of the crib.

The child made a soft, warm, waking noise.

"Hi, guy," he said gently.

He knelt on the floor beside the crib, reaching his thick hand through the bars, touched the child's cheek, traced the shape of it, touched the wetness of the mouth.

He heard her come in. He turned his face toward the sound of her. "I heard you moving around up here," she said.

His voice was hard and sharp, as though he spoke with anger. "There are things I can do. There are things I can teach myself to do."

"I've known that all along."

"I've got to start doing something."

She kissed him. "It's nice to have you back, Ty. Welcome home, my darling."

"Why should I feel like crying? Is there something I can do right now, to start?"

"Let me think. Think you could shell peas?"

He sat on the back porch with the sun warm on his face. The peas made small metallic sounds dropping from pod into kettle. And when the first faint grey image broke into the velvet blackness, the grey image that they had told him to hope for, to pray for, he sprang up with a great cry. The kettle bounded down the steps. The peas rolled across the wooden porch. And he knew that in two years, or three, he would see the face of his son, and be forever proud that he had found within himself the courage to accept the eternal blackness before the grey image brought its promise. It was the last victory, and the best.

THE BACKWARD FORWARD

By LANCE
KERMIT

He strained for the ball,
feeling it against his
fingertips. . . .



*They were a false alarm five that had lost its way—till
the kid who didn't belong on the same court with them
found that you can sometimes make stars shine brighter
—by rubbing them the wrong way!*

WHEN Joe Corson stepped off the train, lugging his cheap suitcase in one hand, he was awed by his first sight of Holland college. Joe was a pea green freshman if ever there was one, and Holland had been educating young men for better than a hundred years. Joe was

so impressed he decided to take his first ride in a hack. He was a tall and rawboned young man with a crew haircut and he had to stoop to get in the cab.

They rode through town, past Fraternity Row and out toward the freshman dormitory. The cabbie, noting his passenger's

interest, said "That's the gym on our left."

He took another look at the lanky youngster perched on the edge of the back seat.

"Play any basketball?" he said.

"A little," Joe said cautiously. He twisted his head to look back at the gym. He'd be out there one of these days, cradling a ball in his hands. It was basketball that had brought him here but he didn't want to tell the cab driver that. He thought of his home back in the small town in the hills and the crude backboard he'd made and fastened to the side of the barn with a hoop for a basket. He remembered the hours of practice with a lopsided ball.

"How's the team going to be this year?" he asked.

"Got all the regulars back," the cabbie told him. "But they got a new guy coming in. Some freshman who's supposed to be a whiz. Shoots with either hand and fast as a streak they tell me. They tell me—" the cabbie had a thought suddenly and turned around. "Say! You wouldn't be—"

"I shoot mostly right-handed," Joe said. "This the freshman dorm we're coming to?"

The cabbie braked to a stop. "This is it. This guy I was telling you about—this flash—his name is Corson. Joe Corson."

Joe handed him a half dollar, thought a minute, then handed over an extra dime. "Likely he's not as good as he's cracked up to be," Joe said, and went down the walk to the dormitory.

He was assigned to a room on the second floor. Three hours later he had explored the campus and visited the Employment Bureau. He was on a scholarship giving him his tuition and he was going to wait on table for his board. His folks had been able to pay his dormitory room fee, but it was his high school basketball that had brought him to Holland.

He went back to his room and stood at the window looking over the campus at the buildings. "I better be good," he muttered aloud, "or my name is mud."

TWO months later he reported for basketball practice. He was on his way to the lockers when Coach Baird stepped out of his office and called to him. Joe had looked him up earlier that fall.

"Just a word of warning, Corson," Baird

said. "I scouted you myself in high school. You can make this team. They need a spark plug, a leader, a guy to take charge. But you'd better go easy for a while. Don't throw your weight around. Holland has never handed out many athletic scholarships. They haven't needed to. Some of the boys may resent your presence a little. For that reason I'm not going to put out any red carpet for you in practice. As far as I'm concerned, you're just another frosh trying to make the varsity squad."

"Way I want it to be," Joe said, and went on downstairs and into the lockers. The trainer gave him a uniform with a white jersey to distinguish him from the varsity lettermen and, finding an empty locker, Joe began to shed his clothes.

He was aware of being watched. Then someone whispered, "That's him, I'm sure that's him. That's the great man himself."

He sat down to pull on a basketball shoe. One of the varsity players came over. He stood beside him with a notebook and pencil in his hand.

"Pardon me, sir," he said humbly, "but I wonder if I could have your autograph?"

Joe looked at him a moment. He had not been around Holland very long but he was glad for one thing he had done—he had found out the identity of the varsity players, and he knew who this man was. This was Fischetti, last year's high scoring forward on the team.

Joe decided to play it dumb. "You got the wrong guy," he said. "I haven't made the team yet."

He turned away, finished lacing his shoes, and went up the stairs to the court floor. Ten minutes later, with all the squad present, they started in. They limbered up for a while and then Baird called for a short scrimmage. The varsity of the past year took the floor as one unit and Baird named five men to the scrub five.

Joe Corson was at left forward. The varsity won the tap and came down the floor. Baird taught a fast passing game with the five varsity men sifting in and out and waiting to set up an opening before taking a shot.

Playing on defense Joe knew he was seeing a very good team. Lou Fischetti finally took the ball in the keyhole and going high in the air dunked it through the hoop for first blood.

The scrubs went back down the floor. They had not worked together as a unit and their play was ragged. They lost the ball and the varsity came down again and promptly scored. When it happened a third time, Joe Corson got a little peeved. He had never liked being beaten and he knew the scrubs could not break through the varsity defense.

The scrubs came down again and Joe took the ball outside. He feinted to a man cutting in, then dribbled forward. A varsity guard loomed in front of him and Joe leaped high and arched a one-hander toward the backboard. It hit and came through the net.

"Showboat," somebody said.

The varsity was coming down again. They were at the halfway point when a pass was a little slow. Joe reached out a big hand and knocked the ball down. He recovered and started for the far end of the court. Fischetti was on his heels. Dribbling low to the floor Joe raced ahead, then suddenly braked to a quick stop. Fischetti lunged past him momentarily and in the fraction of time before he recovered, Joe let the ball ride through the air and the scrubs had another goal.

Practice continued and a minute or so later Joe Corson had the ball again in the corner. He dribbled away from the basket and Fischetti came up to guard him.

In high school Joe had made a specialty of a hook shot. He tried it now, pivoting away from Fischetti, holding the ball in his right hand, then trying to arch it for the basket.

But Fischetti had anticipated the play. He was faster and more experienced and a lot more basketball player than Joe Corson had run up against in high school. He stole the ball and a teammate was down the floor. Fischetti hurled the ball to him and the varsity man converted for a quick score.

Coach Baird blew the whistle. "That's enough of a workout today," he said. "We'll go over some of the plays."

Fischetti said to Joe Corson, "That's how we treat hotshots at this campus. I never yet saw a flash boy who could live up to his press notices."

Half an hour later the day's workout was over. As Joe Corson was leaving the locker room Coach Baird came up to him.

"You got a job, Corson," he said. "I'm switching you to the varsity tomorrow. You'll take Harmon's place. It will take a while for the boys to accept you but they'll come around in time."

Joe hoped so. He was a lone wolf on the squad and he was green. He knew that for some time he was going to make mistakes. This was fast company and the Holland team didn't start the season with breathers. They played in a tough conference and the chips were down with the opening whistle.

THE first game of the season was three weeks later against Manley. In the locker room the night of the game, Coach Baird called off the lineup.

"Brad Clayton at center," he said. "Fischetti and Corson forwards, Deane and Hooker guards."

They went up to the floor and Joe Corson stood out on the court waiting for the basketball to come to him. Big Brad Clayton, six-foot-seven center expressionlessly flipped him the ball and Joe heard a buzz of excitement from the stands. He went up on his toes, flipped a long shot toward the hoop and ran to the basket. The ball kissed down through the cords and the crowd yelled.

"Very pretty," Lou Fischetti said. "Only the practice shots don't count. Too bad."

Fischetti, Corson knew, had been the team's high scorer the past two seasons. Maybe that was his trouble. But none of the others had gone out of their way to be friendly. They seemed to be waiting before delivering the verdict.

The referee called the teams together and Joe shook hands with his opponent. The ball was tossed high in the air and Brad Clayton controlled the tap.

Fischetti took the ball and Holland went into a quick break toward the goal. Hooker had the ball and the forwards and Clayton knifed in and out of the Manley defense.

The boys began handling the ball with sureness and precision. As he cut toward the basket and away from it, Joe Corson began to see the quality of top college court play. Back in high school as the star the boys had simply fed him the ball whenever possible. This was a different league. He was supposed to weld this team together, so he tried to be a playmaker.

Clayton, taking a pass in the keyhole, turned to shoot but was closely guarded. He flipped outside to Corson. The freshman started on a run for the basket, watching Fischetti from the corner of his eye. He leaped into the air, feinted at the hoop, then looped a pass into Fischetti's hands. The forward dunked the ball through the cords and Holland had drawn first blood.

Manley attacked downcourt, playing the same style of ball, passing in and out, finally getting an opening and counting to knot the score. The game seesawed back and forth and finally when the gun ended the first half, Holland had a three-point edge.

The squad trooped downstairs to the locker room. Joe Corson heard Fischetti say to Clayton, "Eight points for the boy wonder. He didn't exactly make the rest of us look like chumps."

The big center muttered, "You got eleven points yourself. Made him look sick."

He was supposed to be on the same team with them, Joe Corson thought, but a stranger listening to that conversation would never know it.

"Going to be a tough second half," Coach Baird said. He came over and looked at Joe Corson. "A little nervous out there?"

"This is my first shot at the big time," Joe said. "A little, maybe."

"I'd kind of figured on a little more drive from you," Baird said. "That's not a criticism, really. I can't expect wonders right off the bat."

A little later they went upstairs again. Play resumed and it was more of the same. It was a dingdong battle, but Joe Corson began to see certain things. There was a little rivalry on the team. Brad Clayton at center and Lou Fischetti were united in disliking him, but they both liked to score. There were times when each one of them should have passed and tried instead for the basket. There was bad blood on the team—it was under the surface but it was there.

They came down into the final two minutes with a deadlocked ball game and then a forward for Manley took a wild long shot and made it good.

Holland stormed down the court with the final two minutes ticking away. Fischetti missed a shot, and Manley, trying to stall, lost the ball. Holland attacked again and Joe Corson got the ball outside.

This was desperation now and he set himself for a shot. A forward, leaping at him, knocked down the ball and Corson as well.

The referee's whistle shrilled.

"Two shots," he said.

The gallery became suddenly silent. Joe Corson walked over to the foul line, looked at his teammates in position and then sent the ball toward the basket. It teetered on the rim, then dropped through and Holland was a point away from a tie.

The crowd yelled, and then the silence came again. He bounced the ball on the floor, trying to steady his nerves, then sent it twirling toward the basket once again. Immediately he knew he had over-shot.

The ball bounced off the backboard and Fischetti leaped high in the air. His fingers touched the ball, pushed it up and it dropped through and Holland had a one point margin. The gun went off while Manley raced down the court.

Joe Corson crossed to Fischetti as they ran for the stairs. "Very nice," he said. "You saved it."

Fischetti stared at him. "One game," he muttered. "One lousy game. We got tougher ones coming up. Maybe you've heard of State, freshman?"

Joe admitted that he had.

"That's the team we're supposed to lick," Fischetti said. "Manley played them three nights ago. State took them by fourteen points. Where does that leave us?"

In the locker room the team did not celebrate the victory. Quietly they dressed and left. On the gymnasium steps Joe Corson watched the other four top men of the squad walk off into the night.

Behind him Coach Baird said, "They're edgy. This is the last year for those boys. They been knocking at the door. They've been good but not the champs. It's got 'em down a little. Got 'em scrapping with each other a little even on the floor."

The coach didn't miss much, Joe told himself.

"I've talked to them," Baird went on. "But you can only teach a team so much. They've got to produce their own fight. See you at practice tomorrow."

Joe Corson walked alone across the campus, feeling that somehow he had let the team down. The papers the next morn-

ing treated him with a fair amount of respect but he could sense disappointment in the reports. He wondered grimly what they expected of a green freshman—come right down to it, he was just another rookie.

They had practice the next day but the session was listless. Hooker was the captain, a solid guard and a likable guy. But he was not the inspirational type of ball player, he was never going to light a fire under the team. He was captain because everyone liked him and there was nothing wrong with his play.

They came up to their second game with an upstate school and Joe Corson had decided to feed Fischetti whenever possible. The forward was a flashy player with a good eye, and Clayton was at his best at controlling the backboards. Joe figured it was good strategy and when the game was over Fischetti was top man with twenty-one points. But they had limped through to another victory and tougher teams were coming up. Especially State. Joe Corson began to hear a lot about State. The team was not looking forward to that game. The previous year their record had been spotless until they ran up against the State team. It looked like the situation all over again.

THEY had a game with Tech before the first State fracas and before the game Coach Baird said, "I'm starting Harmon, Corson. You watch for a while."

Joe sat on the bench as the game got underway. Baird was next to him, talking to him as play proceeded.

"Five pretty good men," he said, "but not champions. Something lacking."

Joe got in later. He was aware that he hadn't measured up and his play suffered in consequence. He drew three quick fouls and Baird pulled him out of the lineup again in the second half. Brad Clayton was controlling the boards but when he fouled out with five minutes to go, Tech had a new lease on life. They made the most of it, scoring ten points in the last five minutes and coming through with an upset win over favored Holland.

In the locker room Fischetti said, "That does it. The night after tomorrow we get State. We get skunked."

Joe Corson spoke up without thinking.

"You giving up already?"

"You're a fine one to talk," Fischetti said. "You were the guy who was going to perform miracles. All we heard about last year was Joe Corson. Baird saw you in three games. Each time he came back with raves. It was very nice. We sat around and listened to him tell us how good you are. When we blew our games to State he told us it wouldn't happen again. Not this year. This year we would have the great Joe Corson. Well we got you. As far as I'm concerned you could have gone to State."

Hooker said, "Take it easy, Lou. We blew a game tonight, no reason to take it out on Corson. He was no worse up there than anyone else."

Fischetti thought that over and nodded. "Sorry, Corson," he grunted. "I guess it isn't your fault. You came in here with that fat scholarship. I guess that got me down. But I can't blame you for that. You haven't popped off about how good you are, you haven't chucked your weight around. I can hand you that much. Coach Baird was the one who made the mistake."

"You mean about me?" Joe said.

He was thinking about the cab driver who had taken him from the train to the dormitory. He was thinking of his first practice when he'd been scared to death. They'd all expected a ring-tailed wonder and what they got was a pea-green freshman so impressed he still hadn't gotten the nervousness out of his system.

"Don't worry about it," Clayton said. "Nobody's riding you now."

"Even if I am a lemon," Joe Corson finished. He began to feel pretty good. He was no longer nervous. "You got it all figured out, haven't you?" he said. "You know you're not going to beat State. And who's going to take the rap? You'll pin that on me. You give up two days before the game. It's very easy for you. You got your alibis all figured out."

Fischetti said, "Button that lip, freshman or I'll do it for you."

"I don't think so," Joe Corson chuckled. "I don't think you have the nerve. Anyway, coach, I'll show up Thursday night even if these birds don't."

He walked out of the locker. He heard a commotion behind him and a scuffle that came to a quick end. He guessed that

Fischetti had been coming after him and had been stopped by Coach Baird.

Joe grinned to himself outside the closed door. He didn't know just what was coming Thursday night but at least it was going to be different. Four men on the team were united now. At least, they were together in hating him.

He was twenty minutes late to practice the next afternoon and came up on the floor to meet a tight-lipped silence from the squad. Joe grinned at them and was casual in the workout that was ragged from start to finish. Coach Baird blew his top.

After practice the coach said to him, "A scholarship can be revoked after one year—"

"Maybe before that," Joe told him. "Maybe after the game with State."

Baird stared at him. "You got an angle?"

"After the State game I'll let you know." Joe Corson said. "Or maybe I won't. Maybe I'll just crawl back where I came from and you can start hunting for another basketball star."

He walked off and left the coach staring after him. They had one more practice session the next afternoon and the game was on the following night.

THE squad was dressed when Joe Corson sauntered down the locker room stairs. He took his time getting dressed, he was late joining them on the floor. He took a look at the State squad. They were big and they looked fast. They also looked confident. He knew State had scouted Holland and they were not impressed. It was up to him to give them a different idea.

They were lined up finally. Joe Corson crouched at his position, giving a quick glance at the sullen faces of his teammates. The ball spun overhead between the centers and big Clayton won the tap. Fischetti had the ball.

Holland started forward with their passing game and the ball came into Joe Corson's hands. The standard play would have been for him to shove the ball to Hooker in the precision passing game that Holland played. Instead Joe took off down the floor on a solo drive.

A guard came up to him and with a quick spat, Joe dribbled the ball between the guard's legs. He picked up the dribble

again as the crowd roared. It was not good basketball, Joe thought, it was spectacular and foolhardy but it was the game he was going to play tonight.

Another guard was in front of him and he was far out to the left. Clayton in the slot was yelling for the ball. Ignoring him, Joe went up on his toes and sent a long shot arching toward the basket.

He held his breath. This was where it counted. If his eye failed tonight Holland would ride him out of town on a rail. Then the ball dropped through for two points.

State came easily down the floor, unimpressed by his fireworks. Hooker broke up the play under the basket and Holland attacked once again.

At midcourt Joe Corson took the ball. He passed off to Fischetti and then cut hard for the corner. Racing across the court, he turned his head and watched the ball come in to him. It was a set play, and having made the pass, Fischetti was breaking down the middle of the court expecting a return under the basket. Joe turned and arched his hook shot from the corner. The ball dropped through.

State came down again and scored and once more Holland had the ball. They worked it in and out under the goal and then Joe took a long shot from far outside. This time he missed, he was sure of it as soon as he let the ball go, and he went racing in for the basket, going up for the rebound.

He strained for the ball, feeling it against his fingertips, pushing up and out and hitting the floor again just as the ball went through the net. One minute later he scored again and State called a time out.

The Holland men sprawled on the hardwood. Fischetti said, "You could have missed every shot—"

"I could have but I didn't," Joe said.

They got up again and went back into the fray. State was a great team and they were not easily stampeded. They hung two men on Joe Corson and it was harder for him to shake loose. He put on a show, dribbling with either hand, behind his back on one occasion. He pulled every trick in the book and when the half ended, he had scored seventeen points.

But by that time State was out in front by nine points.

(Continued on page 112)



ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

By M. KANE

SHARPEN your spikes, gentlemen—or, rather the crease in your pants. A very short beer is advisable, too, to moisten the tongue which moistens the pencil with which, we hope, you'll chase us out of the park. For below are again twenty questions, with rules for scoring yourself on each. The rules are ours—but luck, anyway. (*Answers on page 92*)

Baseball:

1. Who holds the record for most stolen bases for most consecutive seasons? *A single and a stolen base puts you on second. Muff it for two strikes.*

2. What is the record for base hits in one inning? *A single—but all you make is to third. Or else you swing and miss.*

3. Until his retirement, Connie Mack was much publicized as the oldest manager in the majors. Can you name the youngest man ever to manage a big league ball club? *One run scores—a man reaches first—or batter whiffs.*

4. What is the record for consecutive sacrifice hits? *A double—man on first scores. A miss counts for two strikes.*

5. What is the record performance of a rookie, his first day in the majors? *A four-bagger on this—or a strikeout.*

Fight:

6. A recent Joe Louis fight was publicized as "the battle of old men." Can you name the two oldest defenders of heavyweight crowns—and tell what happened? *Your round to win or lose.*

7. Joe Louis won his title from (a) Braddock, (b) Max Baer, (c) Max Schmeling. *A round—either way.*

8. Who was the first American heavyweight champ? *One round.*

9. Who were the principals in the first heavyweight title bout held on U.S. soil? *One round.*

10. Can you name the principals in the last

bare-knuckle heavyweight title bout? *One round—a TKO if you can name the number of rounds the fight lasted.*

Golf:

11. True or false—Bobby Jones originated the Masters Tournament. *Win or lose the first hole.*

12. True or false—The interlocking grip is preferred by most big time golfers over the overlapping. *Win or lose a hole.*

13. What would you say is the longest hole in one recorded? *This should give you the next three holes. You probably won't believe it, anyway.*

14. Is this section of this quiz conducted on a medal or match play basis? *Just one hole for this.*

15. If there is a record golf score, what would you say it was, both in professional and amateur ranks. *Three holes, either way.*

Miscellany (score one for each):

16. How did the Harvard Crimson originate?

17. What is the average length of an eight-man crew shell?

18. True or false—Tris Speaker became a great baseball player because his home state fields several major league clubs.

19. We'd be the first to admit this is an unfair sticker—but, anyway, who makes more first place awards than anybody in sports?

20. How many teams participated in the 1951 NCAA basketball playoffs?

SPIKES OVER SHORT

THE fungo hitter knocked a double play ball down to short. Wally Horn skipped over, gathered it in and made a lightning underhand toss to second. He was swift as an eagle, sure as death and taxes.

Bootsy Crump bobbled the perfect throw with his bare hand, then lined it across to Hi Beetham at first. The elongated initial sacker of the Skeeters stretched—and the ball went through him.

Wally Horn stopped dead, hands on hips. He looked toward Jim Painter, manager of the Skeeters, but that dour gent said nothing. Nobody said anything.

Everybody was waiting until it was time to go to bat. They all loved the batting practice hurler, who could stick it in there where each Skeeter liked it best. The rattle of baseball against wood—that was their hymnal. This was the toughest team in the game.

To Wally Horn it did not make sense. He had been up with the Skeeters only ten days. He was a twenty-two-year-old journeyman infielder who had learned his way about, but he was neither a hitter nor a longshoreman type brawler. His best average was last year's .215 in Texas and he figured to be a couple of years away from the big leagues.

But here he was and even Jim Painter did not seem to know why. The Skeeters had two utility infielders, Eggs Faylen and Bozo Foster, both of whom could hit over .300, they had pitchers above the average in ability, they were all fighters.

But it was July and the Colts were into the Skeeters in this present series, two games to one, with the finale coming up. The Colts were a quiet, efficient lot with plenty of determination. They were running wild on the sieve-like Skeeter defense. If they won this game they would go into first place.

Again a ball came down to Wally. He made a fine stop of a high bounce and threw to first. Beetham did not seem to be paying attention. He dropped the ball.

Wally said quietly but distinctly, "No wonder you guys never copped a pennant."

"Why, you punk—" Bootsy was ready to fight, just like that.

Painter called them off the field. Bootsy stayed close to Wally, glowering. "You can't even hit battin' practice pitchin', you young punk. The least you can do is keep your mouth off better men."

Wally held a paper cup to the water cooler. He said, "One thing I'll say—you're a clannish bunch. Closed corporation, huh? Very touching. But does it win pennants?"

The rest of the Skeeters were in on it, now. They had resented him as an outsider from the first. He did not fit their rowdy pattern. His calmness ruffled them. They stood around the water cooler and glowered at him—Nogrody, Teal and France, the outfielders, all the others.

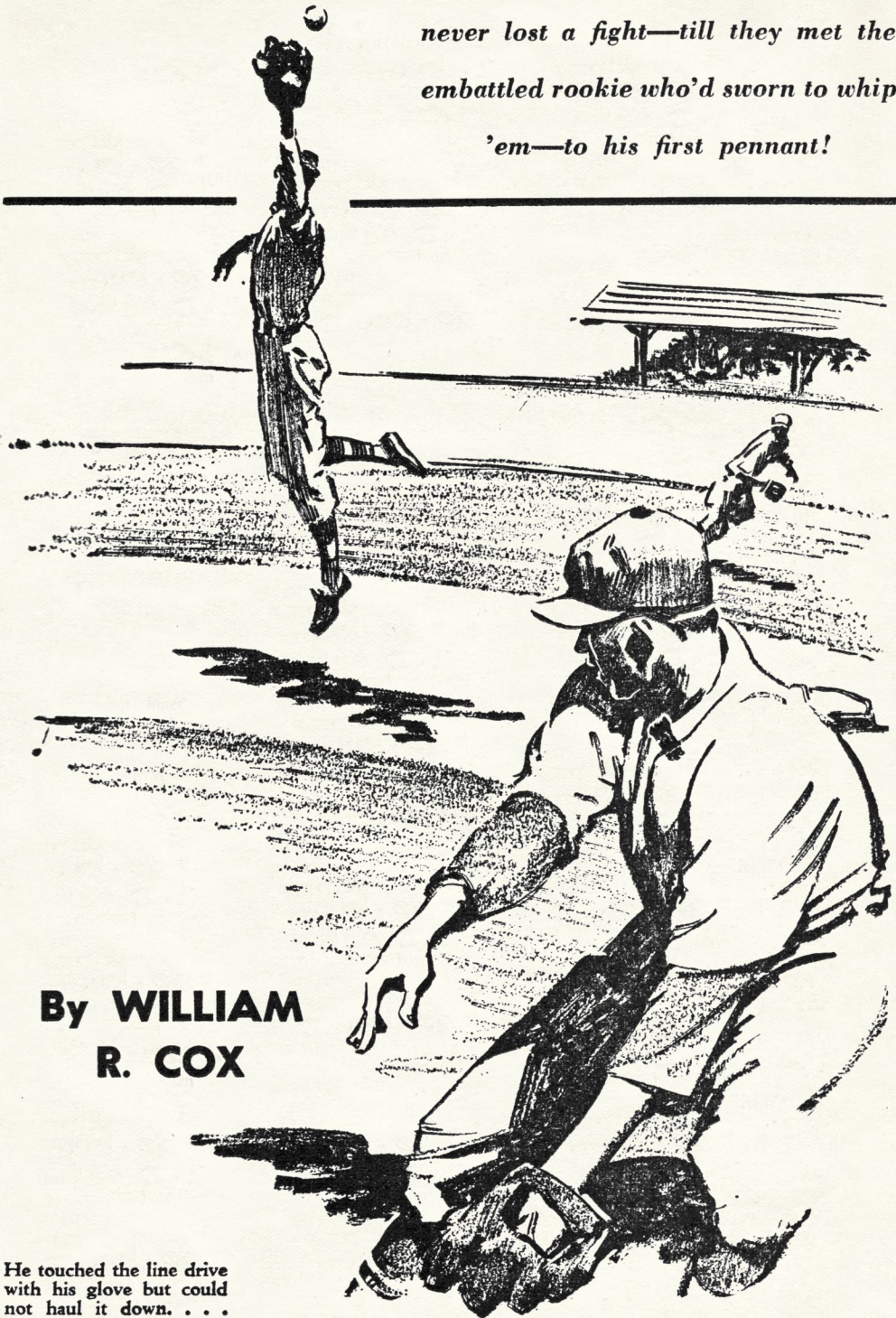
Tim Kegan, the tough catcher, said, "Aw, lay off the kid. He won't get to play anyhow."

Pug Nolan, sweating from his warm-up, reached for a cup. He grunted. "If you hadda pitch against them Colts you'd know what the kid means. Geez, can't we get some outs on ground balls? Have I gotta strike out every man?"

Yet even Nolan was not taking his side, Wally knew. The hurler was merely mildly jacking up his teammates and pals.

Idly he watched a boy come through the tunnel and deliver a message to Jim Painter. He saw Painter's expression as he read the note, saw the tough manager's jaw drop, his eyes pop wide open. Disbelief, anger, then something almost like fear paraded across the weatherbeaten countenance.

*They never won a ball game—and
never lost a fight—till they met the
embattled rookie who'd sworn to whip
'em—to his first pennant!*



**By WILLIAM
R. COX**

He touched the line drive
with his glove but could
not haul it down. . . .

Bootsy was persistent. "I just don't like him poppin' off because Hi drops one in practice. It didn't cost nothin', Hi should happen to bobble a cheap throw from this punk."

Wally wheeled on them. Ten days of this had been enough. Right now he didn't care a hoot what happened. His voice exploded, silencing even the Skeeters.

"Aw, go pound the ball. Or pound each other on the head, it don't matter. Nothing'll happen. Just hollow sounds. Go kick away another ball game. The toughest team in baseball! The Skeeters! The biggest bunch of morons ever assembled!"

Bootsy said suspiciously, "Morons? Is that good or bad?"

"Tough?" Wally laughed at them. "What's so tough? You never win a pennant. You never have and you never will. I've just about made up my mind about you. You're a loud-mouthed yella-bellied bunch of windbags and if anyone wants to make something out of that—"

Painter's voice cut across. "Horn!"

He walked past them, enjoying their open-mouthed, stunned amazement. He stood in front of Painter, again wondering what ailed the manager.

Painter said, "I didn't hire you."

"I wish nobody had," snapped Wally.

Painter bugged his eyes. "You're batty, ain't you? I can't make you out nohow. You don't even like bein' in the leagues?"

Wally said, "How long is this bunch going to stay in the league? It's folding up now, and you ought to know it."

"A busher," grated Painter. "A busher talkin' like that to me." He ground the piece of paper the messenger had handed him to little bits. "Okay, busher. You're gonna play today."

Wally's glibness deserted him. "Me? Play what?"

"Short," said Painter firmly. "You're gonna play shortstop. You were loaded onto me and you're gonna earn your pay." He muttered, "Puttin' me on the spot. Me. After bringin' them through one-two-three for ten years—"

Wally corrected him. "Two-three-four. The Skeeters never won a flab, remember, Mr. Painter?"

"Why, you dumb, no-hit rookie," exploded Painter. "If I had my way, . . . Nemmine that! Get in there and play short.

I hope you choke, but play shortstop and see can you help Nolan out!"

He turned to Eggs Faylen. The shortstop was a grizzled veteran, bowlegged, hard-bitten. He was glaring at Wally, then at Painter.

"You're benchin' me to play this busher? Are you nuts, Jim? He couldn't buy a hit off Angeleno!"

Painter roared, "What are you hittin', Eggs? Three-oh-two, that's what you're hittin'. Hit the bench, sucker. I got troubles enough without hearin' from you."

Faylen blinked, then sat down. Wally pulled out his glove and went into the field.

NOLAN looked over reflectively. Bootsy glared, as did Hi Beetham. On third, Sport Haley maintained a dour silence.

Callahan led off for the Colts. Nolan threw him a curve. He got a piece of it, nailing it down to first and Nolan raced over to cover. Hi Beetham went in and bent like an old maid laced into a corset. He missed the ball completely.

Bootsy had lumbered over to back up the play. He too stabbed at the ball and missed. Callahan, a fleet outfielder, turned first and headed for second. Bootsy picked up the ball, whirled and threw with more haste than accuracy.

Wally stretched and got the ball. He swung about but Callahan was safe as a dollar. Wally walked over and handed the ball to Nolan.

Bersoff was up. Nolan tried very hard, but Bersoff bunted down the first base line.

Again it was Beetham, now upset and nervous, reaching for the ball. When he got it he turned and threw very hard. Nolan, sprinting to cover, couldn't come close to it.

Bersoff came into second laughing like a loon. Callahan scored.

Dorn was up. Nolan, still calm enough, threw with skill and nerve. Wally moved around, eyeing the pitch and the batter, trying to anticipate the play. Nolan laid it low on the outside corner and Dorn came around with everything he had and the ball started like a streak of lightning toward left field.

Wally took giant steps backwards to the grass. He rose into the air. He touched the line drive with his glove, but could not

haul it down. He landed and chased after it.

Bersoff was gone in with the second run. Wally threw to second, ahead of Dorn, as was proper and fitting.

Bootsy was asleep. He muffed the throw. Dorn wheeled around and went to third before Bootsy could recover the ball.

Wally walked in, past the shortstop position, over to where Nolan was beginning to sweat, his face lined. He said to the pitcher, "I should have had it, Pug. Make 'em hit in the dirt and maybe we can stop them."

Nolan asked wearily, "Are you kiddin'? You can't cover the whole infield, even if you were that good."

One thing about the Skeeters, he admitted wryly. They were chipper as ever. They were talking it up as if nothing had happened, promising Nolan they would get back those runs this very inning. He looked for Kegan's sign to Nolan, settling back into position. It would be a curve and a low one. He poised as it went in around the knees of Rechter, Colt third baseman.

The ball came hurtling, taking a cock-eyed spin on the grass. Wally went in with a peculiar, hitching little stride. His knees were bent and his long arms were loose, wrists dangling. The ball spurted sideways. Dorn was lighting a string for home plate, he could see in his peripheral vision.

Wally made a pounce. He steadied himself, making sure of the spinning ball, apparently taking worlds of time. Then he whipped the ball over to first.

Dorn went in with the third run. The ball went like a bullet to a target, waist-high, into Beetham's middle. He had to catch it or take it in the belly. The big first baseman put both hands on it, clutching. The jar of it showed how much power had been in the throw, setting Beetham back. But he held onto it.

Nobody said anything. Each knew there had been a chance to get Dorn at the plate. But they also knew Dorn was a fast man and the erratic hop had forced a time lapse on Wally's part. Their baseball minds told them Wally had made a difficult decision and had played it safe. They had glimpsed the power and accuracy of his arm when the ball slammed into Beetham. They were ballplayers and these things they considered and they said nothing.

The bases were empty, at least. Three

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runs were in, but what were three runs to the Skeeters? They always played for eight, ten a dozen runs. They accepted the rookie's decision.

They went to shouting encouragement to Nolan and epithets at Fineman, Colt first baseman.

Nolan struck out Fineman with his low curve. Then he threw to Geller, the canny second baseman. Geller hit one down to the box which skipped on through.

Bootsy Crump was trying to get over—it was his ball. A lithe form flitted past the box and in front of Bootsy. A bare hand stabbed as Wally did a complete turn-around and threw with the same motion. Again it was a hard, straight throw, and again Beetham froze onto it.

Wally spun and started for the bench. After all, he was thinking, they couldn't be as bad as they looked in that inning. Not even the Skeeters were that bad. He went in and sat at the far end of the bench, by himself. Painter was coaching at third and now the Skeeters were eager as beavers, aching to go up there and hit.

TODAY the astute manager of the Colts sent Angy Angeleno to the mound. This rubber-armed vet with his secret little smile had nothing on the ball. Any big hitter would tell you that. A nothing-pitcher.

Not a thing, as Bootsy said after taking a third one with his bat motionless and jawing the umpire about it.

Butterfly pitches, said Nogrady when he popped to third.

Not even a prayer, howled Slim Teal after he had fouled out to Starr behind the plate.

The Colts were doubled up with glee as they came off the field. Rockman, their cocky shortstop, said to Wally as they passed, "What a bunch of stumblebums. Too bad you hadda wind up with the clown alley of the league!"

Wally stopped dead. He snapped, "Clowns, huh? You didn't look so good yesterday when Bootsy handcuffed you in the third!"

Rockman mocked, "Stop it, you're not the type, kid!"

"You're up next," taunted Wally "Lessee you do somethin', you All-America out!"

Rockman hesitated, flushing. Then he

went in to seize a bat and go to the plate. Wally muttered to Nolan, "Throw that bum some slow stuff and watch him pop."

Nolan took a long look at Wally. Then he threw Rockman three slow curves. The shortstop hit the third one in desperation. It went high into the air behind second base.

Wally's voice suddenly keened high above all others. "I got it, Bootsy! I got it!"

He was moving like the wind. His loose joints made him seem to cover ground without any effort. Bootsy, scowling, moved back, shading his eyes, trying to gauge the ball. In a moment the second baseman was in Wally's path.

Wally hit him. Bootsy went over and over. The ball fell between them. When Wally recovered it, Rockman was on first, shaking with laughter.

Bootsy got up with fists clenched. Wally stared at him a moment, then said mildly, "I guess it was your ball, all right."

Bootsy brushed grass from his knees. He started to speak. He stopped, clamping his jaws tight.

Wally went to position, took and gave a sign. Pug pitched. Rockman came down with the speed of light.

Kegan threw without rising, a line throw, on the bag. Wally dove into it. He saw the flash of Rockman's spikes.

He moved sideways. He danced back and held the ball in both hands. He jammed it into Rockman's belly.

Rockman lay quite still, doubled into a knot. He was a foot short of the bag. The Colts came swarming off the bench in protest. The umpires met them, ordering them back.

Rockman got up after a moment and walked off, wobbly but unhurt.

Wally said cheerfully to no one in particular, "Nailed him in the wind. That'll l'arn him."

Nolan thoughtfully made Starr pop to first. Beetham seemed to have applied glue to his mitt. Angeleno struck out with no fuss at all.

Wally came in and sat down. He watched Patsy France hit one almost into the stands, only to have Callahan pull it down. He watched Beetham fizzle a slow ball straight back to the grinning Angeleno.

Then Sport Haley lucked one into right field. Angeleno walked Kegan on purpose.

Wally Horn took a light stick and went to the plate.

Now the butterflies were really in his middle. Painter had not spoken a word to him. Nobody had said anything. He looked for the sign, and of course there was none, with two away and two on, without speedsters to engineer a tricky steal. There were pinch-hitters on the bench, but Painter was not taking Morgan Feil's man out in a clutch, not today.

He had never been a hitter, not even in high school. There was no explanation for it—his eyes were good, his co-ordination perfect. His training had been good in the fast Texas League. He had studied and worried and practiced, and still he was not a hitter.

He faced Angeleno with his jaw set, wagging his bat determinedly, but in him there was no confidence. He could do anything with a baseball except larrup it, and no one knew this better than Wally Horn.

Angeleno fed him a slow one down around his kneecaps. He let it go for a strike. Another came in the same place. Wally swung at it, knocking down on it, hoping for a bounce over an infielder's head. He fouled it off.

"Like an old washerwoman," howled Starr from behind the bat. "Come on, Angy, this boy couldn't hit a bull in the tail with a snow shovel!"

Angeleno smiled his annoying little smirk. He looked at the hitters, checked, then let go.

It was one of his change-ups, a swift one right through the center. It was designed to break the heart of a rookie caught off-balance and dug in for the soft stuff. Wally scarcely saw it go by.

"Stuh-rike—three!"

FOR a moment he stood there, rage and shame gripping him. Then he turned, tossed his bat toward the bench, calmly trotted into the field. He picked up his glove and went through the throw-around while Kegan put on his gear. Still no one said anything to him, not even the grumpy Bootsy Crump.

But Wally knew he had broken up a typical Skeeter rally, the kind which had pulled out so many ill-played ball games for them. He knew they were thinking of this, thinking that Bozo or Faylen would

not have failed in the clutch. He suffered mightily—but he did not fail to keep an eagle eye glued to the proceedings at hand.

Pug Nolan had suddenly taken a notion to bear down. Facing a three-run deficit, he showed his magnificent courage by whanging his fast one past the slightly astonished Colts, inning after inning.

Angeleno, nothing daunted, his little smile growing more annoying as time went by, did likewise. Tempers on both sides became shorter. Altercations between the umpires and the Skeeters prolonged the game. Shadows began to lengthen.

Wally Horn was all over the infield and sometimes in the outfield. He stole hits from Colt after Colt. His young voice cried defiance, alone in a wilderness, with no backing from his mates, he was fielding the ball like an adding machine gobbling numerals.

Jim Painter grew quieter as the game wore on. Angeleno was one pitcher who was able to muffle the guns of the Skeeters—and Painter, his job in the balance, could devise no strategy to break through the Colt defense.

Dramatically it became the ninth inning, with Nolan still stubbornly hanging on, having given no runs since the first. Rechter was up for the Colts. Nolan pitched too carefully and walked the third baseman. Then Fineman rifled one into left which Nogrady, for once, fielded sharply to hold Fineman on second.

Geller was up, with Rockman on deck. Rockman was shouting raucously, "Sew it up, kid. Put it in the sack."

"You better had," yipped Wally Horn. He was batting fourth in the ninth, he was hitless for the game, but he was deep in the throes of competition, all else forgotten. Painter came out to speak to Nolan.

Nolan growled, "Okay, they got two on. I'm finishin' this. They woulda had ten runs wasn't it for the rookie kid. Win, lose or draw, I'm finishin'."

Painter looked at Wally. His hard face wore a peculiar expression.

He said quietly, "All right, Pug. Finish it."

Geller stood up, grinning, bat held loosely. He would bunt, of course. Wally came in on the grass. Nolan pitched. His curve had hair on it. Geller fouled it off, fouled off the next one. The runners danced to

a good lead as Nolan threw it in again.

Geller nailed it on the nose. It was a beauty, going for centerfield. It was ticketed two bases.

Wally Horn, still playing in to cut off a grounder, took two hopping steps. Then he seemed to rise like a jet plane, straight into a climb. His gloved hand gathered in the ball.

He was scampering before his feet hit earth. He was tagging second, eliminating Rechter. Then he was dashing down the line between first and second. Fineman was slipping a bit as he wheeled to get back to first. Hi Beetham was screaming for the ball.

Bootsy bellowed, "Where you think you're goin', you damned busher?"

Like a bird, Wally descended upon Fineman. He stuck the ball in the middle of the Colt first baseman's back just before that worthy hit the bag and safety. The impact sent them both forward into Beetham, piled them in a heap.

Beetham arose furiously and yelled. "Are you nuts, busher?"

Wally clung to the ball. He laughed. "I may be nuts, but I know where I'm going. Right into the record books!"

The slow-witted Skeeters did not realize what had happened. But the Colts did. For a moment they were transfixed. Then, miraculously, they began to clap. Even as they took the field they were calling their praise to an opponent, an unheard of event in baseball history.

The green, weak-hitting rookie had pulled off an unassisted triple play.

The Skeeters came in and stood about the bench. Jim Painter looked them over, looked at Wally Horn. Then he said hoarsely, "I know when I'm wrong. Kid, you're . . . Damn you, Hi, get up there and hit. That's all you're good for. So do it. Hit!"

Beetham selected a long, black stick of great weight. Sport Haley, still a bit dazed, but beginning to realize what had happened, went to the on-deck box. Tim Kegan took off his gear, then came to where Painter had Wally's arm in an iron grasp.

Painter said grimly, "I may be slow, but I ain't dumb. Look here, Wally. Take hold of this bat."

It was a heavier, shorter stick. It felt strange in Wally's hands.

Kegan said, "Hold it closer to the end. You can't learn to hit in one easy lesson. But you can crowd the plate and maybe knock one outa the infield."

"Your feet are too close together for good balance," Painter added. "Widen your stance."

That's all they said to him. They did not pound a thousand words of advice into him. They did not beat him over the head with words. When Beetham got on with a single, they walked away from him and left him, giving him credit for the understanding which would let their wisdom sink in. Painter went to the third base coaching box. Tim swung a couple of bats.

Sport Haley walked. Angeleno motioned toward the Colt bench, still smiling faintly. Kegan ambled to the plate. Wally Horn, still clutching the strange bat, moved trance-like to the on-deck spot.

There was no sign from Painter to Kegan, Wally noted. The Skeeters were true to their tradition, hit away and scramble for runs. Kegan looked one over, then swung. The crash of the bat brought everyone in the park to his feet.

Rockman leaped high between first and second. He topped the ball. It was hit too hard. But Rockman was on it in a flash, holding the slow-moving Beetham on third. The bases were loaded, with none out—and Wally Horn at bat.

Painter called time out. He walked heavily in from the third base coaching line. Wally stood looking into the hard man's eyes. Painter's lips barely moved, his voice was low.

"Kid, this is a spot for a pinch-hitter. Maybe you think I'm leavin' you in on account of that note from Feil, to make you fish or cut bait."

"No, I don't think that," said Wally.

"Okay, then. Hit." Painter turned and waddled back to third.

Wally went to bat. He carefully spread his feet a bit farther apart. He held the bat at the extreme end. He felt like a man fishing for minnows with a grapple hook. He saw the amazement on Angeleno's face, soon replaced with a wider and less secret smile.

The first pitch was a slow curve which bent like a pretzel. Wally almost bit, then held back. It was a strike over the corner, but not a ball to get hold of, he knew.

THAT was it. He knew what not to hit. He just couldn't seem to get hold of those he should hit. His mind whirled around once with this knowledge.

Then, for the first time at bat, his concentration broke for a moment. He heard voices. He couldn't believe it, but there they were, hammering into his ears.

"C'mon, you kid! Murder the bum, baby-boy! Knock it down his throat, Wally-kid!"

This was Kegan, it was Nolan, it was Painter bellowing from third. It was Bootsy Crump! It was Hi Beetham blending in with Painter, begging to be slugged home.

Wally crouched a little. He had never crouched at the plate before. Angeleno threw a swift at his knees and he swung with everything he had in his lean frame.

The ball glanced off and went against the wire screen behind the plate. Wally sucked in a deep breath.

He dug in. He knew Angeleno might waste one, but he had an idea the canny pitcher might try to slip a third strike through, figuring that if this weak sister did hit it, the result might be a twin killing.

Angeleno took his short step, threw. He had a hitch in his delivery which was very baffling. Wally saw the ball coming in. At the last second he saw past the ball, saw the truth.

The great Angeleno had lost control. On this one pitch he had slipped. The

sneaker he had meant to slide past, dropping to the knees, was not going to break. It was in the fading of Angeleno's smile, the way he tried to pull the pitch back with a jerky motion of his arm.

Wally took a stride. He brought the bat around. Even then he remembered to push it for right, behind the runners. He laid the heavy wood to the ball. He had never felt the utter satisfaction of meeting a ball as solid as this. He dropped the stick almost reverently and began to run.

The ball shot between first and second. It hit the ground deep between the two racing fielders. It was a line drive, the beautiful clothes-line drive every baseball fanatic thrills to as he does to nothing else save a fast double play, and Wally knew it.

Beetham came in. Haley romped home. Kegan was moving as fast as his beef would allow. The relay came in. Keegan slid.

Wally, fleet as a Florida hound on a track, rounded second. Painter, alert, gave him the signal and he kept coming. He went into third all out, banging Rechter off the sack.

"Kegan made it," Painter's voice growled in his ear.

Wally dusted himself off. His chest was bursting with pride.

Bôzo was in there to hit for Pug. Angeleno was holding his hands to high heaven, screaming about lucky hits. The score was tied at three-all.

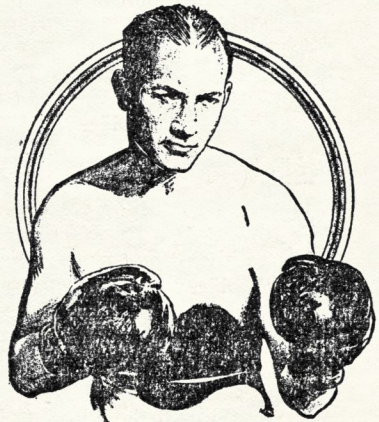
A Prize-Novelette of the Prize-Ring

COME OUT FIGHTING!

By Daniel Winters

"The champ ain't here tonight, mister—but you are. The champ ain't taking his licking—but you are. . . ." Night after night they thundered their message, the red leather mitts of the champion's cop, till they battered their deathless challenge—to a fighting man's greatest hour!

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Finally Angeleno had to pitch. He threw two straight balls. Bozo dared him to put one over. The Colts manager brought in a big young relief man named Oliphant, and Angeleno took the long walk to the hot water and soap department.

The big rookie could pitch. He struck out Bozo. Bootsy came up.

Oliphant dug in. He struck out Bootsy. Wally, dying on third, stole a look at Painter. Nogrody was up and had been futile at bat all day, but there was no one better than he to hit. Painter was agonized. Oliphant concentrated on Nogrody.

Wally could not catch Painter's eye. He stole unobtrusively off the bag. Oliphant took the ball, began his windup.

Wally took off. He was halfway home before anyone in the park knew what was going on. As he gathered speed he seemed to gather size. Oliphant hurried his throw.

Wally slid. He went in with spikes high, kicking. He saw Starr go into the dirt for the ball. He hooked away from the Colt catcher.

The umpire said calmly, "Yer safe, son," and turned away, removing his mask.

The Colts were stunned this time. But the Skeeters understood base running. They were coming at Wally like a herd of wild beasts. He ran for the tunnel, but they caught him before he could make it. He had never taken such a beating as he took before he could get into the dressing room and Painter could rescue him.

Painter stood broad and firm, talking in his flat, hard voice. "I'm supposed to give the signs, y' know. But how did I know he could run like that? He saw the way the big guy was goin' with that slow motion and he took the chance, this kid. I don't want anybody to do it again, ever. But this kid was nothin' but the best today. My way of thinkin', we can be wrong. But you gotta be right every once in a while—like when you win."

He paused and then said, "You know why I played him today? Because I got put on the spot. The owners bought this boy and sent him to me. I didn't use him. Today I got a message from the front office before the game. It said, 'Win this one or quit!' It didn't say put in the kid. It just said win it or quit."

"Hey, they can't do that to you, Jim!" Bootsy Crump was indignant.

"They did it," said Painter grimly. "They hit me a kick in the tail. And maybe I needed it. Because now I am gonna hit you all a kick in the tail so we can stay up there and win this damned pennant!"

Bootsy said happily, "Did you see the liner this kid hit?" He put his arm around Wally Horn. "That was a hit."

"Angeleno lost control," said Wally modestly.

"And di'ja see that triple play?" demanded Painter.

Nobody spoke, then.

Painter went on menacingly, "Tomorrow morning you bums all get up nice and early, see? We have fieldin' practice. Every day this kid tries to teach you not to get skulled by a hit ball. Every day, very early, unna-stand?"

Bootsy said plaintively, "Now I got to learn to be Crosetti? Jim, I'm a hitter type!"

"You'll be a fielder-type!" roared Painter.

Wally was grinning. Painter wheeled on him, pointing an accusing finger: "And you. When you ain't tryin' to teach these monkeys how to play a bad bounce, you know what you will be doin'? You will be tryin' to learn from them how to hit a ball! I know damn well Angeleno lost control!"

"Yes, sir," said Wally, losing his smile.

"You're all lousy, one way or the other," Painter swore. "But one way or another I aim to straighten you out. They want a pennant, I'll give 'em a pennant. I'll show them who's runnin' this team and if they fire me it won't be because you bums don't get your tails run ragged."

That was for the owners, Wally knew. That was for putting tough old Jim Painter on the spot. They must be pretty smart people, Wally thought, because they had sure lit a fire under their manager. A damned good man, and now they would be a well-balanced team, and with those hitters they could win—easy.

Wally wondered if he would ever be a hitter like the others. He supposed not.

Still, he could practice with Bootsy. He gazed fondly at the moon-faced second baseman. All the Skeeters looked wonderful now. He sighed, removing his sweat socks. Mentally he was timing his swing, wondering if he could get more beef behind the ball. He wanted to be a hitter, like the rest of them.

TROUBLE GREEN

By W. H. TEMPLE



The amateur club champ stepped up to the tee and . . . addressed his ball . . .

There're lots of ways to win—but just two ways to lose, Sandy MacLean found—and a champ may lose to a course, but never to a better man!

THEY stood on the eighteenth tee—Lou Carlton, the club champ, his stooge Horton Pratt, and the country club professional, Sandy MacLean. The pro was a small compactly built man with a sun-wrinkled countenance, and he did not have much to say. He was not enjoying the round.

"Guess I'm up," Carlton said. "Into you

for two bucks, Sandy. This is your last chance to collect."

"Fat chance," Pratt said. He was a shadow back of the massive Lou Carlton. He basked in reflected glory and Sandy MacLean did not care for either of them. Maybe it was jealousy, MacLean told himself, maybe what hurt was the way Carlton beat him daily on the country club course.

Carlton put a ball on the tee and belted it out over the fairway. He was a hooker and the ball took off to the left. It landed far out on the fairway, curved to the right and bounded into the clipped rough.

"About two hundred and eighty yards," Pratt said admiringly. "You can sure wallop 'em."

Silently, MacLean put a ball on the tee. He could feel the tension and the anger rising in him and it was ever thus when he played with Lou Carlton. But Carlton was a member, if he wanted to play with the pro, Sandy MacLean had to go along.

He hit his ball savagely and he was off line but on the fairway, the ball far over on the right edge and in a bad position for the second shot. Pratt, who admired Carlton but did not play his brand of golf, flubbed his tee shot and they started down the fairway.

"A nice tune-up for you, Lou," Pratt said, and they grinned at each other.

There was something in the wind, Sandy MacLean knew, but he was not going to ask questions. If they planned to fire him he was not going to make it easy for them. All afternoon he had heard cryptic comments.

He walked over to his ball and tried for the elevated green in the distance, his ball sliding off the alley into a trap on the near side. Carlton was on with his second and when he holed a twenty-foot putt he had done very well for himself.

"Sixty-nine," Lou Carlton said and Sandy MacLean waited for the applause, gritting his teeth.

"Too bad you're an amateur," Pratt said. "If you'd gone in for the pro game you'd have made a name for yourself."

"I guess I wouldn't have starved to death," Lou Carlton said. "I've watched some of the good boys in action. The Hogans and the Sneads and the rest of them. They didn't exactly bowl me over. What do you think, Sandy?"

He was the club pro, Sandy MacLean told himself. It was a good club job and they did not hang on branches, as MacLean well knew. There was only one diplomatic answer. But Sandy MacLean was thinking dangerous thoughts. He remembered when the big amateur had come to him for lessons and then quit after the first one, stating publicly that MacLean had nothing to teach him. He thought of the hours he had spent

listening to Carlton brag in the pro shop, in the bar and the locker room.

"My advice," said Sandy MacLean, "is to stay away from the good pros. They would eat you for breakfast."

Pratt sputtered indignantly and Lou Carlton looked astonished, but recovered quickly. "You mean I should play with the bum ones?" he asked. "Like yourself?"

"I believe I owe you three bucks," Sandy said. "I had a seventy-two. Three it is and thanks for the game."

He handed over the money and was starting for the clubhouse when Carlton hailed him.

"Something I've wanted to tell you," he said and Sandy MacLean knew this was what he and Pratt had been talking about during the round.

"We've scheduled a tournament for the end of the month," Carlton said. "A tri-county championship, more or less of a local affair. It's going to be an open—both professionals and amateurs will be eligible."

So that was it, MacLean thought. Lou Carlton was not completely satisfied with the club championship and was looking for bigger fields to conquer. He was also playing it fairly safe in limiting the tournament to three counties. Offhand, Sandy MacLean could not think of any amateur in the district who would be a serious challenge to the big fellow on his home course.

"You ought to top the amateurs," he said aloud. "You'll get some competition from two or three of the pros. Fellows like Harley Neal and Jack Borden—"

"It's going to be interesting to see them play," Carlton said. "One of them may be the new pro here."

"The new one?" MacLean repeated. It was out in the open finally—he was through. He could not honestly say it was a surprise, but it was still a jolt. It had been coming for a long time now, ever since the war. There was new blood in the club, young fellows with money. They were good golfers on an easy course, tremendous hitters off the tee, and Sandy MacLean was a golfer who had made his reputation with irons. Maybe it was just a sign of the times, he thought.

He licked dry lips and spoke. "When do I get paid off?"

"This was a little premature," Carlton said. "We had figured on making the de-

cision after the tournament. This club can afford to pay a little more than any other in the vicinity. We thought we'd pick our man during the tourney."

SANDY MacLEAN nodded and went back toward the pro shop. He went back of the counter and one of his favorite members was there, Mr. Bailey was in his sixties but still shooting in the eighties. He looked unhappy.

MacLean said, "Take it easy, Sam. I've already heard the news. From Carlton. I suppose it was his idea."

"He spearheaded it," Bailey said. "Some of us fought it bitterly. Sandy, you have friends here. But a lot of the new members have rallied around Carlton. The club situation has changed. Everything about it has gone from bad to worse. I think I'll pull out."

"It's your life," MacLean said. "Even if you don't like some of the members—"

"It isn't just that," Bailey said. "I've belonged here for thirty years. I was club champion myself for four years running. Way before your time. But I never shot under a seventy. They had rough in those days on the south course here. Then some old fogies who couldn't stand the gaff took over. They had sixty-three traps and bunkers removed from that south course. They had the rough cut. In the old days—"

Bailey shrugged his shoulders suddenly. "I guess that dates me," he said. "It puts me way back when and I don't like to talk like I'm ninety years old. I just wish there was something you could do."

Sandy MacLean stared across the counter at him. "Maybe I can do something Sam," he said. "You've just given me an idea."

"Sandy," Bailey said, "don't raise your hopes. There's a solid majority against you. Lou Carlton has been knifing you since he joined the club three years ago and you can't upset him."

"Maybe not," Sandy MacLean said. "But I can go down fighting. I'll need your help. There's a Board Meeting tonight, isn't there? I'm going to attend. I'm going to make a suggestion and if you and your friends back me up, it might go through. Will you do it?"

"I'll have every man who backed you against Carlton on hand tonight," Bailey

said. "I don't know what you're planning but we'll stand back of you from hell to breakfast."

"Make it from tee to green," Sandy MacLean chuckled. "See you tonight."

McLean walked into the meeting in the club dining room at nine that night. The board members sat at a long table and the golfers who had come as interested spectators were scattered in chairs about the room.

MacLean could sense the embarrassment of the men at the table. He walked forward to the club president, asked for and was given permission to speak.

"As you all know," MacLean said, "the club is going to have a new pro soon. I would like to say an official good-by tonight and to thank all of you for the years you gave me here."

He could feel the tension in the room and then the relief. They had expected him to be bitter or angry, he was taking it graciously and it was helping him. He could see that he had won sympathy from many of them.

"This tri-county tournament will be my last one," the pro continued. "Because of that I'd like to make it an especially fine golf match. I suppose it will be played over the south course and I'd like to request that I be given a free hand in making a few changes on the course. We want to make this a real test of golf."

There was a buzz through the room and Sandy MacLean found that he needed no help from Sam Bailey or anyone else. The president, rising, stated that he was sure he spoke for the entire membership in granting the request.

The meeting broke up a few minutes later and Sandy MacLean met his friend Bailey in the club lobby. His retired golfing friend was disappointed.

"I expected fireworks," he said. "That was nothing—they couldn't possibly have refused that request. They'd have made the course tougher for the tournament anyway. Play the back tees—"

"I have more than that in mind," MacLean said. "How about walking around with me and the greenskeeper tomorrow? See you on the first tee at ten o'clock."

They met the next morning and started down the course. The first tee was on a high hill. The fairway was a bottleneck down the

hill and then is broadened out considerably.

"Stop right here," MacLean said. "It's no trick to hit a ball over that hill. It's after a golfer gets this far that he can have trouble. But not on this course. A slice or a hook can't go off this fairway." He pointed to the right and to the left. "We'll put a trap here and here," he said. "A golfer ought to be penalized for a bad shot."

Sam Bailey chuckled. He said, "There used to be traps there, years ago. Many's the time they cost me strokes."

"We've got two courses at this club," MacLean said. "Let's keep the north one easy. Let the duffers play it. This is going to be a course for golfers."

They went on to the second tee. It was a dogleg to the right. MacLean said, "The boys like to play their tee shots here along the right edge of the fairway. It's the correct way to play it if you're good enough. But what happens if you slice the ball off the fairway?"

"You're in the rough," Sam Bailey said. "But the rough is kept cut and the trees have been thinned out and it's no trick at all to hit the green with your second."

"Exactly," MacLean said. "The golfer that takes a chance isn't really taking a chance at all. Why have a fairway if you don't need it?" He turned to the greenskeeper. "Bob, I don't want this grass cut again."

The greenskeeper chuckled. "That rough will be a foot high by tournament time. The balls the duffers will lose in there! They'll scream their heads off."

"They can play safe to the left if they like," MacLean said. "Let's head for the third hole."

"Not much you can do for this one," Bailey said when they reached the next tee. "A poor hole, this one, always was."

It was flat and straight from tee to green, an uninteresting golf hole.

"Two things we can do," MacLean said. "We'll turn the fairway into rough a hundred yards out from the tee. At least a golfer can't top his ball and get a hundred and fifty yards. And we'll build a narrow trap across the front of that green. The boys will have to pitch for the green instead of roiling a dubbed shot to the carpet."

They went on around the course and when they had finished, Sam Bailey said,

"The club should owe you a vote of thanks. It's going to be a golf course by tournament time. But I don't see what good it's going to do you."

Sandy MacLean grinned at him. "I'll let you know. In about a month."

THE men went to work on the course. Imperceptibly at first, the rough began to grow. But four weeks later the course had a new look. A ninety-five golfer shot a hundred and ten, lost four golf balls and went raging to the head of the greens committee.

"Sorry," that official said with a grin. "I took a ninety-three myself. But if I break ninety some day on that revamped layout I'll know I'm a golfer. I like it!"

Sandy MacLean had one more favor to ask. He sought out Sam Bailey. "It's a little irregular," he said. "You might even call it downright dishonest, but maybe you could do it for me."

"If it's short of murder I'm your man," Sam Bailey said. "In fact, if it's the cold-blooded killing of loudmouth Carlton, I might not even stop at that."

"Nothing that drastic," Sandy MacLean said. "In this tourney the golfers go out in threesomes, you know. I'd kind of like to be in a threesome with Carleton. I don't know if it could be arranged."

"Well, I'll tell you," Bailey said. "The names are pulled out of a hat. That's going to be my little job, stirring the names in the hat and drawing them out. Now it's just barely possibly that purely by coincidence I might draw you and Carlton for the same threesome. It could happen. Where have you been this past week? I haven't seen you."

"I've been playing the course," Sandy said. "It's a little rugged."

The drawing was held that night. When it was over Bailey came out of the meeting room and met MacLean. "The luck of the draw," said old Sam Bailey with a straight face. "You're paired with Carlton and Harley Neal. Incidentally, the word is that Neal has the inside track for the job here. Carlton's been playing with him at Neal's club."

"A good golfer," MacLean commented. "We ran into each other on the tournament trail years ago. He's a rugged character."

"He may not work out for Carlton then,"

Sam Bailey said. "Lou figures he has this sewed up and any pro he picks is mainly going to be his cheering section."

There was one more day to practice and on the following morning the tourney was underway. They started going off at nine. It was to be a three day fifty-four hole affair with a thousand dollars for top money.

MacLean, Carlton and Neal were going off at ten o'clock and they had drawn the lion's share of the gallery.

Neal said, "I'm glad I came over twice for practice rounds, Sandy. What have you been doing to this course?"

"Making it a place for golfers," MacLean said. "What do you think of it?"

"I think it's going to separate the men from the boys," Neal said. "Go ahead and hit one, Carlton. Show us how."

The amateur club champ stepped up to the tee and put down a ball. He looked at the crowd a moment, then addressed his ball. This was suddenly different, this was no friendly match. There was prize money for the hungry pros and cups for the amateurs. There was a crowd looking on.

He belted the ball out over the fairway. The crowd gasped at the rising power of the ball but Harley Neal grunted one word. "Trouble," he said, and the ball hit the ground and started rolling. It bounded to the left and buried itself in the strategically placed bunker on that side of the fairway.

ON THE inside rim of the spectators Horton Pratt said loudly, "You've been penalized, Lou. You hit a great shot and you're penalized."

Neal was staring at him. He said suddenly, "Anytime you finish running off at the mouth I'll play my ball."

Scarlet-faced, Pratt subsided. Neal looked down the fairway, shook his head and reached for a number one iron. He hit a ball beautifully straight down the middle of the course. It came to rest midway between the traps.

Sandy MacLean had decided to take his chances with the woods. He used a brassie for better accuracy, addressed his ball, went into the backswing and swept the club forward. He was playing to the left, perilously close to one of the traps and if the shot was successful he had a good play for his second to the green tucked over on the left side.

It looked good. The ball was hit straight.

It landed, bounced ahead and then apparently hit a divot in the fairway. It took a sudden erratic hop at a direct angle into the trap.

"In with me." Carlton said, and he



If Acid Indigestion comes
And tries to rock the boat
Settle it with Alka-Seltzer
Before it gets your goat

First Aid For ACID INDIGESTION

Your
BEST BET
Is a Glass of Sparkling,
Refreshing

ALKA- SELTZER

BRAND

DEPENDABLE
Fast Acting
PLEASANT TASTING
Alkalizing
NOT A LAXATIVE

ALSO RELIEF FOR
HEADACHE
COLD MISERY
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seemed to feel better and more confident.

They walked slowly down the course. Over the last several days Sandy MacLean had played dozens of shots out of that trap, getting the feel of the sand.

His ball was sitting up and he decided to try and pick it off. It was a delicate shot. He reached for a four wood, dug his feet solidly into the sand and clouted the ball.

It went out of the trap like a bullet, rose high into the air, seemed to hang up in the sky, then dropped short of the green. It bounded twice and stopped on the carpet.

Carlton elected to play it the same way, also using a four wood. Before the clubhead hit the ball, MacLean knew it was off line. The ball rocketed out over the fairway, then zinged left and buried itself in heavy rough far off the green. He took two shots to make the green and when he two-putted, Carlton had a six to a four for his opponents.

They went on to the second hole and Neal was leading off. He studied the dogleg, the heavy growth of grass along the right and then made his decision.

"I play it safe," he announced and hit his ball out to the left, leaving himself a four iron shot to the green. Sandy MacLean put his ball on the tee and elected again to gamble.

He reached for his driver and aimed down the right hand line of the fairway. The ball was hit low. He watched it soar out over the course, and then let his breath go as he realized it was hit true. It bounded inside the curve of the dogleg and he had a six shot to the pin.

Carlton hesitated. Then, making up his mind, he went for the same shot. He almost made it. A slight fade pulled him into trouble at the last moment.

They walked down the course and his caddy located Carlton's ball. Carlton blasted with an iron. The ball popped out of the long grass, hit a tree, and dropped back in. He hit it again savagely and got back on the fairway with a short pitch to the green. He took a five as his opponents again picked up their pars.

Carlton was grim as they reached the third tee. Neal poked one straight down the middle, out over the rough that marked the first hundred yards and directly in line with the narrow trap that blocked the green.

The golfers who knew Sandy MacLean's

game were aware that he had suddenly altered his stance. He hit a ball down the middle but then it began to hook and it ended up on the extreme left edge of the fairway.

"Never saw you hook before," Carlton said. "Lucky you stayed on the fairway."

"Lucky my foot," Neal snorted. "You're getting an education today, Carlton. He played that hook deliberately. See where his ball is? He's got a clear shot at the green. No trap to climb over. A real golfer plays to spots, the rest of 'em just aim for the fairway. I should of thought of it myself."

Carlton put down a ball. He hit a long ball down the fairway but he had the trap in front of him. MacLean was away with his second shot and his ball, hit with a five iron, rose high into the air, came down on the alley bordering the green, rolled on and held. Neal was into the trap, and Carlton, determined to get over it, used too much club. His ball landed on the green beyond the pin and rolled down the bank on the far side.

"You're an amateur," Neal said to Carlton. "You watch your pro out here today. It's the best lesson you'll ever get."

"From him?" Carlton said. "He never saw the day he could beat me. I've been in the sixties on this course—"

"Not on this one," a voice cracked from the crowd. It was Sam Bailey and he wore a grin from ear to ear. "It's like the old days. Like watching the immortal Bobby Jones. It's golf."

Pratt spoke up. Sandy MacLean never heard what he said because he disappeared suddenly in the crowd.

They went on to the green, and then on to the fourth hole. It was a short one across water and Carlton had fight left in him. He dropped his ball two feet from the pin to collect a birdie deuce. The fifth was four hundred and seventy yards and made for the long hitter. Carlton picked up another stroke and was back in the running.

Heading for the sixth tee MacLean found Sam Bailey at his side. "You slug Pratt?" MacLean asked him. "I saw him disappear—"

"Better than that," Bailey said. "We made a small bet. A small five hundred dollar bet. I invited him to put up or shut up. Pratt could buy me and throw me away but he hates to lose a nickel."

"It's a long way home," MacLean said. "Fifty-four holes—forty-nine to go."

They had reached the sixth tee. It was a long hole but there had been nothing risky about it except for a fairway that narrowed in short of the pin. At its narrowest point MacLean had had a series of bunkers built up and sodded with deep traps in front of them. It radically changed the hole.

The line of bunkers was four hundred yards from the tee. It meant that a golfer had to put two good straight shots together to get across the bunkers. It put particular pressure on the tee shot.

Neal stared out over the fairway. "A challenge," he said. "Win or lose, Sandy, this is a golf match!"

He hauled out his driver and went for the marbles. He hit a beauty far and straight down the middle and he was one hundred and forty yards from the traps and bunkers when his ball stopped rolling.

Sandy MacLean grinned and he forgot that he was as good as fired, out of a job and maybe out of golf. For the moment he had forgotten everything but the game.

"You really put it up to a guy," he laughed, and slammed into his own ball. He hit a fair shot but he was back of Neal, twenty yards short of him, but with a chance to cross the bunkers with his second.

Carlton took a long time. He was going for three hundred yards. He swung mightily and he overswung. The arc of his club drifted out and then back in and he cut across the ball.

The result was a slice. He stayed on the fairway but he was two hundred yards short of the bunkers. He walked forward grimly and his rivals watched him angrily yank a brassie from his bag.

SANDY MacLEAN spoke up. "Tough shot, Lou," he commiserated. "I'd suggest an iron. Don't try to clear the bunker."

"Go to hell," snarled Lou Carlton, and he wound up and powdered the ball. He hit a good shot, but he was trying the impossible. The ball came down into the bunker and was buried in the side of it.

Neal and MacLean cleared the bunkers with their second shots and Carlton climbed up onto the bunker. He cut loose with an iron and the ball moved perhaps an inch. He swung again and the ball trickled up over the top of the bunker and stopped

halfway down the far side. Carlton suddenly hurled his iron into the woods.

Carlton's caddy had retrieved the club. He came walking back with it and MacLean saw Pratt standing in the crowd. Pratt was evidently thinking of his five hundred, for he looked green.

He squeaked suddenly, "It's not fair. The course has been tricked up. It's all MacLean's doing—"

"Shut up," a voice said.

It was a grim choked voice. Sandy MacLean turned in amazement. It was Carlton who had spoken. "I apologize for losing my temper," Carlton said. "I've played some good golf courses in the past. I didn't do well on them. I thought it was just a bad day. Now I'm finding out differently."

He took the club, addressed the ball and hit a perfect shot to the edge of the green.

Neal turned to Sandy MacLean. "Guy's all right," he said. "Got real guts buried underneath that big shot bluff. Going to be a golfer some day after you've worked him over the practice tee for a year or so."

"I won't be the one to work him over," MacLean said.

"No?" Neal shrugged his shoulders. "You must have a better job in line then. Looks to me like you have plenty of friends here. Looks to me like they all want you to win this, and I don't know who can take it away from you. But I'm going to try."

He tried hard. He had a seventy-one to a seventy for Sandy MacLean at the end of the round. Lou Carlton had an eighty but he was not alone in the big numbers.

Sandy MacLean felt pretty good that night. He felt better two days later. He had a seventy-one the second day, and a seventy for the third and final round and he was the winner by three strokes over Harley Neal.

Lou Carlton made the presentation of the check. "Nice to have the home pro win this one," Carlton said to the crowd, and then lowered his voice.

"Sandy," he said, "how about a lesson Monday? Maybe I got a nerve asking you. I tried to get rid of you. If I tried to get rid of you now the boys would lynch me. I think the boys are right."

"Monday morning, ten o'clock," Sandy MacLean said. "We'll go to work. In a year I'll have you beating my brains out. I won't mind a bit."

● SIXTY-MINUTE

"You're fast, mister—but the clock runs faster," the years whispered to Sammy Hale—and it was time he bought back those yards-for-a-buck with a fighting man's—buck for a yard!

JIM MARTIN talked about it for an hour. Sam listened to him with half his mind. He couldn't get Strobey out of his head. Strobey and the new contract. "It would be taking a chance," Martin said, "but I figured we could do it together."

They'd done a few things together in the Army. They'd put a few bridges where you couldn't put bridges, and a few roads where you absolutely could not put a road.

Martin said, "It would be tough hauling for a couple of years, but if we get by for that long we'll have equipment and we can. . . ." He talked on with a cool and measured enthusiasm.

Sam said, "I'll have to think about it, Jim. Talk it over with Joan." But he was thinking of the contract that ought to have been along before this. Thinking of the contract and of what Strobey had up his sleeve.

"How's Joan?"

Sam nodded. "Good." And he was lying about that, too. Joan had changed, in some indefinable way. Unhappiness and discontent were in her eyes. In her voice, too. When she spoke to him.

Martin got up from the restaurant table. "Think about it, Sam. With what you could bring into the business, we could do it."

With what he could bring into the business. Nothing. Not a dime. Sam said, "I haven't saved much, Jim."

Martin grinned. "I could figure that. I've met you before, remember? But I'm talking about only a couple or three thousand, Sam."

And there wasn't even that much in the bank. He'd been making better than twenty thousand a year, for the last five, six years, and still there was occasionally some slight question of where the rent was coming from.

But the new contract would fix that. He was good for three, maybe four years more with the Ramblers. And if they started saving now—cutting down here and there—why, in three years they'd have enough to invest in a business like this, maybe.

But right now it was out of the question. He had three big years left, if the knee held out, and he had to make the money now.

Martin said, "I'll call you," and they shook hands and Martin left. Sam watched him go and remembered some of the work they'd accomplished together, and he thought of Martin's proposal. A small construction company near Martin's home town. Martin had the contacts, they shared the know-how. Maybe three or four tough years, then the thing expanding, growing.

The whole thought of it left a good feeling in Sam, but he knew he couldn't do it. It would be too much of a change, and he couldn't ask Joan to make it. No more big apartment, no more fancy hotels, no more traveling in luxury.

He went up to the ball park, and in the dressing room Sol Berg said, "Mr. Hale, I presume. We were about to page you in the streets." Sol was massive in his nakedness. His cigar looked like a stained toothpick. "Strobey's been looking for you."

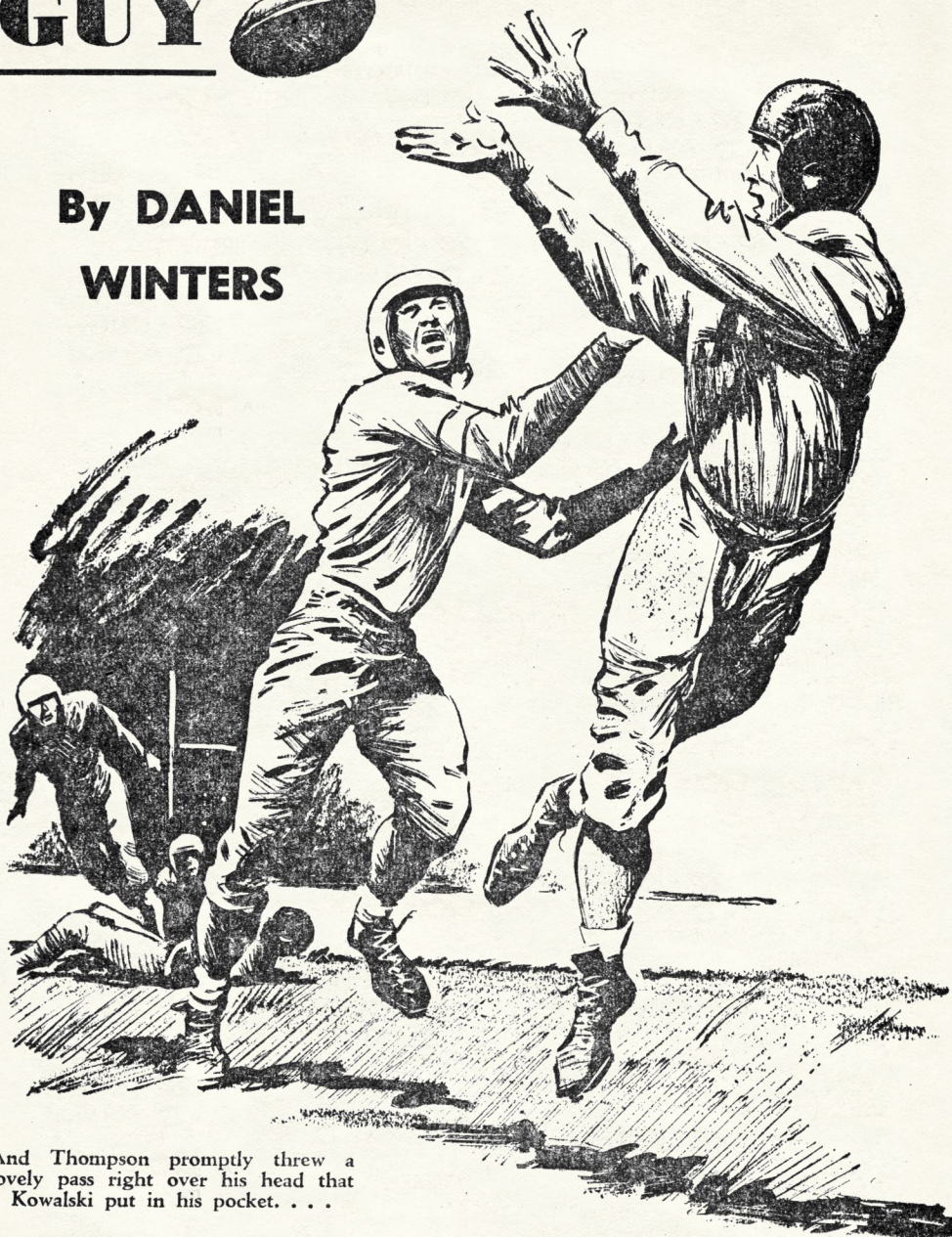
Sam sat on the bench in front of his locker and began to change into practice clothes. "So I'm here," he said, and he felt good. It had to be about the contract. Strobey couldn't want him for anything else. But then you never knew.

HE WENT out on the field with Mike Moran. The big end said, "Sam, how's about Sunday? Will we take them?"

"They have a good club." The Hawks had a fine club, and they also had Kowalski. When Kowalski had a good day he could knock your brains out.

"I could sure use the dough," Moran

By **DANIEL
WINTERS**



And Thompson promptly threw a lovely pass right over his head that Kowalski put in his pocket. . . .

said. A win over the Hawks would give them the championship game with the Pirates who already had it sewed up in the other division. And they could take the Pirates, Sam knew. It might mean a couple of thousand apiece, if the weather held still for the game. He could use it, too. He could always use a couple of thousand.

The outfit was lost in the big empty park like icing without a cake. You needed people in here to make it real. But Strobey was real. Big, and with the same hardness that had been part of him when he'd been a great back twenty years before. Big, and with the small mind that followed only one channel. It was Strobey's channel. The

thin mouth and the shrewd, darting eyes.

Strobeysaid, "You take your time."

Sam looked at him and said nothing. Most of the time it was better to say nothing.

"But I sometimes forget," Strobeysaid. "You're Sam Hale. You can come around any time you like."

"I'm on time," Sam said. "There are guys still in the dressing room. You were looking for me?" And he thought of the contract. You were always thinking about that damned contract. It was next year's bread.

Strobeynodded. "I wanted to talk to you." And then his eyes were active and his mouth was still for a little time. "Something important." And then he clammed up, and Sam knew the man was waiting for him to speak. It had been like this for years. Strobeys always made you lead. He fed you just enough to make you interested, then he let you lead and surprised you. And Sam knew he wasn't going to lead this time.

Strobeyswaited for seconds then said, "Something very important."

And Sam waited. For as long as he could. Then he followed the routine. "About the contract?"

Strobeys'eyebrows went up. "The contract, Sam? No one said anything about a contract." And there was a trace of a smile on his face. "But since you mentioned it, Sam, the contract's been on my mind. I've been thinking about it. You had a lousy year, Sam."

That wasn't true. It hadn't been one of the big years, but it hadn't been too bad. Sam heard himself say, "The knee's been giving me trouble." He'd hurt it in the first game of the season. It had cut down the yardage. He wasn't getting that extra jump, that fast step which had made him the leading ground-gainer in the league for four of his six years.

It wasn't a thing you apologized for, but he found himself doing it. That was always the way it had been with him and Strobeys. You knocked off a thousand yards a year and found yourself apologizing for it. And wondering about the contract.

Strobeysaid, "What I wanted to talk to you about is that Fallon's shoulder is no good. He can't play tomorrow."

Sam said, "It's tough." It would make a

difference. Fallon was the defensive full-back, and backed up with Ben Blane, the big center.

Strobeysaid, "Yeah. Tough. So you'll play his spot." And the smart, beady eyes waited for a protest.

Sam hadn't played defensive ball for a couple of years, since Strobeys had gone along with the rest in the two-platoon system. He had a left halfback, and he went out of there as soon as he kicked. But now he looked at Strobeys and tried to figure it, but he said nothing.

Strobeysaid, "I want you on Kowalski. All day."

There were things you could say, questions you could ask. What was wrong with Manners, a fine defensive back? But with the contract coming up, you kept your mouth shut. Strobeys was a smart guy. That was why he owned and coached the Ramblers, and it was why he'd won seven championships in the last fifteen years.

Sam said "I'll be a busy guy, watching Kowalski."

And he had the satisfaction of glimpsing surprise in Strobeys' eyes. The man had expected a kick. And Sam said nothing about the contract. It could wait.

"Kirby'll play in your spot," Strobeysaid. "Maybe you can work them both at once, for a little while." And his eyes were careful, calculating.

"Whatever you say," Sam said. It wouldn't be the first time he'd worked a full game, but it would be the first time in a long while. When he'd done it before he'd been younger. It was a simple fact, he knew, that when you're thirty-one you are not twenty-five.

So Fallon's shoulder was a bad separation, and Sam worked this last day with the defensive squad, listening, now, to see if he could find out anything he didn't know about the Hawk's offense, and about how Kowalski acted. He picked up a thing here and there. It was not much but it would help.

But all the time he was thinknig about the contract, and how much Strobeys would offer him, because he was not winding up this season as he had the others. He was finishing it as a line backer, and Strobeys would use that in the big argument that always preceded the signing. Because a line backer doesn't get the money that a

hot halfback does. And Sam thought of his wife Joan, and the big apartment, and of the money he didn't have, and the money he owed. But he kept his mouth shut.

And later, in the dressing room, when they were through, Joe Ricardo said, "So you're on our club, now." Joe was the defensive guard, with Sol Berg. And in his voice was a questioning tone.

Sam examined it carefully, and he knew that Joe was not sure of him. Not sure that the big-shot halfback could or would back up a line the way it should be backed up. Not sure that he'd be getting a square shake in this deal, with a couple of thousand bucks on the line. Dollars that he needed.

And Sam noticed that the rest of the outfit was looking at him, waiting for him to answer. It was a couple of thousand for each of them, and everyone could use it. They wanted to know what they were going with. They'd never seen him work on the defense.

Sam said, "Yeah, I'm on your club now, Joe." You played them the way they came up. The way Strobez dealt them.

Sol Berg said "That Kowalski. He's a tough one to figure, Sam. Let me tell you about the last game."

And Sam knew that they'd made their decision, that they figured he was going all out in the new job, that he was not sore about the assignment, that he'd give it the big try, that he wouldn't bring his resentment on the field with him, that he'd try to do a good job on Kowalski, because he was a ball player and it meant money to all of them.

"I'll tell you about that guy," Berg said, and Bemis drifted over, and Blane, the great center, and Sam knew that in the next half hour he was going to learn a lot more about Kowalski than he'd known before.

When the guy was going to run to his right he held his right hand over his left hand. And when he was going to the left it was the other way. Sometimes when he was going out for a pass the hands were both clenched. He liked to run to his left better than to his right. He always turned to the outside for a pass.

Some of the things Sam knew and a few of them he hadn't. Big Blane grinned and said, "The first time you've earned your

pay, Sam." It was always that way. The defensive club always thought they were doing the hard work.

And Strobez was not a part of this. He'd arranged it, set it up, but his shrewdness, his conniving, were not of it. This was a bunch of guys talking, working things out. There was no contract in this—just craftsmanship.

But later, on the way home, there was the contract in his mind. He remembered each word Strobez had said. That he'd had a lousy year. And Strobez had been there, in the beginning of the season, when the big doctors had looked at the hurt knee and had shrugged their shoulders and said, "It's the sort of thing you can't tell about. It might last and it might not."

Well, it had lasted this far.

WHEN he got home there was the doorman who was dressed like a five-star general except that he didn't have a corn-cob pipe. The doorman said, "How are you, Mr. Hale?" and Sam said, "Fine, Mr. Johnston," because such dignity was hard come by and should not be abused.

The beautifully paneled elevator took him to the twenty-fourth floor, to the lovely little eight room apartment cozily surrounded by air, which cost him four hundred a month which he sometimes did not have. He put his key in the lock and the maid almost snatched the door out of his hand. She smiled at him and said, "Good evening, Mr. Hale," in an accent he'd never been able to place, and here he was. Home. The love nest.

Joan came into the huge living room. She was slender and dark and lovely, but in her eyes was the disquiet he'd become familiar with in these last few years. He looked at her with an appreciation which had never dwindled. She wore a low cut sweater made of some metallic fabric, shoes that were an amazing combination of wood and mother-of-pearl, and black velvet jodhpurs. He'd never seen anything quite so beautiful.

He said, "Where did you leave the horse?"

Joan was working on her nails with a buffer. She said, "Very funny. You should have been home before this. You said you'd help me."

"With what? Your nails?"

"The other night you asked fourteen people to come here for cocktails. You've forgotten?"

And he had forgotten. They'd been at Mike's, the steak house, and he'd opened his big mouth. It had become a habit. That was why the two of them needed an eight room apartment, with a cook and a maid whose accent you couldn't define. You went here and there, and of course you had to ask the neighbors over once in a while, except that they were not neighbors, just part of the nightclub crowd whose names you weren't quite sure of. But that was part of being Sam Hale, the Ramblers' big back, and that was what kept you and your wife too busy, during the years you'd been up in the big time, to pay very much attention to each other. That was why you had to worry so much about Strobeys—whether he had a cold, or was in a bad humor. Because that contract was always hanging over your head, and he never signed anyone to more than a one-year contract.

Sam said, "No, I didn't forget." He lit a cigarette. "It was just that I had a busy day."

Joan looked at him and he could see the anxiety in her eyes. "Did you see Strobeys? About the contract?"

She had the fever too. They were both rotten with it. The big apartment, and throwing money around as if they had it, and always there was the contract, the contract.

He said, "No, I didn't talk to Strobeys." There was no sense telling her about tomorrow. She'd understand, and that was the bad part.

He looked at her, and he knew this was where she belonged, in a fine big apartment, wearing clothes he couldn't really afford to buy her, being hostess to a part of the smart crowd. This was what she liked, the way of life she was gaited to. A life with dough.

And he knew, too, why she'd been worried lately. Why they'd drifted a bit apart, why she wore the frown. She'd been thinking about that contract just as much as he'd been. Because if the contract didn't come through, this would end.

He said, "I saw Jim Martin today."

Her face lit up for a moment, softened, as if she were remembering those first years of their married life, when he and Jim had been in the Engineers. Things had

been different, then, and a good bit happier.

"How's Jim?"

"All right. He was asking for you, of course. I'd have asked him up tonight if I'd thought of this. . . ." He walked to the big window and looked down at the park. "He had a screwy idea about a little construction company we could run together."

She said, "Oh?"; and not looking at her, he could tell that the lift in her tone was only a polite interest. He felt her eyes on him and turned and found a new concern in them, but he stilled that. "Don't worry. It's from nothing. We'll get the new contract in a couple of days."

The twenty, twenty-five thousand that kept this bird cage running. That kept her in the black velvet jodhpurs, and let them have a load of people for cocktails.

Joan said, "About Jim. . . ." and then the doorbell rang, and the people started to arrive, and luckily there was no time to talk about it.

It was a crowd, suddenly, and Sam moved around, liking them all and saying the things that were expected of him, and looking at Joan, lovely and gracious, and knowing how much she liked all this. He had to get that contract. He had to talk with Strobeys.

He wondered what he'd say. He tried to remember just what he'd said to the man in the past years. But the past years were different. It had always been tough to talk to Strobeys about money and about the future, but in the past he'd always had a big selling point. This year, he knew, they'd talk about the bad knee. He didn't have much to sell this year. And when you bargained with Strobeys, you had to have something to sell. The guy bargained hard. He knew what he wanted, and you couldn't fool him.

Sam had no kick about Strobeys. He gave you what you could get out of him. You came up with a lot of publicity, and you were good, and he paid you for the crows you dragged into the park. If you were a Goodtime Charlie and spent it all at once, that wasn't Strobeys's fault. He just paid you what you were worth to him, and it was all yours from there on out. You couldn't complain about a man like that.

But Sam remembered how Strobeys had looked when the doctors had talked about

the leg. He hadn't said a word, but there had been that expression on his face. He made you feel like a side of beef.

And then Sam smiled at a guy, took a glass of beer from the maid, saw Joan talking to some people in a corner, and was back in the party again. He wondered vaguely what he would do about Kowalski tomorrow.

KOWALSKI was plenty of trouble. There were fifty thousand people in the ball park who wondered aloud just what Sam was doing, backing up the right side of the line, but he had no time to bother about them. Kowalski was a two-hundred pound shadow who could run a hundred yards under ten seconds, and each time you tackled him it was like being under a falling building.

You watched his hands and you watched his feet, and each time he packed it you were up there to meet him, and by the end of the first half you knew more about the man than his wife did.

And at the end of the first half the Ramblers led, 7-0. They had forced a lovely march of eighty yards, having had to fight for every inch of the ground. Kowalski had gained a grand total of fourteen yards for the Hawks.

In the dressing room Sol Berg draped a huge arm over Sam's shoulders. He said, "Mr. Hale, you're a nice guy to work with. I love to see you run for those yards—our yards. But I didn't know whether or not you could work. You can work."

Strobey talked. It was never very much, just what he'd seen and what he thought would help. "We should have two more scores," he said, and he told Tate, the quarterback, when they should have had the scores. Tate agreed with him. You usually had to agree with Strobey, because he knew what he was talking about.

And when he was through, and when the group had broken up, Strobey came over to Sam. "You're not doing bad. You're hanging onto him pretty good."

Pretty good. Holding Kowalski to fourteen yards in a half was an impossible trick. Sam said, "Fine." And he wondered what Strobey would have to say if Kowalski broke away. But it was setting things up for the contract talk.

"Maybe," Strobey said, "I could use you

on the defense next year—it's according."

And that one bit deep. It meant a big cut, certainly. And the way Strobey had said it, you could tell that he was doubtful if he wanted Sam on the club. The man kept you in the hole all the time, kept you backed up, and with no room for movement.

Strobey walked away, and Sam looked at the broad back and knew that he was afraid. Strobey held the future in his big hand, but he wouldn't open the hand and give you a look at what was there. And he knew he'd been afraid of the man for years.

He went out for the second half and the fans gave him a big hand. They'd had time to think about what he'd done in this new job, and they loved him anyway for the game he'd been playing for years. And he knew what they meant to him—the big heavy roar that weighted the afternoon breeze when you ripped off the yards. He wouldn't be hearing it so often, backing up a line.

But he went out and concentrated on Kowalski again, and now the Hawks sent a couple of blockers at him and the work was harder. But Blane came over, and between the two of them they kept things under control.

Until the end of the third quarter. The play developed nicely, going off to the right, and Kowalski was out of it, doing a decoy job. Sam stayed with him as long as necessary, then cut over to help with the play.

And Thompson, the Hawks' quarterback, promptly threw a lovely pass right over his head that Kowalski put in his pocket and galloped thirty-five yards for a score. No one laid a hand on him. Thompson kicked the point to tie the score.

Three plays after that Kirby was hurt. Sam was on the bench with the defensive outfit, and Strobey said, "Hale," and he picked up his helmet and went out on the field without speaking.

He was a little tired, not too much, and the way they'd suckered him on the Kowalski play hadn't made him feel any better. Tate said "Welcome home," and put him right to work.

And then he had to get into the new rhythm, and it was a little difficult. Instead of just watching Kowalski he had to think

about Ronaldi, the big tackle, and of how Rivers, the end, worked.

He bit off the yards. Not in vast chunks, but steadily, slowly. He was doing the kicking, now, and early in the fourth quarter he put one outside on the Hawks' two. And he stayed in there when the defensive club came on the field.

The Hawks tried a running play, and Sam got into the hole just before Kowalski and dropped him for a yard loss. Kowalski gained a yard on another running play. Thompson tried a pass and Blane batted it down, and then Owens kicked. Sam Berg got half a hand on it, and the ball went outside on the Hawk twenty.

The Ramblers took it over in five plays. Sam bit off eight, then Roberts went through the middle for three and a first down. Sam was stopped, Roberts got five, then fumbled and recovered for a five yard loss. Sam went to his right cut back sharply and knifed in there, traveling fast. He was hit on the two but went over. And the crowd loved it.

Berg kicked the point.

And then the Hawks went all out, with the clock dying on them. They threw Kowalski at the ends, and Sam dogged him. Thompson passed, and Sam breathed on Kowalski's neck and knocked down two.

But he could feel the tiredness gathering in him like a fog. He carried when they had the ball, and then he dueled with a refreshed Kowalski each time the Hawks took the ball. He was afraid he couldn't keep it up long enough.

The game broke with a minute and a half to go. The Hawks had the ball on the fifty, and Thompson was chucking them, now, with all his cold skill. He'd completed three short ones in a row, each good for a first. None had been to Kowalski.

He faked out of the T, now, and went back to pitch another. Kowalski made his feint, then stopped dead, turned to watch the play. Sam almost quit on him, then Kowalski started to run to the sideline. Sam went after him desperately.

The pass was far to the outside, and Kowalski had a step on him. Sam saw the ball out of the corner of his eye, coming low and accurately, on a lovely line. He went into the air, felt it touch his fingertips and he hooked them desperately and it stayed. He came down with the ball in his hands

without breaking stride, headed in the right direction. Kowalski was the only man on the field who had a chance at him, and Kowalski tried. Sam pumped the last ounce of juice into tired legs and went the sixty yards for the score. The ball park went mad.

Sol Berg and big Blane hugged him in the end zone, and Sam said, "All right, already. You'll kill a man."

And then he was forcedly aware of the noise in the park. He'd never heard anything like it, and it was a tribute compounded of the years which no modesty could ignore. He did what he had never done, raised his hand and waved to the packed stadium, and they roared out their affection for him.

The rest of it was a romp. They kicked to the Hawks, who passed twice unsuccessfully, and then Blane intercepted their third pass as the game ended. They got off the field with difficulty.

They were set for the game with the Pirates next week, and Sam knew they would win. They'd beaten them early in the season, and the Pirates just didn't have the stuff to go with the Ramblers.

THE dressing room was noisy and happy. Sam had a bottle of beer, sitting with Blane and Berg and Joe Ricardo, and Berg said, "Next week Sal gets that fur coat. In August she was screaming that she was cold."

Berg was sourly happy, and Sam grinned with him. This year the fur coat. How about next year, if they had a bad season? How about in two, three years, when Sol couldn't move around so fast? Would he be wrestling, then?

And then he noticed Kirby, over on the rubbing table. The club doctor was there, examining the ankle, and Strobey was right beside him. The doctor's face was grave, but Strobey's didn't show a thing. Kirby looked just a little scared. And Sam knew why. He was thinking about that contract. And he had plenty of time, Sam reflected, to think about that contract. This was his first year up.

Sam looked at Strobey. The man might be a trainer examining a horse in a stable after a losing race. His face was impassive, his attention not on Kirby but on the doctor and what he was saying. Kirby was noth-

ing to Strobeys but an investment, a cog in a business. And if the cog didn't function it would be replaced swiftly.

Blane said, "Next year it could be good. We have a nice outfit, and. . ."

Next year, Sam thought. And the next, and the one after that. And Joan wearing her fine clothes and that worried frown. And Strobeys saying, with his lifted brows, "Contract, Sam? I didn't think we were ready to talk contract, after the poor season you had. But if you—"

Sol Berg said, "I was just talking with one of the newspaper guys, Sam. You know how much Kowalski got all afternoon, including that TD? A net of nineteen yards." He handed Sam another bottle of beer. "On me," he said. "That guy. Nineteen yards." He shook his head.

Sam kicked off his shoes. Maybe Kowalski would do a little worrying tonight. And his wife. It was a good game to play while you had it. The pay was fine, and as long as you knew what you were doing you were all right. As long as you understood that your time was limited. It was a long life, and you couldn't spend all of it knocking yards out of a big tough line that grew younger and tougher each year. You couldn't wait for one cold, business-like guy to nod his head before you took a deep breath and went home to your wife without fear in your eyes.

But next year, he knew, was safe. With

this one under his belt he could ask for and get just as much as he had this year. He and Joan could stay on the merry-go-round for another season, at least. He wondered if she'd seen the game today. Sometimes she didn't use the ticket. If she had, she would know that they were set, and maybe her humor would change.

And so with what he knew he had on Strobeys at the moment he walked over and said, "I want to talk with you." You had to take advantage of every break.

Strobeys said, "Tomorrow, Sam. I'm busy now."

You had a good day and you were 'Sam.' It was a wonderful arrangement.

Sam said, "Now, Strobeys. I won't be around tomorrow."

Strobeys shrugged and led the way to his little office down the corridor. He closed the door, walked to the desk. "Cigar?"

Sam shook his head. He wore only his pants. He had a bottle of beer in one hand, a cigarette in the other. It was a time to relax.

Strobeys looked at him. "What's on your mind?"

"Next year," Sam said. "The contract."

"I thought we'd wait to talk about that. We've got a game next week, and—"

Sam said, "Kirby's got a lousy ankle. I heard what the doctor said. Kirby may not be around next year." He knew that Strobeys had been counting big on Kirby for

PALM BEACH RAILS



THE LAST long stretch of big-time railroad to be built in the United States was the 270-mile Seaboard Air Line right-of-way from Jacksonville to Miami. Along this straight-as-a-string track and the paralleling Florida East Coast flash the glamorous streamliners bound for America's "Riviera." Read about the great name trains like **The Orange Blossom Special**, **The Silver Meteor**—and about the railroad builder who put Florida on the map, in January **RAILROAD**, now on your newsstand, or send 35c to

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next year. That was part of the squeeze. Strobey lit a cigar. "So you had a good day."

"Maybe somebody had a better day in this park," Sam said. "But you never saw it."

Strobey shrugged. "They made a lot of noise."

"And we won a ball game. Those are the two things you pay off on."

Strobey's eyes were flat, like his voice. "So you were good. Next year will be a year later. In this business you figure depreciation, like on a car. This year, you got eighteen thousand. I'll give you twelve for next year."

Sam got up. "It was enlightening, working for you." He opened the door.

Strobey said, "Fifteen, Sam."

Sam turned and grinned at him. He stepped into the corridor. "Take a good look at Hale, next week. It's the last time he'll be playing for you."

Strobey said, "All right. Eighteen."

Sam looked at him. "Strobey, you've taught me a lot. Someday I might be a good business man."

JOAN was home when he got there. She wore a beautiful tailored suit and an expression he couldn't quite figure. But the worry was still far back in her eyes.

He said "You go to the game?" In the past she'd never missed one. She was always worried sick about him, but she had always been there. Lately he didn't know whether or not to ask.

She nodded. She gave him a smile that had something of the past in it. "You were hot, Sam. I didn't know what to think when they made the switch. But you never had a better day."

He said, "I talked to Strobey about the contract."

And the worry was dominant in her eyes, now. She said nothing.

"He'll pay us the same as this year. The endorsements should be better, and then there'll be the games on the Coast."

She looked at him for a long moment and then the tension left her face but the eyes retained their discontent. He waited for some word of congratulation or pleasure, but it did not come.

So he put it out fast. As long as things were going lousy, they might as well go

downhill all the way. "But I'm not playing next year. I called Jim Martin and told him I'd have a couple of thousand from the game next week, and that I'd go in on that deal with him. I'm an engineer. It's about time I started working on it. I played ball and I made money, but I'm just about at the end of the road and I'm not going to grow a set of ulcers waiting for a slob like Strobey to mastermind my life."

Her eyes showed the shock, the sudden surprise.

He said, "You won't have any of this. If you want to come along on the deal you'll have a small house, and you'll have to cook your own meals—and mine. The nights will be big. Maybe if I'm not too tired we can go to Jim and Kitty's house for bridge and a few beers, or they can come to ours. There won't be eighty-six people for cocktails."

She stared at him. "You called Jim Martin and told him you'd go in with him?"

He said, "That's right," and waited for the outburst. But the time had come. Things had been going so bad they couldn't get worse.

She came to him so fast she almost knocked him over. She was warm and alive and eager in his arms. "Sam! I've been trying not to say anything, but if you knew! Worry about you, worry about the money we were spending, about what we were going to do! You and Jim!"

She moved away from him, then, and he stared at her. She pointed at the huge television set, at a couple of chairs and a sofa that had cost him a month's pay. "Do you know how much we can get for those items? Or for the—"

She was almost dancing.

He took a step and held her by the arms. "You mean you don't mind? This deal is all right with you?"

"All right?" Her face was alight with a new joy, and then she sobered. "Sam, it hasn't been good, lately. Worrying about you each time you played, watching you wait for Strobey to make up his mind. It wasn't what we'd planned, Sam." Then her smile was filled with warmth. "But this new thing. . . ."

And he felt the grin spread over his face. Sometimes you never knew. A man could go on being a fool for a long time and never know it.

PARDON MY PUCK!

Some men play for money, and some for the glory of winning, but Blackie Magee carved up the ice with but one thought in mind—to destroy forever the memory of an all-time great—who had sworn to run him out of hockey forever!



**By
T. W.
FORD**

He took the rubber, curved it in, shuttled to Day. . . .

SHUTTTLING the rubber back and forth as if they had it on pulleys, the Nomads piled in on a three-man break. Jeff Magee of the Falcons back-checked warily. He figured he had the rival center well covered. A Nomad wing cut hard diagonally. The black-haired kid thought he had a chance to intercept a pass, lunged. It was a neat drop pass instead, and he was caught out of position. The Nomad center dug for the cage to pick up the return. Only a miraculous stop by Curly Eb-

bert saved a goal. The rubber was batted out of the chaos into the corner.

Jeff—"Blackie"—Magee dug desperately after it with one of his explosive spurts. The raw-boned kid of the third line got there on it with the Nomad center. It was rough. Blackie got the butt end in the ribs but broke free with it. He whipped it forward to Ledaine up near the blue line. The fans groaned. A slowed-down veteran wingman, Ledaine couldn't quite get to it. A Nomad defense, playing up, pounced on it.

Curly in the cage was subjected to two more fierce shots.

Blackie jumped into the melee, hooked the second rebound. But a husky Nomad smacked him out of the play. The hollow-cheeked kid, paling, writhed inside as he drew a chorus of catcalls from the gallery. Back in the AHL, before he'd come up to the Falcons, he used to meet slam with slam. But there was something about the silver-haired lynx-eyed man on the bench with his constant preaching of, "You don't score in the penalty box," that shackled him. The thing between them, the unspoken comparison, tied him all up anyway.

Ziggy Hayes of the defense finally cleared up to Blackie. He broke fast, catching the *chuff-chuff* as his own blades carved the ice. There was only a lone defense man down there between them and the goalie, plus a frantically back-checking forward.

"Blackie! Blackie!" It was Balco, the raw rook at right wing, flanking him down. Blackie fed it over to him in the alley. But Balco messed up the pass with crude stickwork. By the time it came back on the pass-and-take as Blackie cut for the cage, Vellers of the Nomads had time to cover, bouncing into him hard. The back-checking Nomad picked up the rubber. The next moment, a whistle for an offside face-off and the bang-bang on the boards by the Falcon bench to signal a change in lines.

It was the second stringers, the "Kid" line, coming over the dasher. Blackie's eyes locked with the crescent-shaped ones of Big Jim Todd, Falcon manager-coach, as he neared the bench. Todd's eyes, the color of frozen water, switched away. For Blackie's money, he might as well have sneered broadly.

Why the devil doesn't he give me a chance with that second line, some decent wings? the kid asked himself, sitting down. Ziggy Hayes, off too, dropped onto the bench beside him.

Out on the ice, the Kids carried the play to the Nomads in a fierce effort to break the third period 3-3 deadlock. Again and again Skin Desalle at center led his two wings in on blistering drives. But Desalle, though still some years short of thirty, was no energy-charged kid any more. He'd come up in his teens. That, plus a series of injuries capped by an ankle fracture last season, had slowed him down. He couldn't

stay with his wings. Time and again they had to hold up passes till he got to the position.

"For the lovva Pete!" Ziggy Hayes snorted. "There it is—Skin holding 'em up again! Shucks, Blackie, you oughta be centering that line!"

"Sure like a crack at it," Blackie admitted in the thin voice that hadn't reached maturity as yet.

A whistle for a faceoff down by the Falcon cage. Ziggy turned to Blackie Magee. "Y' know, kid, I think Jim Todd's got a grudge against you for some reason! Honest! I—"

A jam on Curly Ebbert in the nets. He cleared. Red Paine, at right defense for the Falcons, tangled with Vellers, speedy defense ace for the Nomads and a bad man in his own right. They both hit the ice grappling. As officials parted them, Big Jim Todd yelled, "Hayes!"

"Here we go again with the old Girl Scout act," Ziggy muttered, thrusting a burly leg over the dasher. "Whatever you do—don't get a penalty, Hayes," he added, imitating Big Jim Todd's always half-husky voice. And, sure enough, after a quick confab with the pilot, Ziggy sneered with disgust as he skated out to replace Paine before the latter could blow his stack.

A FEW moments later, the first-string forwards, the veterans, went on with the crowd pleading for a tie-breaking tally. They carried it down there all right, those smooth-skating veterans. But they couldn't dent the cords as the spares on the bench writhed and groaned. It was an old story by now. Sonny Day, left winger, and Locke, the center, had a feud going, nobody knew what about. But they refused to pass to each other.

Then came a break. A Nomad forward got thumbed to the penalty box for high sticking. Big Jim rose, ran the lynxlike eyes along the bench as he signed Ziggy back off the bench. Todd was about to make one of his surprise unpredictable gambles.

"Magee—go in!" he ordered.

Blackie was so dumbfounded for a moment it took a shove to start him over the sideboards. He realized Big Jim wanted four-man power drives against the short-handed Nomads.

One of them iced it. The Falcon defender intercepted, slapped it up to Blackie. Half muscle-bound with the sense of responsibility he fumbled with the rubber in the crook of his stick as fans booed. He kept thinking of how the man who'd sent him in, Big Jim Todd, an all-time All-Star, had a rep in his day of breaking up many a game with a last-minute score. Blackie felt he had to do as well.

He got going, fed to Day, slipped his check. They piled in on a four-man power dive, Tournau, the right winger, at the crease for a screened-shot setup. It was furious work. Skin Desalle was trapped against the boards by big balding Vellers. Blackie drove in, smacked Vellers into the dasher. He took the rubber, curved in, shuttled to Day. Day lunged but laid it on Blackie's stick with a drop-pass as the Nomad goalie, fainted, fell to his knees. It was practically an open cage. A flick of his powerful wrists and Blackie fired—over the top of the nets. Chagrin almost choked him.

A Nomad grabbed a carom off the boards and streaked away on a solo. Blackie back-checked madly with both Desalle and Day flattened on the ice at the moment. The Nomad let fly as he met the lone Falcon defense man. Curly kicked out a low whizzer and Blackie wheeled in to take the rebound.

"Look out, look out!" Curly yipped.

Blackie took his eyes off the black disc, wondering if there was another Nomad hawking around, as he reached for it. Then it happened. There was a smothered yell from Curly. And there was the rubber nestling in a corner of the Falcon cage.

That was the game. The penalized Nomad returned. Todd went back to two defense and the second line. Thirty-odd seconds later the buzzer ending the game sounded. Head bowed, hot-faced, Blackie turned quickly off the bench and clumped down the runway to the dressing room.

"That was a tough one—a tough one to drop," Big Jim Todd snorted, striding around down there. He shrugged as one of the sports writers who'd gotten in said something. Big Jim's light blue eyes flicked to Blackie a brief instant. Then he said, "We gotta do something about our reserves. We gotta strengthen the bench. Some of the rooks. . . ." His eyes swiveled to Blackie again before the pilot turned.

Blackie felt himself shrivel inside. Coming from his own father made it that much tougher. . . .

AFTER the game, he, Ziggy and Curly Ebbert had hamburgers and coffee together. Blackie tried to keep his emotions in check. When you came down to hard fact, he had kicked away the game. But the personal angle was inescapable. His father, Big Jim, kept him working on the third line flanked by a pair of wings who were millstones around his neck. He had to constantly throttle his own stuff, slow down. How the hell could he be expected to look good?

Ziggy said, mouth full of ketchup-bleeding hamburger, "Aw, if Todd had really let us slam those guys around and soften 'em up, we could've won! What's the idea of this namby-pamby stuff, anyway?"

The older Curly shook his head. "Jim Todd is no softie, Zig. As a player he was rated one of the roughest back-checkers in the game."

"Then why's he always warning us about staying outa the penalty box? It don't make sense, Curly."

"Think of it this way," the solemn-faced little goalie said thoughtfully. "This club hasn't jelled yet. We all know there's trouble on the first line to begin with. And—well, we haven't begun to click on all cylinders yet."

"No, we aren't hot. Fifth place," Ziggy conceded.

Curly ran fingers through his balding head. "That's right. We aren't a typical Todd club yet—a team that can go out and get goals when it needs them. And a team that can't get goals can't risk penalties. Because when you got a man in the coop is when the other club *does* get the goals. So-o, I guess Jim has to play it safe for a while."

"Well, I—maybe—but I don't know," Ziggy said.

Blackie Magee's thoughts had switched off at that remark of the goalie's about a "typical Todd club." He wondered what it meant. And it reminded him of the remark his dad was supposed to have made when the Falcons had announced Blackie's purchase from the Mohawks. The Falcons had just been returning from a road trip. And according to one hockey writer, who

had handled it as a leak, Big Jim Todd had stated he didn't know the deal had been consummated till he read it in the papers. That had been a slap in the face for Blackie, confusing him the more.

Ed Davers of *The Chronicle* paused at their booth in the chophouse. "Hear about Vellers, boys? Seems he's got a couple of cracked ribs—not busted, just lateral cracks. He'll be out for about a week, they say. Got 'em right near the end of the game. I guess it was when he and Desalle roughed it up on the backboards."

The muscles at the hinges of Blackie's jaw lumped as they hardened. He suddenly realized it wasn't Desalle who'd done the job on Vellers. It must have been he himself when he charged in there to steal the rubber.

"Vellers is a mean customer about getting back when somebody hands him his lumps, too," Curly remarked.

A little later, walking down to the side street hotel that was the team's unofficial headquarters, Ziggy, still brooding on the game, came up with it again. "Dammit, Blackie, I still think Todd's giving you a tough deal. It isn't giving you a fair deal to work you with that third line. Maybe he has a grudge against you, huh?"

Blackie shrugged. But up in the hotel room he shared with Ziggy, he couldn't help but wonder. Actually, it seemed to him, he was the one with cause to harbor resentment. Before he was old enough to remember, his mother and father had separated. Shortly afterward, his mother had died in an automobile accident. The Magees, his mother's family, had raised him. Officially adopted him and given him the Magee name. And Grandfather Magee had taught him to despise the father he'd never known. It seemed that Jim Todd, a blooming star when married, had hit the primrose path, drinking heavily.

But, as he grew, Blackie read repeatedly in the papers how his dad had made a great comeback. He was again a star, a great one, a forward who was a terror to every goal-tender in the NHL. And something had made Blackie decide he had to be as great a player as his unknown dad. It was just as he made the jump to the pro ranks, hailed as a potential big timer with his explosive speed, that his father, Big Jim, had hung up his skates to become a manager.

Blackie had figured some day they'd meet. But to play under the man he had been taught to hate. . . .

Ziggy, a comic book in his lap, lowered the bottle of ale from his mouth. "You know, Blackie, was I you, I'm damned if I'd knock my brains out on the ice till Todd gave me a real break." He took another gulp of ale. "It's time he woke up anyway. There's rumors around that the front office isn't satisfied with the showing he's making with the club."

Blackie clamped his mind closed against the idea. He was a hockey man, first, last, and always. It was in his blood like a third kind of corpuscle. Still it did look like a raw deal. . . . His thoughts back-tracked to his first meeting with his dad when he came up to the Falcons.

BIG JIM was supposed to be there when he went up to see Phillips, the club secretary, in the business office. But Jim was late. The press had already been let in when he did arrive.

"Hello, Jeff—Magee," his father had said as they shook hands, adding the surname hesitantly.

"Hello, Mr. Todd," Blackie said, stiff with embarrassment.

Then the scribes inundated him with questions, seeking background color for their story on the highly-touted rookie. One asked him if there had been any hockey men in the family before him.

There had been a moment charged with drama, a moment that only Blackie himself and Big Jim, his dad, understood. Blackie had waited to see if his dad would speak up, reveal their relationship. Jim Todd had merely put a cigar in his mouth. Blackie had finally said:

"My—my dad—he was a player. And," he went on glibly before they could pin him down, "if you're going to ask me about girls, I've been too busy playing hockey—or learning to play—to give them much time."

That had sealed it for Blackie, the fact his dad had remained silent. It had hurt, hurt hard. And when he began to get the rough end of the stick as a player under him, Blackie figured his dad felt nothing but antagonism toward him. Putting him in to center that third line with the wings who handicapped him seemed proof of it. And

in the practice workouts, Jim Todd constantly criticized him, seemed to get a savage satisfaction in pointing out his faults, repeatedly harped on flaws in his play. Never a single word of praise, though.

Like that Indian game, Blackie's third with the club. He had tied it up in the final minute with a scintillating solo drive. Yet when the reporters had mentioned it to Big Jim after the game, the latter had said, "Oh, yeah, that goal. Of course, Apley of the Indian defense was playing tonight with a bad shoulder. We were lucky."

And now, finally, tonight, the rap, aimed at him, about the rookies not coming through for the club. Blackie's teeth ground. He wished he'd never come to the Falcons. But now, more than ever, he was determined to become as great an ice man as the bench boss ever had been. He wanted to throw it, tacitly, in his father's teeth. . . .

The next afternoon's practice workout, Big Jim ignored Blackie completely. That rankled too. And the evening after, as they dressed for the Tiger contest, thick shouldered Big Jim strode from his office to indicate Richy Mund, a veteran used mostly as a general utility man, with a spiking finger.

"You'll center the third line tonight, Mund."

Sullen and fuming, Blackie saw most of the action from the bench. He filled in a couple of times for brief spells as a utility man, was on once with the "Kid" line as the fourth forward when the Tigers had a man in the penalty coop. The disorganized Falcons managed to eke out a 3-3 tie. But Blackie left the Arena nursing a faint spark of hope. Desalle had sustained a badly banged-up knee in the closing minutes when crashed into a steel upright of the Tiger cage. It might mean a chance to center that "Kid" line for Blackie. But another thing he had begun to notice worried him because he was a hockey man to the core. The club morale had sagged even lower. Now they were a broody grumbling bunch ready to seek a scapegoat for their lack of success. Blackie realized a situation like that could detonate with a single faint spark.

THEY entrained for a short two-game road jaunt. But it was gall to Blackie when they took the ice against the Comets. For Mund was moved up as the play-maker

for the second line with Blackie himself back centering those two misfit wings on the third line.

During the game he kept thinking about Ziggy's advice not to knock his brains out. He tried to forget it but his play was ragged. Thanks to super net-tending by Curly, the Falcons were lucky to pull it out by a 1-0 score. But down in the locker room afterward, Mund collapsed. The Comet club physician discovered he had a temperature over a hundred and one with a severe case of influenza. Mund was sent to a local hospital as the club took the night train to the Nomads' home city.

"Todd'll have to use you now," Ziggy said.

But Big Jim decided he didn't have to. He put in Desalle, injured knee heavily taped, with the "Kids" again. Blackie was still on the third line, the "Junkpile Line" as he had secretly christened it. Lashed by an inner fury, he smashed in twice, blindly. The second time, Vellers nailed him, getting him with a trip that wasn't called, then crashing him flat with a numbing body check. The Nomad defense was playing with his ribs in an adhesive tape corset.

"Come on down some more, sweetheart," Vellers taunted. "You and me got a little score to settle."

Blackie realized then that Vellers knew who'd cracked him up in the last game. Vellers gave him the rough stuff a couple of times more before the period ended with a 1-1 score. Midway of the second period, Blackie lost control. He had a setup pass coming at him just outside the crease when Vellers charged him, caught him too with an elbow over the jaw as he toppled.

"'Fraid to fight back, punk?" Vellers jeered.

Blackie came off the ice, pale with rage. Before he realized it, he had thrown a punch at Vellers' head, then stripped off his heavy gauntlets. Vellers slashed at his legs. Blackie pitched two more blows to Vellers' face, drawing blood from his lip, then grappled with him. Both men hit the ice as the whistle blew. And Blackie was waved to the coop for two minutes for what was termed "roughing." Looking across the ice he could see Big Jim giving him a two-ton stare from the players bench.

But the damage was not complete. Unknowingly, Blackie set off a chain reaction.

He hadn't served half a minute of his time when Red Paine joined him for tripping. With the Falcons two men short, the Nomads rammed two past the beleaguered Curly to make it a 3-1 game. And the Falcons were hardly back at full strength when Locke, after hitting the net post on a wide-open shot, blew up and fouled a Nomad in his self-anger. With the Falcons one man down, the Nomads capitalized again to sink one and make it 4-1.

In the rest period, Big Jim Todd let them have both barrels, verbally flogging the hides off them as he ranted. But the third period wasn't three minutes old when Ziggy Hayes drew a two-minute penalty. He charged a Nomad into the boards so hard the man was knocked unconscious for a few seconds. Curly Ebbert performed sleight of hand, did splits like a ballet dancer, and came up with a few fancy miracles. But seconds before Ziggy emerged from durance vile, the Nomads did it again. The debacle ended in a terrific 6-1 shellacking for the Falcons.

Downstairs, Locke began to yap about the officials.

"Shut up!" Big Jim Todd stood at one end of the small room, eyeing them coldly. He sized up each man unhurriedly, giving Paine a double-long glare. His eyes finally came to rest on his own son, Blackie Magee. The Falcon pilot wore a broad sneer now. Then he turned and walked into the office off the dressing room, throwing back, "Damned alibi artists! Bah!"

Red Paine clattered his stick against a locker front. He had been benched for the rest of the contest after that tripping in the second period, was bitterly sore about it. "I've had about enough of that guy. . . ."

THE Falcons caught the homeward bound night train without Big Jim. The pilot had caught a plane for Minneapolis to take a look at a promising forward with the Millers. In the club car, Ziggy dropped down beside the disconsolate brooding Blackie. He began to speak in a low, guarded tone.

"Look, Blackie, Red Paine's drawing up a petition and he wants to get as many players to sign it as possible. Now—"

"Petition for what, Zig?"

"Well, we're going to send it to the Arena president. It's a protest against the

way Todd is running the club. We think we could get to winning with the right kind of a manager. . . . As a matter of fact, kid, we're going to say that unless steps are taken damn soon, we'll simply refuse to dress for a game—"

Blackie caught his breath sharply. He realized, under the circumstances, such a move might be just enough to tip the scales against Big Jim. Might mean the gate for him. Player revolts had been known, by insiders at least, to succeed in sports before. He stalled by lighting a cigarette.

"Give me a little time to think it over, Zig," he finally got out. He felt the men were right. But he couldn't bring himself to do this to his dad—not yet, anyway.

Back home, the next day he was jittery with ragged nerves, eyes red-rimmed from sleeplessness. Ziggy watched him half choke on a couple of mouthfuls of luncheon, said something about a phone call. When he returned he reported he had made a date, and his gal was going to bring along a friend for Blackie. Blackie started to protest.

"Nuts," the defense silenced him. "This is Tuesday. No game till Thursday when we meet the Comets. No wild party—just a little fun. . . . By the way, quite a few of the gang have already signed Red's petition, kid."

Jean, Blackie's date, was a nice kid, a little brunette, cute, who didn't jabber your ear off. They found out, at the little East Side spot Ziggy knew, that they danced awfully well together. Blackie had two drinks though the defense man took on quite a few.

When it came time to go home, a dank cold drizzle fouled up the night. Blackie took Jean uptown in a cab, to where she lived with her parents. Her goodnight kiss was mighty sweet and he was relaxed, calm-nerved, for the first time in weeks as he took the subway back.

Two stations down, the local crawled to a halt just after leaving the platform. There was some kind of a tie-up ahead. When it finally did proceed after a long wait, it inched the rest of the way to his midtown station. It was eleven-thirty, half an hour after the team's curfew time, when he walked into the hotel lobby after hustling across town. Over to the right, in a big leather lounge chair, Big Jim looked up from a newspaper. Their eyes locked. In that moment, Blackie noticed his dad's face

looked somewhat older—kind of haggard.

His father glanced down at his wrist watch. "Half an hour after curfew, Magee," he said slowly. "That'll be a twenty-five buck fine." He rose and walked into the hotel taproom before Blackie could explain things.

IN THE morning, there was bad news that shoved the petition idea into the background temporarily. As Ziggy put it, "You can't hit a guy when he's sorta—well, down." For two more members of the team, Red Paine himself and Desalle, were bedded with the flu germ that had knocked out Mund on the road. The club sent for a promising young center on their farm club. He was due to come in the next day. Thursday morning, word arrived that the kid had suffered a fractured hand in the minor league game the night before. And just to clinch the hard luck, two hours before game time, the club physician sent Delaine, hit by the same vicious bug, to the hospital.

Blackie was in the Arena dressing room early that evening, before the rest of the club. He wanted to be alone, to try and think things through, to, if possible, get himself straightened out. On the bench beside him lay an afternoon paper, folded open at the sports section.

A column was titled: TOP-TO-BOTTOM SHAKEUP RUMORED FOR FALCONS. And the opening line had burnt itself into Blackie's mind.

From a reliable source, our informant has learned that no member of the club, from Big Jim Todd himself down, is certain of his job. . . .

Curly Ebbert came in with a "Hi, boy," brushing newfallen snow off his trench coat. Then Blackie quickly flipped the newspaper to the floor as his dad, Big Jim himself, entered. The latter just nodded and went on into his office.

"We'll have to play a tight-checking game tonight and wait for the breaks," he told his depleted squad before they went upstairs. "And a trip to the penalty box can just about kill any chance we have. . . . Go in there and—keep punching."

But his husky voice lacked the vitality-charged quality it formerly had. It did nothing to crack the listless spirit of the men. Blackie could feel it around him as they fled out. His dad had lost his last vestige

of any hold over them. It was evident from the initial faceoff. The Falcons, disorganized, a team that had lost faith in itself, played uninspired mechanical hockey.

The Comets shifted their defense after an offside. And Blackie took a double-take at the bullet-headed man with the receding hairline in the yellow shirt, one of the new backline duo taking over. It was Vellers, recently of the Nomads, his *bête noir*. He turned to Rogers. "That Vellers' brother or something, Rog?"

"Shucks no, boy, that's him, the bad actor in person. He went to the Comets in a deal yesterday."

But even when Vellers with his cold, mocking grin, taunted him after bumping him around on a two-man break, Blackie couldn't get warmed up and going. The fans booed them lustily as they left the ice at the end of the first period, trailing at 1-0. And again it was only yeoman work by Curly in the cage that kept it that close.

Big Jim had nothing to say to them in the rest period. A pall of hopelessness hung thickly over the locker room. They plodded up for the second period. Blackie found himself working with the "Kid" line, then, after the first-stringers had been on, going out there again with a makeshift third line. He tried. But he couldn't throw off the sense of futility that shackled him. The spark had gone out of him.

The Comets made it 2-0 on a power play, Vellers punching in a rebound when Ziggy Hayes got two minutes for charging. Papers and pennies sprayed the ice as irate Falcon fans demonstrated their opinion of the home club.

Blackie was on the ice when the big break came. He'd just cleared a loose disc in a jam on the Falcon cage. But a Comet stole the rubber from him on the backboards. Another raid on Curly, another melee in front of the cage mouth. Curly pitched onto his face. There was suddenly a blotch of blood on the ice beside where his head rested. The whistle shrilled frantically. They turned the groaning half-out Curly over gently. The crimson poured from an ugly eye gash, a bad slice right through the eyebrow itself.

When the team doctor examined him downstairs, it was found the eyelid itself too had been cut right through. The doctor ordered him taken across the street to the

Polyclinic Hospital. The officials plus the Comet manager came in. It was decided to add the remaining seven minutes of the second period onto the third, taking the ten-minute rest interim now to give the Falcons a chance to decide what to do about a cage guardian.

They looked at each other blankly. Balco, the third line winger, spoke up, saying he was willing to don the goalie's pads. But they all realized putting the raw awkward kid in there would be just a bad joke. Besides, with four men on the shelf with that flu, they were badly undermanned on the front lines as it was. Big Jim himself shifted around restlessly, heavy shoulders sagging as he drew hard on a cold cigarette.

"Maybe we better forfeit it and—" he started.

The veteran, Locke, broke in. "Say, Jim, I read once how you'd started as a goalie in the minors. You've had some experience, anyway. If the Comets don't kick. . . ."

THERE was a round of courtesy applause as they took the ice for the third period with the P.A. system announcing Big Jim in the cage. On the bench, Blackie felt a glow as he watched his silver-haired dad rough up the ice in front of the cage, then crouch at the faceoff. There was a long angle drive at him smack after the faceoff. He caught it, juggled it, dropped it inside the crease. But he batted it out to the side as the yellow-shirted Comets swarmed around him. In a matter of seconds though, there was a real jam on Big Jim.

The Falcon defense was split and Comets really swarmed around that crease. Jim Todd kicked out one, stopped another and flung himself out to smother the rebound with his body. A faceoff in the circle over to the left. The Falcons couldn't clear. The Comets carried in with plenty of body-slaming. Big Jim dropped to his knees for a brilliant stop. But then he was smashed back hard against the steel side post of the cage. Blackie saw his mouth shoot open with the pain as he went down. Then, lying on his side, Big Jim shot up a glove and stabbed a shot above him, flung it free.

The Arena throng really made with the yelling then. And Blackie himself was on his feet, bawling, "That's the stuff, dad, that's it!" None of the other spares heard him in the uproar.

It was happening. The club was beginning to jell, to pull itself together, driven by the courageous example of Big Jim in the cage.

At an offside faceoff, Big Jim called from the cage and changed lines. Blackie leaped eagerly onto the ice as he went on with the second, the "Kid" line, flanked by Rogers and Tourneau. Blackie stole the rubber with a sweet poke-check and led his line in. Their passing was razor sharp. Blackie picked up the rubber in close but was upended by Vellers with an illegal crosscheck. He escaped a penalty too. Moments later, Blackie spearheaded another surge.

Tourneau was rushed into the corner but slipped the puck out and back to Blackie near the blue line. Really red hot now, the rook center stick-handled past one Comet, drove in, weaving. And then Vellers tripped him flat. There was no whistle as Blackie jumped up. The officials were closing on Tourneau and a Comet in the corner who'd started to grapple. A whistle then.

"You sure pull in your horns when a guy gives it back to you, huh, kid?" Vellers taunted Blackie.

The latter flung down his stick and started to rip off a gauntlet. Then he remembered the silver-haired man back there in the cage. He picked up his club and shifted off for the faceoff. A second later, deadly cool now as he used to be back in his Mohawk days, he spotted Rogers cutting in from the side. From out front, Blackie lifted a tricky soft shot at the cage. And as the Comet goalie slid out for it, Rogers neatly flicked it past him for the first Falcon score.

Play got rougher and faster. In the Falcon cage, with the first line back on, Big Jim stopped two Comet power plays, kicking out shots desperately, clearing rebounds. Once he was banged outside the crease after lunging to make a save. The crowd groaned. But the silver-haired pilot charged at the puck carrier and dumped him, then iced the puck. It riled the Comets that they couldn't score on this elderly fill-in. And the Falcons kept getting hotter, coagulating into a team instead of a bunch of individuals, losing true rocketlike passes, talking it up. At 13:10 of the period, Locke dented the cords with a honey on a triple pass play with Sonny Day feeding it to him in the goal mouth to tie up the game.

The infuriated Comets put on the pressure. Big Jim went to his knees to make one save, kicked out another. And then Ziggy Hayes drew a penalty for hooking when he prevented a Comet from shooting as Big Jim landed on his pants. The defense man turned to his pilot, distress stamped on his face.

"Lord, Jim, I'm sorry as—" he began.

Jim Todd nodded. "Don't worry, Zig. It saved a score. We'll hold 'em, boy," he told his player.

AND they did, Blackie and Sonny Day working up front with a defense spare on to replace Ziggy. Seconds before Ziggy returned, there was a pile up in front of the cage. Blackie snagged the rubber and took off, only Vellers down there between him and the goalie. The big defense edged forward. Blackie veered to his right, feinted to the left. And the bellicose Vellers flung his body in a savage charge instead of forcing Blackie to the outside and trying to tie him up.

There was a spray of blade-shaven ice that left fourteen thousand fans holding their breath. Blackie had whipped to a dead stop in his tracks. Vellers, off balance, went plunging past his right shoulder. Blackie took off the brakes, rode in, fired. The game Comet goalie dived out on the rising hip-high shot. He blocked with his stick. The rubber caromed off its upper edge and struck him in the side of the forehead. He landed on his knees, blood streaming from the cut. The whistle blew. Time was called while he skated to the visitors bench to have it patched up. Blackie drifted around on his blades back of the blue line, away from the others.

"Jeff . . ."

Blackie's head jerked to his left. It was Big Jim, his dad, speaking softly with everybody watching the Comet goalie being treated.

"Look, Jeff, no matter what happens, you're a hockey player tonight," the older man went on. "I guess you—you sorta hate me. . . Don't blame you. Maybe I leaned over backwards in handling you because you're—my son."

"Sure, okay," Blackie said in a voice that croaked.

"The day you got here—in that press confab—when you didn't tell 'em you were

my son—I—I sorta figured it might be better that way. Maybe if the fans knew they might think I was playing you as a favorite, sorta. That's why I let that statement leak out about not knowing the deal for you had gone through. . . I didn't want you to be handicapped—Jeff. But—I'm proud of you tonight—damned proud. I saw what Vellers was trying." He turned away.

It all burst on Blackie then, the simple clear explanation of the whole situation.

When their goalie returned to the nets, the Comets poured on the coal. Big Jim made a dizzy save on a close-up rebound that brought applause like crackling thunder. The feedout to Blackie. He swept in with Rogers and Tourneau. A pretty drop pass to the latter. Rogers to Tourneau cutting for the cage. A feint and the flip to Blackie. Vellers smacked him fiercely off balance. Blackie rode in on one skate and flicked it through the nettender's skates into the cage to break the tie.

Blackie yelled, "Pardon my puck!"

They were still cheering him eleven seconds later when he stole the rubber from the rival center and flashed in on a solo. That drive, an inch inside the goal mouth at 15:06 stowed the game away. . . .

THE fans were bellowing his name at the final buzzer. Then Big Jim's name. The Arena police had to bull a path for them, father and son, through the fans that poured out of promenade seats and jumped down out of boxes. Then they were down in the dressing room. And everybody was sort of embarrassed. It took Ziggy to crack the ice.

"Damn my eyes," he panted as he squatted on a bench, "if that wasn't pretty good goal-tending for an old son-of-a-gun!"

Pandemonium threatened to bring down the ceiling then. Only Big Jim Todd and his son were silent. Big Jim's arm was draped over Blackie's shoulders. Blackie had a trembling feeling inside as the sports-writers piled in. One of them planted himself in front of the pair, started to speak, then peered through his bifocals.

"Say, you know, outside of the hair, you two look sort of—well, a damnsight alike, anyway. Honest, Jim!" he said.

"Shall we tell 'em, Jeff?"

Blackie winked at the silver-haired man. "What the devil, as manager, you oughta be spokesman for the team, Dad. . . ."

BIG MOMENTS

in SPORTS

by Nelson
and
Allen

WHEN BOUDREAU BEAT BOSTON

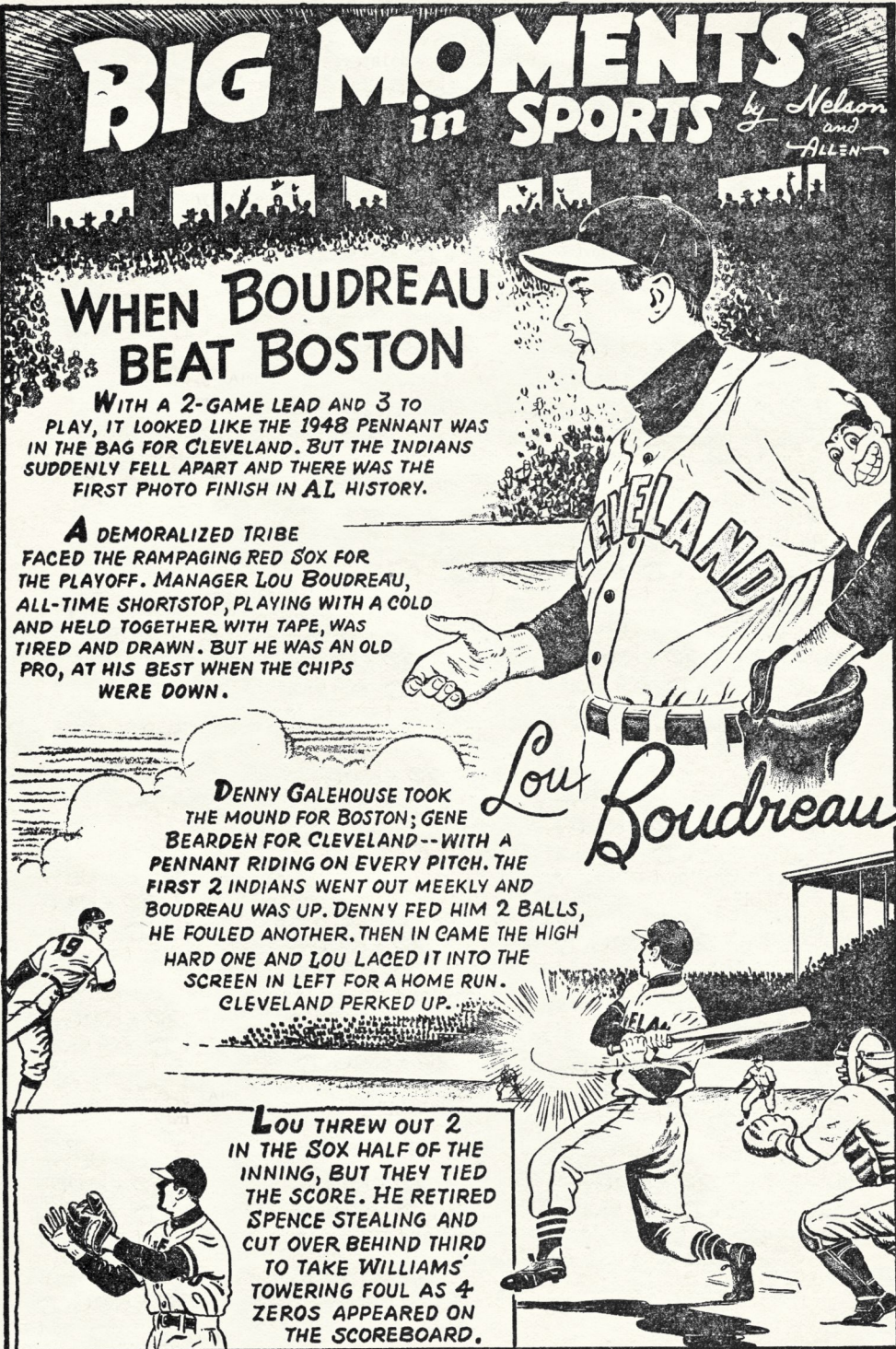
WITH A 2-GAME LEAD AND 3 TO PLAY, IT LOOKED LIKE THE 1948 PENNANT WAS IN THE BAG FOR CLEVELAND. BUT THE INDIANS SUDDENLY FELL APART AND THERE WAS THE FIRST PHOTO FINISH IN AL HISTORY.

A DEMORALIZED TRIBE FACED THE RAMPAGING RED SOX FOR THE PLAYOFF. MANAGER LOU BOUDREAU, ALL-TIME SHORTSTOP, PLAYING WITH A COLD AND HELD TOGETHER WITH TAPE, WAS TIRED AND DRAWN. BUT HE WAS AN OLD PRO, AT HIS BEST WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN.

DENNY GALEHOUSE TOOK THE MOUND FOR BOSTON; GENE BEARDEN FOR CLEVELAND--WITH A PENNANT RIDING ON EVERY PITCH. THE FIRST 2 INDIANS WENT OUT MEEKLY AND BOUDREAU WAS UP. DENNY FED HIM 2 BALLS, HE FOULED ANOTHER. THEN IN CAME THE HIGH HARD ONE AND LOU LACED IT INTO THE SCREEN IN LEFT FOR A HOME RUN. CLEVELAND PERKED UP.

LOU THREW OUT 2 IN THE SOX HALF OF THE INNING, BUT THEY TIED THE SCORE. HE RETIRED SPENCE STEALING AND CUT OVER BEHIND THIRD TO TAKE WILLIAMS' TOWERING FOUL AS 4 ZEROS APPEARED ON THE SCOREBOARD.

Lou Boudreau



THEN, FIRST UP IN THE 6TH, HE PUT ANOTHER SPARK TO THE INDIAN ATTACK BY LINING A SINGLE TO RIGHT. JOE GORDON SINGLED AND KEN KELTNER SCORED THEM WITH A HOME

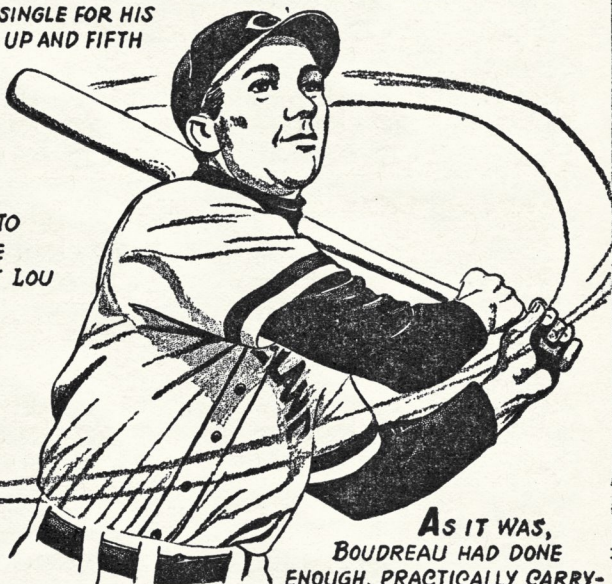
RUN. ELLIS KINDER REPLACED GALEHOUSE, BUT THE TRIBE WAS ON FIRE AND SCORED 1 MORE.



Ellis Kinder
(GOT HIS LUMPS)

WITH 2 GONE IN THE 5TH, LOU BELTED ANOTHER HOMER. KINDER PRUDENTLY WALKED HIM IN THE 7TH. IN THE 9TH HE PUNCHED ANOTHER SINGLE FOR HIS FIFTH TIME UP AND FIFTH TIME ON!

WITH THE RED SOX DOWN TO THEIR FINAL OUT, IT WOULD BE NICE TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT LOU MADE IT ON A SPECTACULAR CATCH. ACTUALLY, KELTNER SCOOPED UP TEBBETT'S SLOW BOUNDER AND RIFLED TO FIRST TO NAIL DOWN CLEVELAND'S FIRST PENNANT IN 28 YEARS.

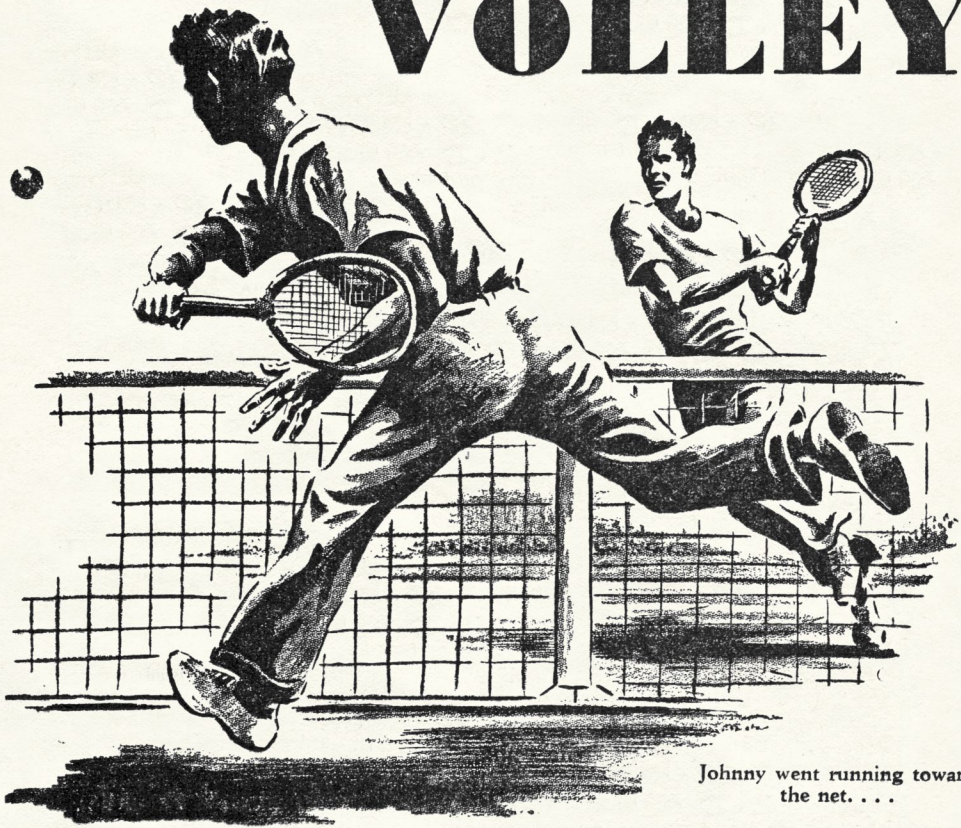


AS IT WAS, BOUDREAU HAD DONE ENOUGH, PRACTICALLY CARRYING THE TRIBE TO VICTORY SINGLE-HANDED WITH 3 RUNS, 4 HITS, 2 RBI, 1 BB, 3 PUTOUTS AND 5 ASSISTS. THE FINAL SCORE MIGHT WELL HAVE READ:

BOUDREAU	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	1	1	--8
BOSTON	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	--3

THAT CLEVELAND WENT ON TO WIN THE WORLD SERIES FROM THE BRAVES WAS STRICTLY ANTI-CLIMACTIC.

VENGEANCE VOLLEY



Johnny went running toward the net. . . .

"Two things any tennis bum can buy, kid—a game and a racket. But there're no strings to the thing called—guts!"

THE way to work it out, Johnny Blaine told himself, was by the percentage, the law of averages. A coin flipped in the air couldn't always come down heads. Some day he had to beat Rick Coffey. Today would be a very good time.

They were warming up on the number one tennis court and the stands were fairly well filled for the club junior championship. Most of the crowd was unimportant—there were his friends and Rick Coffey's friends,

and a sprinkling of strangers. A couple of the strangers were important, mainly Mr. Trafford. He was an alumnus of Rutledge University, and in charge of the scholarship committee.

Johnny Blaine could also see his parents in the stands. He remembered what they had said before the match. "Don't worry about it, kid," his father said. "Don't worry if you lose. We'll manage somehow to send you to college."

By WILLIAM TAMPA

They were like that, Johnny thought. All his life it seemed they had been telling him not to worry if he couldn't beat Rick Coffey in the finals of some tennis tournament. It was ironic. If he were either a year older or younger than Rick Coffey he would be a cinch for the scholarship to Rutledge. But they had to be the same age.

Maybe this was the day. It was a three-out-of-five-set match and he was on the losing end, six-three, seven-five, seven-nine. He was playing it very cautiously today out there. Across the net Coffey had the strokes and the manner and poise of a veteran of Forest Hills. But Johnny Blaine had been holding himself in for the long pull; he had plenty left, and had let Rick Coffey do the work.

Johnny Blaine walked back on the court with his shambling gait. He bent down for the balls at the net and Rick Coffey joined him there.

"The last time," Coffey said. "You thought of that, Johnny? This is probably the last time we play each other in serious competition. Next year we'll be at Rutledge and we'll be on the same team, not competing against each other on the court any longer."

"If we go to Rutledge," Johnny said.

Rick Coffey's eyebrows shot up. "Where else is there to go?" he said.

It was like that around the town. Everybody who was anybody went to Rutledge. Rick Coffey laughed his low pleasant laugh. "Unless you're thinking of Gilmer," he said.

That was a joke. Gilmer was right in town. It had a grubby office-building look and the students rode to class in elevators. There was no manicured campus, such as Rutledge pointed to with pride and no clinging ivy whatsoever.

"Three rousing cheers for Gilmer," said Rick Coffey. "Let's go, kid. let's give 'em a match they'll remember. We'll make the last one good."

"Nuts," Johnny Blaine said. It was an impolite remark. He always felt like being impolite in the presence of Rick Coffey. He acted like a jerk and it was a wonder Coffey put up with him. The guy was always nice, and that was part of the trouble. Johnny wished that instead of smiling at him, Coffey would bust a racket over his noggin.

HE WAS serving and he went back to the line and stared grimly at his opponent. He slugged the ball across the net and Coffey returned it deftly down the backhand line. Blaine was there, he cross-court and lunged in toward the net.

Coffey tried a lob. It was well placed and Blaine had to dance back. He got under the ball, went up for the smash and thought he had put it away, but it hit in close and Coffey was going all the way back to the screen, leaping and returning the ball. Savagely Johnny Blaine lashed the ball into the net.

He walked slowly to the service line. He was long with his first and he hit the second to the backhand. The baseline duel began and finally Coffey hit the ball outside. Three points later Johnny held his service.

It went like that for eight games. It was four games all and Blaine was serving once again. He got the first one in and Coffey had blasted for the righthand corner.

Johnny saw him coming to the net. He had to get this point. He put his shoulder muscles into the forehand power blast and he had the height. He was an inch or two above the net. But he had come just too close to center court, Coffey with an acrobatic dive got to the ball. His racket twisted in his hand, the ball bounced off the gut and died across the net.

Not again, Johnny muttered to himself. It couldn't happen again. He could feel the pressure on him like weights hanging on his racket arm. He missed the first serve, the second was too good and Ricky Coffey slammed one at his feet. He powered it back and watched it land right at the line. He waited, dry throated, for the linesman's call.

"Outside."

"Love-thirty," the umpire droned, and Johnny went at it again. He aced him with the connonball. They switched courts and Johnny got another good serve in, Coffey dove at the ball and it came off the wood of his bat. It came up to the net, dribbled across the top and dropped on Blaine's side.

Careful, Johnny told himself. He was in the net with the first one. The second was a twisting shot to the backhand and Johnny stayed deep, playing it safe. They began pounding from the baseline. Johnny stroked with care, not trying for the net and finally Coffey cut one for the sidelines.

He saw it pick up chalk and threw himself toward the ball. He landed on his shoulder and he heard the crowd yell. It was a magnificent recovery. The ball was going back over the net.

But it was a sitting duck for Rick Coffey. He swept it easily to the far side of the court and he had broken Blaine's service.

Six points later Rick Coffey held his own service, and it was over, it was like all the other times. There weren't any miracles in tennis, Johnny decided. He walked up to the net for the old familiar scene, he mouthed the familiar hackneyed words.

"Congratulations, Rick. Nice game," he said.

"Thanks, kid," Rick said. "You had me worried."

"When?" said Johnny bluntly. Rick Coffey always said that. "When did I have you worried?"

Rick Coffey laughed. "Well if you insist on asking, you never did. Not this match and not any other match. You turning into a bad loser, Johnny? It's not like you. Take the chip off your shoulder. After all we're going to Rutledge together. I have a lot of friends there. I can do you some good."

"Thanks," Johnny said, "only I'm not going." He made up his mind right then and there. He knew he should keep his big mouth shut but he couldn't help himself. "Rutledge," he said. "What's so hot about Rutledge? A snob school, a place for the right people. Nuts to the right people and nuts to Rutledge."

He became aware of striped flannels by his side. Mr. Trafford, the very important Rutledge alumnus, was standing there stricken speechless. He passed it off diplomatically while he made the presentation of the cup to Rick Coffey. The boys shook hands for the photographers and Johnny tried to make amends.

"Sorry I unbuttoned my lip," he said.

Rick Coffey was still doing a small burn. "It could be you shouldn't attend Rutledge," he said. "Maybe you're not the type, Blaine."

Johnny stared after him. It was the first time he'd ever seen Coffey ruffled.

Mr. Trafford was smoothing things over. "Of course, Johnny," he said, "our scholarship to Rutledge goes to Rick. But we'll make you very welcome there. You'll be a

great asset to the long line of championship Rutledge teams."

"Yeah," Johnny said. "Thanks very much." He walked off the court feeling like a jerk, a lout. He saw his folks grinning at him like he'd won and he waved wearily at them and shambled on for the lockers.

Somebody stopped him, a rather seedy looking guy, thin as a rail, hawk-faced, his face and hands burned brown.

"Like to talk to you," he said. His voice was low, his eyes looked directly at Johnny Blaine. "My name's Venner. I'm tennis coach at Gilmer."

"Gilmer has a tennis team?" Johnny asked.

"Four courts," Venner said. "Nothing like Rutledge. And they give no scholarships at Gilmer. I couldn't offer you a thing. I heard you plan to be an engineer."

Johnny nodded and Venner went on, "Gilmer has a good engineering school. No elm trees, no coeds, but a good faculty. And if you're going to be an engineer you probably will be going out of town to work. Gilmer engineering graduates get good jobs. Think it over."

That was a laugh, Johnny thought. From Rutledge to Gilmer. From the top to the bottom. Then suddenly he had another thought. If he went to Gilmer he could live at home. He'd save his parents plenty of money.

He showered and changed his clothes and when he got back home his parents were holding dinner for him.

"Expected you an hour ago," his father said. "I don't want you to worry. We can swing four years at Rutledge. We'd figured it out on paper—"

"And you wouldn't even see a movie for the next four years," Johnny said. "No deal. Besides, it's too late. That's why I was delayed tonight. I went down and enrolled at Gilmer." He hurried on. "I went through the engineering department. You should see the equipment. They got every gadget in the world. It's where I want to go."

What he didn't say was that he had also seen the tennis courts, all four of them, stuck off in a corner of the city. The courts themselves were all right, good clay, but the nets were mended. There was no clubhouse, no showers. The team probably

rode out there on a bus. Well, that didn't matter. Johnny Blaine had one final explosive to get out of his system.

He went up to his room, threw his racket into the closet and got his final feelings off his chest.

"Nuts to tennis!"

THREE months later he was at Gilmer. The coach, Venner, had not been wrong. The engineering course was rugged and the students, most of them were far from the playboy type. They were hungry for knowledge, and Johnny had to burn the midnight oil to keep up.

Three weeks later he ran into Venner in the hallway. "Where've you been?" Venner asked. "I thought you'd gone to Rutledge. Didn't you see the notice on the bulletin board—for tennis practice?"

"I saw it," Johnny said. "I didn't think I'd bother."

Venner reddened. "Maybe you should have gone to Rutledge," he said. "Or maybe you were afraid with that lousy backhand, you couldn't make our team."

He turned and walked away. Johnny Blaine stared after him.

After class that afternoon he went home, fished his rackets out of the closet, and caught the bus on the corner.

An hour later he was on the courts. Venner was holding a clinic session for the squad. No one paid much attention to Johnny and he could feel the chill in the air. They didn't like a guy who had to be coaxed to report and he didn't blame them. After the demonstration session Venner had them play a set. Johnny tackled a lanky string bean with a big service but not much else.

Suddenly it was good to be out there again, to wallop that ball and feel his timing coming back. He learned to handle the serve after three games and took a six-three set in stride.

Venner said, "You good for one more? With me? Take it easy on an old-timer."

They started in. Venner played his backhand and Johnny hit a sweeping shot into back court. Venner waited for the ball to bounce high, then cracked a forehand shot for the sideline. It picked up chalk as Johnny stood flatfooted.

It happened again and again. Venner won the set six three.

"That does it," the coach told him. "I couldn't go another one. The legs are gone. But I wanted to show you something. Your backhand is strictly defensive. A smart guy lets it bounce high and then whacks it."

Johnny Blaine felt very humble. "It's pretty lousy," he admitted. "Can anything be done with it?"

"In time," Venner said. "If we buckle down."

"Let's go to work, coach," Johnny said.

He rode the bus each day after that. Gradually he got to know his teammates and to like them. He discovered they were no chumps at tennis and they played a good schedule, most of their games away. They avoided the conference of which Rutledge was a member, which was one reason they got very little publicity in the local papers.

They stayed outdoors until cold weather drove them inside. By then Johnny Blaine was reasonably happy at Gilmer. There was something nagging at him and he was not sure what it was. He had to live with a feeling of discontent. And the winter seemed endless.

It was better when spring came and they were at it again. It was pretty good when they piled into Venner's car and drove a hundred miles upstate to play their first match. Johnny was number one and he took his singles match handily.

It was satisfying to win, but something was lacking. It was the college, Johnny decided. He was getting his education but he wanted something more.

Venner, one afternoon, rode him home in his car and when Johnny started to get out, the coach said, "Wait a minute. We've got an open date, a cancellation. Two weeks from now. I'm trying to fill it. Got any ideas who we could play?"

Johnny shook his head. "It shouldn't be too hard—"

"How about Rutledge?" Venner inquired.

Johnny felt cold inside.

"We've tried before," Venner went on. "They gave us the cold shoulder. But they're free that weekend too. I looked up their schedule. And they have their conference championships a week later. They might like a tune-up. That's one thing. Another is that you know Rutledge people. You might drop a word to the right ones."

"I could do that," Johnny said.

"One more point," Venner continued. "Rutledge is thirty miles away. We get no gallery at home, we've no place for spectators. Most of our trips take us too far away. We play at Rutledge, and half the school will be there. It means as big a gate as Rutledge ever had. Rich as they are I guess they don't turn up their noses at more money."

"It might swing," Johnny admitted.

He knew he didn't want to do it and he knew why he'd gone to Gilmer. Not because it was cheaper—it had gotten him completely away from Rick Coffey. And he had heard things about Rick Coffey all that spring. The freshman star was setting the conference on fire.

JOHNNY spoke to his father that night. He called up Mr. Trafford. His father, at his law office, made some calls to certain clients. Four days later a letter, slightly on the condescending side, reached Venner. The match was scheduled.

The place was transformed. Johnny found he couldn't take a step down the corridor without being halted by some student he'd never seen before.

"Good luck," they'd say, shaking his hand.

He'd need it, Johnny thought. But it wouldn't happen. It never had before. He had a backhand now that Coffey couldn't treat with contempt but there was no reason to suppose that Rick Coffey had been standing still at Rutledge. Not from what he'd been reading about him in the papers.

Grimly, he practiced, and finally they left for Rutledge. Cars full of students passed them on the road. The team arrived, awed by the magnificence.

The number two singles man said, "It would be wonderful—if I wasn't scared to death."

"Take a look outside," Venner said. "For the first time in history the Gilmer tennis team has a gallery. Look at 'em pouring in. You're not alone out there." Venner grinned. "I've been waiting ten years for this. You know what this means? We'll be on their schedule from now on, win, lose or draw. It means money in the till for tennis equipment, maybe for better courts of our own some day. Locker rooms."

It was nice for Venner and for Gilmer. But Johnny Blaine figured what it meant for him was four more years of taking beatings from Rick Coffey.

They went outside and the second singles led it off. The number two man was obviously flustered and his game fell apart. Rutledge had an easy match under its belt.

It was time to go. Johnny walked slowly out on the court and waited for Rick Coffey. The guy appeared finally, looking a little huskier than the last time they'd met, a year ago. He still had that collar ad look, and Johnny felt loutish and tough.

"So you went to Gilmer," Rick Coffey said, and gave that little laugh of his.

"Yeah," Johnny answered. "Gilmer. What's with the laugh? What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Rick said smoothly. "I think it's just about your speed."

If he stood there, Johnny thought, he'd poke him, and tennis was supposed to be a gentleman's game. He stumped back to the baseline and they rallied.

They were ready finally. Coffey was serving. Johnny went back deep and waited. He had always been careful with Rick Coffey before, but he would be more careful today. He would lose but maybe he could draw it out.

The serve came whipping in. He blinked and the ball was past him for an ace. He moved across for the next one, took it on the rise and pounded it back. He stayed deep most of the time, he conserved his energy and tried to make Rick Coffey run, to lead him from side to side. He put drop shots over the net and lobs at the baseline and played very careful, very cagey tennis.

He lost the first two sets, six-three, six-four.

They began the third one and this could be the finish. Johnny Blaine played the same game, his back to the wall and he noticed that the ball was coming at him with less speed. Rick Coffey with two sets under his belt, was letting up a bit. Johnny put more pressure on his own strokes, he dragged it out and when he broke through in the ninth game, it gave him the edge and he took the third set.

He heard a solid wave of cheering. The packed Gilmer stands were on their feet, roaring their approval. It gave him a warm feeling he had never known before because always before the crowds had been with

Rick Coffey. They were nice guys, Johnny thought, but they didn't know a lot about tennis.

He went in the locker room and Venner was there.

"Personally," he said, "I'd rather be killed quick than nibbled to death."

Johnny Blaine stared at him. "I don't quite figure that," he said. "All I know is I'm letting those guys down. They yelled for me but they don't know tennis."

"No?" Venner said. "Maybe they know more than you think. Maybe they're just on your side, win, lose or draw. You ever think of it that way? You pretty much made this match. You got us to Rutledge. You're by way of being a school hero but I'm not sure you're worth it. How long you been scared to death of Rick Coffey?"

It was a blunt question. Johnny reddened. Then he said honestly, "Ever since we were fourteen and he beat me the first time. I was a green kid at the tennis club and even then he knew his way around."

"So you blunt your weapons and play defense," Venner said. "You're like a prizefighter going against the champion. You don't try to win, you just try and last for the distance. You try and hide on the backline."

Johnny stared at him. "Yeah," he said. "Maybe I should dig a hole. Then he couldn't find me."

He felt better suddenly. He got up and walked out and the Gilmer fans rose and yelled. They were great guys, they were the greatest in the world, he thought, and he went out to meet Rick Coffey.

HE WAS serving. He hit two cannon-balls and they were both long for a double fault. He took to the net and he wasn't used to it, not against Coffey. He couldn't find the backline but he found the net very often. He lost three straight games.

It was very lousy, he thought. But Venner was right. It was better than being nibbled to death.

And then suddenly he found his timing. He pulled up to three-all, and then it was dingdong the rest of the way. He remembered swatting that ball and following it in to the net, diving to block Coffey's passing attempts, racing back under lobs and going up for the smash.

It was his set finally and it was two-all and a different looking Rick Coffey across the net, no longer debonair, his jersey plastered to his chest, his face purple.

They battled it out on even terms. It went to four-all in the final set and Johnny held his serve. They changed courts and he waited for the ball to come in, knowing one of them had to crack. He took a hard serve on his forehand and blocked it back. Rick Coffey rifled to the backhand corner and he cut over for the ball.

He picked the ball low off the ground. It was barely over the net, hit down the middle with low trajectory and Coffey scooped the ball. Johnny went running toward the net, thrust out his racket and slashed the ball to the side for the point.

It went to five-all, to thirty-fifteen and finally to deuce. The serve blasted in once more and he cut it back and Coffey was still in the fight. He smashed a forehand shot to the corner and Johnny saw him racing network.

He went for the lob. He checked his swing, lifted the ball up and saw Coffey backpedal hastily, but it was low and just out of reach. The ball bounced just inside the backline and Rick Coffey's return went far out of court to the sidelines.

There was a little noise from the stands. The first serve was in the net and Johnny moved in a step. The second serve came over and he sensed that it was soft, some of the zing had gone from his opponent's racket.

It was hit right at him and he turned to take the ball on his forehand. He sighted on the backhand corner and summoned all the power he had left.

The ball ripped across the net. Rick Coffey lunged toward it, then slumped and watched the ball hit an inch inside the backhand corner for the game, set and match.

In the confusion that followed, Johnny Blaine found himself in the presence of Mr. Trafford.

"Fine match," said Mr. Trafford. "At Rutledge we're big enough to admit our mistakes. We guessed wrong about you, Johnny, but we want you here next year."

Johnny Blaine grinned. "I'll be here." He saw Venner's face fall.

"Yes, Mr. Trafford," he said, "I'll be back next year. Playing tennis for Gilmer against Rutledge. You can count on it."

—BIG OUT—

By JOHN
WILSON



Duke was off the mound in a hurry, grabbing the bunt.

THE thing about Duke Braden was that his big mouth had always gotten him into more trouble than his pitching. Six seasons in the Big Show; six noisy, roaring years packed with raw pennant heat and a fountain of feuds. Now the old flipper had gone haywire, and the ride was about finished. The Titans, however, weren't really latching the gate behind Duke. Just optioning him out to their Wren farm club, with a twenty-four hour recall tag on him. Where Duke was going, the sun would be strong and steady, and per-

Where the biggest bats in the league had failed, the Duke came through for one last time—he blasted himself right off the mound in the greatest game he had ever pitched!

haps, kind to a ragged, service-worn arm. "There's a chance that you'll be back with us," Hutch Shevlin, the Titan skipper, told Duke. "Maybe with no pressures, and the right work diet, that wing of yours will come around."

Duke forced a laugh. Nothing lasts forever, and he'd spent the speed and strength of the right arm with lavish abandon. Too many steaming pennant duels, and the winning fever boiling in his blood. A rubber-armed guy who'd never known a sore muscle, or when it was time to quit work. Two seasons ago, he'd carried the Titans to a pennant, and then through to a World Series triumph. And the next trip around, the arm hadn't been worth two cents.

"All right, I'll take my little vacation on the farm, Hutch. Leave it to ole Duke to show 'em how to make a comeback." He had no right to believe in himself this way, he thought, but some deep, honest hope in his chest would not let him accept the fate that spelled big league doom. How often he'd heard the phrase and seen the heart-break of it—they don't come back—and yet now and then somebody did climb back. Beating the odds, doing the impossible, had been the pattern of his pitching greatness. He could settle for a temporary decision against him.

He saw the tenderness way back in Hutch Shevlin's eyes, which somehow seemed out of place in the rough, hard-packed face.

"Duke," Hutch said slowly, as though measuring his thoughts, "when you feel ready to try again, say the word."

Duke walked out to where the reporters were waiting for him. He was a guy who'd never ducked a line-drive or a forthright question, and he did no sidestepping now. They asked him about his future, with a kind of apology. He laughed, striking at their sympathy, and defying the future they believed gone with his arm. He told them he'd be back and read the amused, pitying grins in their eyes. But beyond their surface thoughts, Duke sensed their warm regard for him. He'd meant something more to them and the game than a loud, explosive guy whose antics both on and off the field had made "hot" copy. He wasn't sure they understood, any more than he himself, why he forgot the tomorrows for the victory today.

He talked and kidded with the reporters

as though it were just another hot-stove session. Then one of them wanted to know how he felt about the bright young bonus hurlers on whom the Titan pennant hopes were built.

"They'll do fine in the early going," Duke said, "but wait till August and the dog-days come along. Those kids will sag then, because they aren't real pros yet." He was aware of the sidelong glances, and sudden interest. He'd spoken with quick, raw honesty. Then: "They stay up nights figuring their bank accounts instead of the hitters."

Sometimes Duke wondered what made him that way—popping off, the trade called it. Maybe in some other business they had a nicer, more accurate term which might better describe this urgency to speak his piece. He couldn't believe that he was a guy who simply talked to make a big noise. Just because he was taking a tumble was no reason to pull his punches. . . .

THE yesterdays came back to Duke Braden on this hot afternoon in a bush-league town. He was garbed in the toggery of the class A Wrens, but still looking the part of a big-timer. For seven frames, he'd made the walk to the mound, stride slow, and something oddly defiant in his very casualness. He had a shut-out going, spacing five Beaver bingles while the Wrens grabbed the lead, 2-0.

Now he started out there for the bottom of the eighth. The sun glowed down as fiercely as ever, and he swore softly, thinking how it was worse than a St. Louis summer day. But despite the heat, Duke did not feel too wilted. He was browned, and the big, raw-boned frame, solid and fit. He'd never been in more perfect physical condition in all his life. He could almost believe the right arm had grown new roots and life. Almost.

He tossed in his practice flips to the stocky youngster who was green and awed. But the kid had an alert mind, a bullet whip, and the makings of a top-grade receiver. Duke watched him rifle down to second, low and into the targeted glove.

Duke smiled tensely to himself. This was the showdown, the game which carried his comeback chips. He'd prepped to the hilt, leading up to this moment, and now he could anticipate a recall to the Titans. It hadn't quite happened yet, but Pick Dol-

phin, the chief Titan scout, was in the stands, wanting an answer on him.

He found a grim satisfaction in Pick Dolphin's presence. The stretch-run was going full blast in the majors, and those young Titan chuckers folding under the pressure of it. Well, that was a shot he'd called. Somebody had suggested sending him a supply of sour grapes. But for the sake of the Titans, and those kid pitchers themselves, he'd gladly have taken the rap for being wrong.

The batter stepped into the rectangle and Duke gave him the full treatment. It was sheer artistry, that long, smooth flowing sweep, and follow-through of the delivery. But he knew the moment the ball flew from his hand, there was precious little stuff on it. An inside hook which didn't quite snap off with enough sting, and it was rapped hard and foul along the left field stripe.

Duke saw the confidence grow in the youth at the plate. Each inning, it seemed, the Beavers were less awed, and more determined. Duke waited till the catcher crouched, then touched the peak of his cap. He was calling the pitches himself, and the catcher simply acknowledging his signs. It wasn't altogether that he didn't trust the catcher's judgment. Rather the realization that he couldn't possibly supply the brand of fireballing likely to be asked of him.

He got past that first hitter, slipping across another inside hook, though changing the pace of the pitch to a soft curve. It was popped to third and gobbled.

The ball was flashed around the infield, and the peppery comments rang in Duke's ears. Plenty of spirit and ambition, these young hopefuls owned. It sparkled in their eager faces, and danced in their hearts. And standing there, waiting for the ball, the years seemed to lump like lead on his shoulders. He'd been over the same bush league trail once before, and it was not easily forgotten. A big, fastballing kid, with a dream in his heart, and a willingness to endure every test. It hadn't mattered then, the humpy overnight bus hauls, the cheap rooming houses, and meager paychecks. All part of the big league climb.

But he was no kid now, and could not be shown a new dream. Not after sleeping in pullmans, travelling first-class, and swank hotels. Six swift, fantastic years, living big, and falling in love with the big cities. He

was all out of place, like something wrongly transplanted, in this setup.

As far back as the third inning, he'd known the fire had cooled forever on the old fast one. Maybe he should have realized the hopelessness of rebuilding a worn-out arm. But the sweat and determination of his effort had given him a false confidence. Something had seemed to awaken in the arm during the series of relief stints, though he never quite bore down all the way. But this day, he'd put the arm to the test, cutting loose with the full power of the buggy whip delivery. A bush-league kid had knocked the pitch safely over second base.

A summary of the next batter's strength and weakness ran through Duke's mind. Three times he tried to draw a swipe at an off-target heave, and succeeded only in rolling up the count against himself. He had to come in with something on the sweet side. He threw a strike. The waiting was suddenly over on the next delivery. The sharp, clean click of the wood, and the ball was sailing into the left-center hole. Worth two bases, that wallop.

The crowd, some three thousand strong, was up and beseeching the local Beavers to rally. It was by far the loudest demonstration of the afternoon. They'd been a quiet flock, sitting and watching, and saying little. But now the spell was broken, and the choice made between their home team loyalty and respect for Duke's reputation. Duke could always shrug off the shouts of the jockeys in the stands or on the other bench. But something stabbed through his chest, as the cry of "has-been" rang through the air.

The laugh was tight and bitter in Duke's throat. He piled as much speed as the arm would give into the delivery. That was the old way, falling back on the whizz stuff when trouble came. But the wing felt like a piece of dead wood. Just a slow kind of paralysis creeping up the full length, and settling into the shoulder.

Duke watched the ball come off the stick and sizzle across the turf toward short. It was a hard but routine chance till it took a crazy skip on that sun-baked turf. The shortstop lurched, got a glove on it, but couldn't make the play. Runners on first and third, and the Beavers were dancing with glee in front of their dugout.

THE catcher called time, and strode out to the mound. Duke could see that the kid was worried and puzzled. Certainly the kid sensed the facts.

"Okay, they've had more than their share of luck, Duke. Pour 'em past those bums now."

"Sure, I'll throw the rock past them," Duke said, but the words made him swallow hard.

The Beaver at the plate was anxious, and Duke curved him across the shoulders. A groan went up from the stands as the ball plopped into the air, near the home club dugout. That kid behind the bat was tearing off the mask, and racing in pursuit. The ball was up there, like a soft, high lob, slanting away from the kid's pounding spikes. Duke knew it was either going to land among the Beaver players or atop the dugout.

"No, no, kid," he hollered. "You can't—" The warning froze in Duke's throat. The kid didn't seem to hear him or the shrieks of the fans, telling him to lay off that foul hoist. Almost at the edge of the dugout steps, the kid lunged, glove outstretched. Then he went tumbling headlong among the scattering Beaver players.

It was a crazy stunt, the way the kid risked his hide, but he somehow latched onto the ball. Duke saw him make the stab an instant before going overboard.

The beaver coach was wide awake, and he sent the runner from third streaking toward the plate. The ball came flying out of the dugout, and Duke was even more surprised than the runner. He slapped it on the Beaver, and it was a real squeaker for the ump to call. Duke knew he'd nipped the runner, and the ump saw it that way, too. It all added up to a double play, the side was down.

Duke hurried to the spot where the catcher had piled into the dugout. But the kid was already shouldering his way past his teammates. He'd been shaken hard, and a side of his pink-cheeked face scuffed. He didn't want any fussing or shoulder patting, grinning off the comments of his teammates.

He went over and sat on the bench, and Duke dropped down alongside him. Duke said, "I've seen some big-time guys who wouldn't take off the mask for a thing as tough as that one, kid."

The kid gave him a funny grin. "You'd take a chance, Duke. You wouldn't know how to quit."

Duke said, "Yeah, my best, all the time. But I made mistakes, lots of 'em, kid." He was wondering how many other youngsters like this one, considered his way of the game as their own. And that was an odd thought, because he'd never really concerned himself with the kind of impression he'd made on the kids.

"I'd never dreamed," the kid was saying, "that I'd be catching you, Duke."

Duke smiled faintly. "There's not the whistle on the fast one that you expected, huh, kid?"

The kid grinned stiffly. "It's okay, Duke. This whole deal here is just a kind of experiment, isn't it?" He paused, and his voice suddenly brightened. "Those Titans can sure use you again, what with their pitchers kicking away a pennant."

It was a nice speech, but a lie. The kid knew he'd been getting by on savvy and nerve. But it'd taken a long while—eight innings—for the kid to see through the hero-worship cloak. A kid behind the plate, begging for him to fog the fast ones through, and having no answer. That's when the kid had turned the trick for him, and scooped the foul out of the Beaver dugout.

Duke said nothing.

"You've sure made a difference in this ball club," the youngster went on. "Those relief jobs, and now if we put this game in the sack—means third place."

Duke wanted no more of the talk. The taste in his mouth was dry and bitter. These past months, he told himself, were nothing more than a nightmare soon to be forgotten. He'd be getting out of these surroundings that he'd come to hate, and back on top of the world with the Titans. He'd shown enough smart pitching to warrant another crack at the big time, even if it might not trip up the major league hitters.

He could hear Hutch Shevlin's voice, like a drum beat in his mind. "... When you feel ready to try again, say the word, Duke ..." Well, he was going to say the word to Pick Dolphin. Get the bush-league dust out of his lungs, the tight, locked-up feeling that these small towns gave him.

There was no sentiment in baseball. Strictly business, and t'hell with what hap-

pened to a guy after he gambled away his arm in the pennant rush. So he'd take his chance on kidding the big-time hitters along. He could always say the wing had suddenly gone sour again.

The way the pennant race shaped up, the Titans could do no worse than runner-up. Who could blame him for wanting a slice of melon, something of a nest-egg to cushion the future. He'd squandered his dough recklessly, and the next round was on the Titans. They owed that much to him. Hadn't he killed the arm, piling up pennants and gold for them?

The Wrens put on a mild threat in the top of the ninth, but got nothing for their effort. Duke moved off the bench and the swagger in his stride was just a bit more careless and pronounced than usual. The jaw was squared, and a cocky, defiant grin was there for the Beavers to see. He thought how he'd been through the pressures of a hundred clutch games, and here in this bushy town, the biggest and most decisive of them all.

He was thinking ahead to the hitters coming up this final frame. The top of the batting order, and a swift-footed, light-hitting geezer starting off for the Beavers. Duke deliberately let one of the catcher's returns skid off his glove toward third. That gave him a chance to have a word with the third-sacker, without the Beavers getting suspicious of what he was plotting.

"Play a couple of strides deeper for this guy," Duke said, taking the retrieved ball.

The third baseman stared at him, silently questioning the tactics. Duke gave him a look that said to forget the questions.

DUKE finished his warm-up, and the batter dug in at the plate. He saw the quick glance toward third, and then the sudden call of time. The guy was moving out of the square, rubbing dirt on his hands and looking down at the third base coach.

He'd bunt now if the baseman didn't change position.

Duke sent the delivery in, and the batter didn't quite wait that last split fraction before committing himself. Duke was off the mound in a hurry, grabbing the bunt. It wasn't too good a bid, and Duke had a big jump on the ball. He winged the guy out with plenty to spare at first.

One down, and the third-sacker was grinning at Duke, aware of how the Beaver had been slicked into a putout.

Duke threw twice to the number two Beaver. The ball was smashed deep to center. It took some galloping to pull that one in, but the guy in center made the grab.

A breath of relief ran out of Duke. He was close now, within an eyelash of the shutout, and the big chance with the Titans again. He came in with the pitches, high, low, and everywhere except where solid wood might connect. The count went the distance, and then his luck turned bad. A drive to right was straight at the picketman, but rising. He came in too fast, then tried to backtrack. The ball skidded off his fingertips, and the runner scampered into second base.

That gave the Beaver cleanup another lick. This boy had that long wallop in his stick, and Duke knew the thought was also in his mind.

The right arm felt like a heavy anchor, and each time Duke lifted it, the weight seemed to increase. He dueled the Beaver slugger, trying to destroy the right-handed pull power. The wood swished once, and a slashing foul carried almost into the left field stands. A fluffy nothing ball shaved an outside corner. But in between those heaves, Duke missed the target three times.

He summoned all the remaining strength in the arm for that last, big pitch. Rearing back, he let the ball fly, half praying there'd be enough takeoff on the hook to tip the swing out of kilter. But somehow that

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seemed like asking for a miracle the way the arm felt.

The delivery moved in there, and Duke's heart gave a joyous leap as he saw the ball suddenly twist to the outside. No more than a quick, sharp wrinkle, but detouring enough to surprise the batter. There was the slightest hitch of hesitancy, then the lunging follow-through. But a fraction too late, and the pellet was past the flailing wood. Down on strikes, and the game over. . . .

It seemed hours, the walk to the dressing room, and now the waiting for Pick Dolphin. Most of the kids had cleared out of the place, and Duke sat in a corner, dressed, and alone with his thoughts. He'd taken a stacked deck and played out the hand, and all that was left—the wild card joker.

He saw the door open and the stout, gray-haired man come in.

"Hullo, Pick," he said.

"Never saw you in better condition, Duke," the Titan scout said, "all slimmed down, and looking years younger."

That was an understatement. Even Pick Dolphin couldn't possibly imagine how tough a pace he'd set for himself, getting into tip-top condition. But right now he felt as old and tired as his right arm.

"Yeah, I gave it the college try, Pick."

The scout nodded, regarding him closely. "Well, how 'bout it, Duke? You want to go back with me?"

It was that easy, just a simple question, and nothing more. No sense kidding himself, Duke knew, that he'd convinced Pick Dolphin that the arm was any sounder than when he'd left the Titans. But had the question come up, he'd been prepared to speak of the extreme heat, the reluctance to really bear down in a tilt meaning no more than a workout. But Pick Dolphin was letting him make the decision as Hutch Shevlin had promised. " . . . When you feel ready to try again, say the word, Duke."

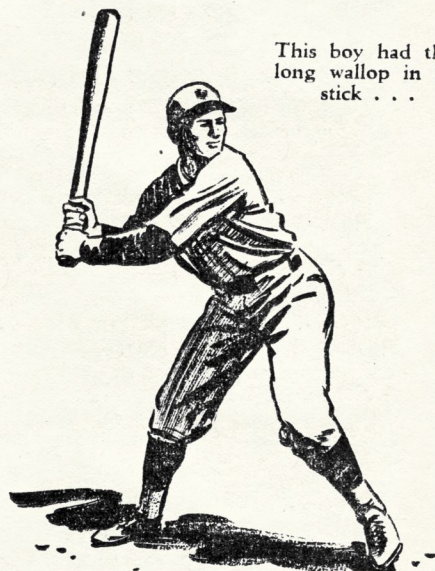
Duke said, "Tell the ole man thanks, but Ole Duke's fast one is gone."

He saw Pick Dolphin's face go gray, and a fuzzy look in the eyes. He laughed at himself for thinking that he could kick his own rule of the game to pieces. A pop-off guy, sure, from way back. But what had made him different and above the accepted type, was his ability to deliver. Even when

he'd called a wrong shot, no excuse was needed because of his own deep and honest conviction.

He could understand suddenly, clearly, why Hutch Shevlin had written a blank check on his comeback. Hutch knew he'd get the right figure, the right answer. That's what had earned for him the respect of the diamond people, and youngsters like the Wren catcher. It was, he thought, a contribution to the sport, that he himself had not realized till this day.

"That big mouth of yours," Pick Dolphin



This boy had that long wallop in his stick . . .

was saying, but the voice was soft and a trifle scratchy.

Duke stood there watching the scout turn and move toward the door. The pressure and strain of the months paled away, and he could feel the sense of clean relief that an honest decision brings to a man.

He said suddenly, "Pick, that kid catcher on this club—"

"Yes, that lad's got the goods to deliver." Pick said, stopping and looking back over his shoulder. "Kinda like you, Duke."

The door closed behind Pick Dolphin, and Duke stared around the empty, silent room. A while ago, it'd been noisy with whoops of victory. Well, maybe he could help these kids do better than third place. He was sure he could, even though his fast one was gone. He still had that big mouth—and the heart to back it up.

THE THUNDERER'S LAST RIDE

"Did you ever think of quitting your job, Doc? Well—mine is a slice of my life. My idea of quitting is to fall down dead on the track, trying to catch a faster man!"



He heard the light
drum of feet, com-
ing ever closer.

By ROY C. RAINEY

JOE GILBERT came down the ramp, listening to the thunder drift down. It was a familiar pattern, yet a good one, that sudden expectant roar, starting in the dollar seats, high in the smoky air, pounding down across his brain. It was a part of the Garden. And the Garden was his spot, the spot that had made him what he was.

The pole vault was finishing. Okie Cramer, the lanky wonder boy from Brown trying for his fifteenth fifteen-foot jump. The big kid was down at the end of the

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runway, fussing with the grip on his bamboos.

Joe pulled off his windbreaker. The long trunks, ankle-length, smelled faintly of wintergreen and sweat. A familiar smell. Mollie said she had met only one track man, but she'd sure know another one if she had to do his laundry. Joe thought, *she never will*. And sobered, remembering what he had been trying to forget.

The Garden went into hysteria, and Joe turned his head, trying not to feel bad, not quite making it.

It was Jimmy McDermott, of course. The kid was mitting the crowd, and his lean square jaw was very brave and determined, promising the gallery gods their thrill of the night. The thrill that had been repeated a full score of times, over the years. Jimmy trying to catch the mile champ of all time and never quite making that, either.

A little man came over to Joe, his jaw wagging up and down even before he was in range of human ears. Sol Kramer was not much on looks, but he knew how to worry with the best of them.

The fat little trainer was saying, "... so I tell you to see this sawbones, an' whadya do? Don't tell me, I got the X-ray charts in me pocket. I tell you, Joey—"

Joe said, "Why didn't you get some healthy young squirt and sit nice an' comfortable up in the box, Sol? Worryin' don't get you nowhere."

And then Sol's hands, tender as a woman's were adjusting the tape on his bad instep, moulding the muscle into place.

It was a good field. The Millrose games were not for a guy who hadn't tucked a four-ten mile under his belt, some time or other. Besides Joe and Jimmy McDermott, they had a kid named French from N. Y. U. who had been burning up the boards in the indoor competition all winter. They had old Alex Freeman, the Dartmouth veteran, and Si Corbin, the man with the explosive finish sprint—if he could stay with the pacemakers long enough to unload it. And young Ray Mather, out for a pace-making job and knowing it, without hope.

Joe went down the track, bringing his knees up high, loosening up.

He was not a picture runner. He was big and loose jointed, and his legs were too heavily muscled. He had a dead pan and

a sloping chest, and he photographed lousy, with the cords of his neck standing out like iron bands and his teeth grimacing in a savage leer of effort when he came down to the tape. He didn't have the outside of a big-time runner, he was thinking wryly—even if he happened to be the best mile runner of his day.

He spent a lot of time warming up. Mollie had said, "Take this one, lug. I gotta hunch you'll have to work for it." And Mollie knew her stuff. He still couldn't get over the fact that a little gal with a Judy Garland grin could know so much about the legs and hearts of the men he had to fight against. And thinking of Mollie, the grin went away from his face and he could feel the hard, tight line knot along his jaw.

He knew that he was ready.

He trotted back to the starting line. A photographer said, "Hold it a minute, Joe," and suddenly a hand was in his, and Jimmy McDermott was smiling, saying, while the news reels recorded it for posterity, "Good luck, champ. I'll—I'll fight my hardest."

It was a good line, Joe was thinking without bitterness. The kid had the looks and the moxie and the Irish way about him. Everything, including the prettiest stride in the business. Everything, as Sol Kramer had said, save one. The heart of a winner.

Joe had the inside lane, as the defending champion. It was an old story now, the business of getting down there, knowing that there was that thin lane to get through and then you were alone at the turn, standing off the world. It seemed hard to realize that it was probably his last time. It wasn't fair, somehow.

AND then suddenly the gun barked and he was driving for that coveted spot, and the smoke and the noise and the world were gone and there was only a race to be finished—ahead of any other son on those boards.

It was an eleven-lap track. The boards were a pattern that his feet had remembered through the years. He had a momentary impact with McDermott's elbow, just as he rounded the turn, but his big chest took it without a break in his stride. And then he and little Ray Mather were in front of the parade, fighting it out down the straightaway.

The kid was a good pacemaker. He was half a stride in front, giving Joe plenty of room. He had a nice, loping stride that was almost a pattern of Joe's own. But his lungs were geared for shorter distances.

There was the familiar clop, clop of spikes behind his shoulder and he didn't look back, knowing the answer. Young French was getting worried, trying to take the lead. The college kid would have to learn the hard way. Grinning a little, Joe let him pull ahead. That wasn't the guy he had to worry about.

They strung out for four laps. The pace was good, he knew. Coming down the straightaway, the college boy was leading by ten yards. Rounding the middle mark, Sol had his hand up, four fingers raised. The little man's face was red and he was shouting something, lost in the roar.

Joe frowned, trying to keep his pace down. A two-four half. That was all right, but he'd had to save a lot for that finish drive. He could feel the difference, the tight hot pain in his lungs, trying to drag him back. What was it that two-bit doctor had tried to tell him?

Whatever it was didn't stay long in his brain, because the crowd started to go mad. The sound beat into his brain, and he knew that McDermott had started to move up. The kid was a supreme judge of pace. He'd have to tend to his knitting or else—

The college flash was done. Already the cords on his neck were going tight and his feet were wobbling, trying to keep his stride. A quarter of a lap further, and he pulled over to the side, rolling his eyes in distress.

Joe passed Ray Mather on the next turn and then there was nothing in front of him, but the yells—almost, but not quite, drowning out the steady beat of spikes, getting relentlessly closer—and just at the gun lap, with the bark of the pistol, he heard them coming right at his heels, so close that he could see the white face of Jimmy McDermott, straining to push in front.

It was the time. He was utterly done, more weary than he had ever been in his life. There was a sharp pain raking the left side of his chest, trying to cut off his breath. And the tape, so far in front of him, seemed a cruelly impersonal thing, out of reach of anything he had left of muscle or

wind or heart. But somehow, out of the sure-grained instinct that was a part of him, he turned on the go-juice and, after a blind moment, the babbled yells from the gallery told him that Jimmy had fallen behind—not much, but enough to let him win.

He came down the straightaway, the same old Joe Gilbert. Chesty, piker-faced, looking like a big lug that had bulled his way past better men, contemptuous of their travail.

And just as he hit the tape, something went funny inside him, and he wondered whether he were going to displease those howling maniacs still further by dying on the spot. But nothing happened, except that the pain in his chest was like a probing knife. He turned around.

Jimmy McDermott was on his face on the boards. One slim arm was outstretched toward that broken tape, a gallant, last-ditch try to break that coveted thing he had never been able to reach, not while Joe Gilbert was powerhousing his way in front of him.

And the crowd liked that, with sound effects. The flash bulbs caught the two of them, Joe helping the kid to his feet. The thinner man's eyes were ringed with the poison of fatigue, but his hand, pushing Joe aside, was strong enough.

"I can make it," he said. "You ran a great race, chum."

And then Mac was wanly mitting the crowd, which was going crazy.

Sol Kramer came over. The little man was scowling.

"Four-eight and two tenths," he said dourly. "It ain't good, an' it ain't bad. An' you broke your stride in that seventh lap an' if I didn't know you better, I'd say you was swillin' that beer last night. What gives, kid?"

They walked down through the thunder, into the blessed sanctuary of the dressing room. Joe put his head down on the rubbing table and a curious thing happened. The lights went out for him.

HE SAT up. There was a piece of ice on his head and Sol was barricading the door. When he saw Joe sit up, he let the newshounds in, but he said, "Ixnay," out of the corner of his mouth. And afterward he said loudly, "The boy's pretty tired. That McDermott's a hard cookie to beat."

Make it short an' then we'll go home."

The reporters didn't like Sol, but they respected him. The little man was the best conditioner of runners in the land. They jotted down a few perfunctory statements and went their way, trying to catch the late edition of their respective papers.

Sol locked the door carefully and sat down.

His eyes were bleak and troubled.

"So you were cooked," he said. "You can fool them goons in the dollar seats, but I been around a little, pal. You shot your bolt them last two laps. I thought you were going to scramble like an egg all over them boards. Are you tired of running, or just tired?"

Joe tried to grin, but his eyes were a little wet.

"Maybe, you can answer that one," he said simply. "I can't. I—I don't feel so good. You know a good sawbones, sourpuss? I seen one, but I didn't like what he said to me."

The little trainer scowled ferociously.

"Them guys," he said loudly. "Anything to rake in a coupla bucks. You just ate something that didn't set right. But what the hell—it's your dough. It'll get this guy I know to look you over."

But his hands, dialing the number, were shaking a little.

And when Joe went into that cloistered office, he knew he was looking at a man who was as great in his field as he, Joe had ever been in his.

The man in white said gently. "You're a sensible looking man, Gilbert. I've seen you run almost all your races. You've picked up a lot of silver plate an' you've always given the boys a good value for their tickets. Did you ever think of quitting?"

It was a silly sounding question, and Joe tried to keep the blank look out of his eyes.

"Did you ever think of quitting your job, doc?" he said. "I trained for mine almost as hard. It isn't my bread and butter, but it's a slice outa my life. My idea of quittin' is to fall down dead on the track, tryin' to catch a better man."

The doctor's lips thinned, a little distastefully.

"I can only say one thing," he said. "You will."

And then it was Sol's turn to sit down and clutch his chest, as though the breath had been driven out of him by a gigantic sledge.

This was it, Joe was thinking. This was what came of passing up the beer and the good times, and making the strain of effort a part of you so that after a while you grow to like the pain and look forward to meeting it again.

He turned to Sol. "The other doc said the same thing, pal. The ticker tried hard, but it's yelling for help. I guess you better find another champ, squirt. I'm ready for the ashcan."

Then he stared, surprised. Sol was crying. It looked almost indecent seeing that hard-bitten face puckered up.

Sol blew his nose loudly.

"So what the hell," he said, sniffing. "Mollie will take care of you. A coupla months away from the boards an' you'll be as good as new. I'll tell her what happened."

Joe said, "We won't tell Mollie, mister. She's going to have a baby. I guess that's enough for one girl to worry about. You tell the boys, an' make it good. I'm through, see? I've won all there is to offer an' I'm quitting while I'm at the top."

The man in white held up his hand.

"This isn't exactly a funeral," he said. "You've got one of two things. Angina pectoris or false angina. The symptoms are exactly the same. A pain in the chest, going up into the arms. One is serious, though not necessarily fatal, if you take care of yourself. The other is a nervous condition, and not at all serious."

Sol said, "I always knew you was the nervous type!"

Joe could feel the quick throb of hope in his veins.

The doctor added hastily. "Don't get me wrong. You're a sick man. You've got to be—I can't take the responsibility for saying you're not. You see—" he lit a cigarette, but the warmth in his eyes belied the callous gesture—"if you went out there and ran a race with false angina, you'd suffer, but you'd walk off under your own power. But if it was the real thing, you'd collapse and die!"

Sol said, "That's enough for me, doc. Get a nice case for those cups, Joe. You're done. You're gettin' old and spavined any-

way, so what the hell—you take it easy.” But he couldn’t keep the horror from his eyes.

MOLLIE knew her stuff. She had a steak and onions; and make-up almost, but not quite, hid the funny strained look about her eyes. It wasn’t any fun to have a baby, Joe was thinking. Mollie was very happy about it, but the strained look was still there, bravely masked from the world.

She had an envelope in her hand. Her eyes were big and round. She said, “Not till you finish your steak. I listened to that race over the radio. I nearly had kittens! That McDermott almost caught you with your shoes untied!”

Joe said, with his mouth full, “He’ll never see the day, baby.”

And, after awhile, he put his knife and fork down and sighed happily, and Mollie was reading the letter.

It was from a big Eastern University, and the name was hallowed in Ivy halls. It was from the athletic director’s office. It was general and no lawyer could pin it down to any definite promise, but it got one point across, accented by Mollie’s exultant voice.

“You see, lug,” she said. “All they want is one thing. You end up this season as mile champ, and you have a three-year contract as track coach. We can move out of this flat, and you’ll be a famous man, and Jimmy will grow up with those college guys, and—”

It was a good idea. But life is like that. He was too tired to think of a convincing reason, and too honest to hedge.

He said, a little harshly, “Yeah. That’s a good outfit. But I’m not running any more, Mollie. I fired my spikes at Sol tonight for good. The old man’s gonna sit in the bleachers an’ watch the other guys sweat from now on.”

Mollie said, “But you can’t!”

And, after he stared at her a minute, helplessly, hiding his agony, she said uncertainly, “Well, I guess you can. But I don’t get it. Maybe you’ll break down and tell me, sometime.”

And that would have been all right. A guy has a right to call it a day especially after he’s licked the best there was to offer, time and time again, so that it became

a habit. But the day after the news broke in the papers, a guy named Arlson in Sweden cracked a four-four mile and became the toast of the world. And the next week he had accepted an invitation to come over on the Clipper and race in the Garden for the last two weeks of the year.

Mollie showed him the paper. Her lips were smiling cockily, but her eyes were puzzled.

“Okay, grandpa,” she said. “You were talking about no competition. Comb this one out of your whiskers. I’ll get your stuff out of the laundry. You’ll need three weeks to train.”

It had been a hard day at the office, and that dull pain was still a part of him, reminding him of what he had lost from his life. He said, a little tightly, “I guess you didn’t get it, baby. I’ll see this Arlson run. He must be good, from that write-up.”

“He’s never been beaten!” Mollie said. “Don’t you see, Joe—”

Joe stood up. He tried to keep the hunger out of his voice, and something harsh took its place.

“Lookit,” he said. “There was Alfredo and Jones, and this McDermott. They were all the nuts. But I ran ‘em all into the dirt. An’ now I’m tired an’ I wanna sit down. You been telling me for a year about this McDermott’s fighting heart. Well, let him take on this job. Me, I’m through.”

Mollie looked at him, and the light went suddenly out of her eyes.

“Yes,” she said, in a curious flat voice. “Yes, I guess you are.” And went quickly out of the room.

HE TOOK Mollie to the Pyramid Games. It seemed funny to go into that vast cavern of smoke and steel. Sol had found some seats for them in a box near the finish line of the mile. There were a couple of very tough citizens in front of them. They had checkered ties and wide lapels and shoulders a lot wider than they would have been with their coats off.

The milers came out shortly after ten o’clock, and the thunder boomed out there to meet them. The guy in front of Joe said, “That Gilbert! If you could only put McDermott’s heart and Gilbert’s legs together, you’d have a guy who could give this Arlson a race tonight!”

The other guy said, "So what the hell. You won a lot of dough on the guy. Maybe he don't want to run no more, that's all."

Joe sneaked a look at Mollie. She was sitting up very straight and there were two red flags of danger in her cheeks. She leaned forward and Joe said, "Skip it, baby. What they don't know won't hurt 'em." And he was thinking, *And that goes double for you, my dear.*

And then Arlson came out on the boards and the crowd went crazy.

The Swede looked just like his photos, but Joe hadn't realized the laxy grace of the man. He was tall and gangling, standing there with his pipelike legs, and then he took a couple of mincing steps and the awkwardness seemed to flow away from him and Joe knew he was looking at a perfect running machine. The man was all chest and flat, smooth thigh muscles. And he never put his heels on the ground. Beside him McDermott looked bunchy and musclebound. And yet the kid was on the slight side.

Joe said, tightly, "This will be something to watch!"

They had the same old field, except for Joe and the Swede. Arlson had the inside lane, with McDermott beside him. The kid's face was drawn and tight even from a distance. French, the college kid, was on the outside, grinning into the flashbulbs. He was in there for experience. In a year or so, he would make trouble for the best of them. Alex Freeman was just in there out of habit, refusing to admit that the hard years had caught up with him. But he could still tear off a four-ten mile.

Joe said, "Baby, this will be something. The Swede doesn't like to set the pace. Neither does Mac. There'll be some fancy jockeying around here, unless one of 'em breaks the rules."

Mollie said, "I'm sure I wouldn't know. But I hope McDermott knocks his ears off. He isn't afraid to run him, anyway."

The gun cracked and French grabbed the lead at the turn, with Mac fighting at his heels. Arlson was in fourth place, a stride behind Freeman as they came down the first straightaway. The Swede was running easily, those stems of his reaching out for incredible distances as he strode. That ten-foot stride publicity wasn't far

from being true, Joe could see. Mac would have to take ten strides for every nine the other man reeled off.

They swung into the fourth lap, and it became a picture that was familiar to Joe, so that his hands were clenched and he could feel his heart pounding, running that race with them. The Swede was staying back stubbornly and it was worrying McDermott. The kid was looking over his shoulder, trying to figure why the other man wasn't putting on the pressure. Dixon stumbled and broke his stride going into the sixth turn, leaving the kid in the lead, ten feet in front of the pack.

He wasn't happy about it. He swung wide at the next turn and Alex Freeman cut in to the pole and went ahead. The chunky veteran's face was tight with the strain. He had all the heart in the world, but too many miles had scarred his reserve. Already he was laboring, and that meant the beginning of the end.

Joe looked up at the clock. It had been a two-six half. Shockingly slow time, for what had been ballyhooed as the race of the century.

The record-hungry crowd booed down from the balcony seats. And suddenly, as though stung by the jeers, Arlson made his bid.

It was a funny way to sprint. It broke all the rules. Instead of jockeying for the pole, saving himself, the Swede went deliberately out on the bank, fifteen feet wide of Freeman. And at the same instant young McDermott cut in for the pole, so that both men passed Alex at almost the same instant, with Arlson far outside.

The Swede would have to run thirty extra feet to hold that lead and stay in front. But he did just that, with lazy, almost contemptuous ease. Coming down to the gun lap he was a stride ahead of McDermott, crowding the rail— And Joe knew that all the cheering and the thunder wouldn't make up those eighteen inches. No matter who was behind that smooth striding phantom.

They came around the last turn. McDermott was straining hard, pulling that crowd-pleasing sprint. For a heart-stopping second he came up abreast of the Swede, just as they came into the straightaway, while the world went insane. And then, grinning a little, Arlson put his head

down and poured on the juice, sighting for the tape. As though snapped by an invisible spring, he pulled away from the other man. Ten feet from the tape he looked around, almost slowing up, and went over the line.

That same old pulse-stopping roar came up from the crowd. Mac had made another last gasp bid. It was the first time Joe had ever seen it, and he could understand why the kid had seized the hearts of the crowd. He was all done and his legs were gone, but he was fighting to reach the long-striding man in front of him. Two yards from the tape he lunged for it, just as Arlson went over, reeled, and staggered off the track; with half the committee holding him upright. Arlson, turning around, came back and helped the other man to keep on his feet, posing for the pics. The Swede was not even breathing heavily.

The loudspeaker came on.

"... won by Arne Arlson, of Sweden, with James R. McDermott, of the city Athletic Club second. The time..." You could hear the sudden hush... "four minutes, thirteen and two-tenths seconds."

Beside him, Mollie said disgustedly, "Slow motion stuff! You never ran under four-nine in the Garden in your life. I bet—"

And Joe put his hand on her shoulder. The Swede, with a curious little gesture, had taken the microphone, his reedy little voice cutting through the boos.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Arlson's English, slightly accented, had a curious dignity to it that asked for and obtained a respectful silence almost instantly. "I am sorry I did not do better. You see—" he grinned a little ruefully up at them—"I have just come off the boat, and I still have my sea legs on me. And I have never run on boards before. I have heard of your great American runners and I didn't think I could win. I—" He hesitated a minute, groping for the words. "I am sorry that I didn't meet the best of them all. I hope the next time he may find it possible to meet me. Thank you very much. The next time, it will be different, I can promise you. The next time, I will try for your record."

He bowed stiffly and walked away, proudly and with a certain dignity. And this time they really gave him the cheers they had been saving.

Joe said, "That guy. He's no phoney. He's the best runner in the world."

"You'll never know," Mollie said, "by sitting here and talking about it."

THEY took a cab home. Sol had insisted. The little man was chattering all the way. He had the running bug in his brain.

"They don't know," Sol was saying. "But you and I do, Joe. That squarehead will crack four-five the next time out, even against a lousy field. I wish the hell—"

He stared grimly out of the window. Joe could feel Mollie's tight silence against him, begging him to speak.

They went into the apartment. And Mollie didn't take off her hat. She was sitting very straight on the hard backed chair, and her eyes were a little wet, as they got when she was very angry.

"Joe got an offer from Eastern," she said to Sol. "All he has to do is beat that Arlson and he's set for life. But he doesn't want to."

Sol looked appealingly at Joe, opened his mouth and closed it again.

"I guess," Sol said, "the guy has just run out his string. You can't make a guy run when there ain't any more racing left inside him."

Mollie shook her head.

"We never smoked," she said. "We never had a glass of beer like the other people do. We lived in a two-bit flat so Joe could afford to train and win his silly cups and be a big shot. And I loved it."

Sol opened his mouth, and Joe said, "You keep still, Kramer. This is family stuff."

Mollie said, "We're going to have a family, Sol. In case you didn't know. I—I wanted it to be a boy, but I don't any more. I don't want to have to tell him that his Pop came—came up face to face with his first chance to get licked, and—and ran away from it, without even trying?"

Joe stood up. There was a queer feeling in his chest.

Sol said, "Mollie, a good woman can take her husband's bad breaks with the good ones. Joe isn't—"

Joe said, "Shut up, Kramer. How long will it take you to get me in shape?"

"Not under me, you won't," Sol said grimly.

And then with Joe's eyes boring into his, "One, two weeks. You're as ready as you ever will be."

And only the two of them knew what that meant.

IT WAS good, feeling the boards under him again, hearing the world explode as he came down the ramp. Mollie had begged to come, and he had shook his head.

"I want you to listen to this one, baby," he had said. "You're a little too—uh—you don't want to get too excited." His jaw tightened, thinking of that. This was his test, and if it came out the wrong way. . . .

Arne Arlson was waiting for him at the starting line. The Swede's eyes were probing, frank.

"I have waited for this day a long time," the Swede said. "You and I, we will give them something to remember."

"Good luck," Joe said. "An' run your legs off. Because I'll beat you if you don't."

McDermott was there, crowding into the photos. But the crowd didn't quite take him to their hearts this time. It was as if they, too, had finally sensed what only Joe and Sol had known all the time—that an underdog can be very appealing but that it isn't healthy to be an underdog forever.

They tossed for the pole and the Swede won. He said, "It won't effect this race any, I am glad to say. I'll be in third place until the fifth lap, Gilbert. After that—watch out!"

They got down to the mark and just as he knelt, Joe saw something that almost blotted out the world and the race out of his brain. That green dress, in the box over him. It was Mollie. She was crying and her mouth was open, shouting something. And then the gun barked and there were no more pictures.

French fought hard, but Joe managed to grab that pole at the turn. He could feel the college boy slide off him, one arm raking his side. It was technically a foul, but entirely unintentional. The kid had slid out of the way, not quite in time.

Joe Gilbert was a front runner by instinct. With Sol checking him on the pace, he put his head down and hugged that pre-

cious pole, saving the inches. He would need them all this day. At the first turn, French made his bid. The kid had lost his awe of the field and he had been well coached. He swung wide, and Joe saw his shoulders push ahead.

It was too early. Joe let him take the lead, staying a stride behind that long pace. There was a thudding behind him, coming closer. That stride had been etched in his memory through a hundred smoky nights. It was McDermott. The kid was really trying this time. Usually he saved his sprint for the last lap. And the Swede was right beside Mac with that effortless, giant lope that ate up the yards and gave no quarter.

It was a fast two laps. Sol was making crazy motions leaping up and down on the straightaway so that Joe could find him.

"Fifty-eight seconds! It was a hell of a quarter." The Swede hadn't been fooling about that record.

They went into the fourth lap, and French was feeling it. The big guy's stride was wobbling and the cords in his neck were tight as drums, trying to take off the strain. He swung a little wide on the turn, shaking his head, and Joe slid through, taking the lead again. And suddenly, on the crest of the roaring sea of sound, he heard the light drum of feet coming ever closer.

It was that fifth lap. The Swede had been as good as his word.

The pain was there. It came into his chest wall, fighting for his breath. He lost track of the laps. His legs were full of fight, but the fear was trying for the mastery.

They came down to the gun lap. That light, maddening echo was almost at his side now. The world had ceased to exist. There was only that shiny board, with the marks of the spikes blackening the narrow lane he had to keep and hold as long as he could. He saw the yellow hair of the man out of the corner of his eye, and his own breath was harsh again. But Arne Arlson was up there, so that his shoulders were astride of him, laboring hard. The Swede was making his famous finish. It was the two of them against the world now.

There was a mist in front of him but he could see the tape so near and yet so mad-

deningly far. He took the pain and let it drive him.

This is for you, baby.

He put his head down and ran through the blackness and something touched him lightly and he felt himself falling. And after that he didn't feel any more.

H E SAT up. He was still out on the track, he saw with some surprise. Arne Arlson was holding him upright, forcing water down his throat. He gagged, rinsed his mouth and climbed stiffly to his feet.

The Swede said, "You will want to hear this."

The slim man's face was mottled with strain but his smile was open and admiring.

They went over, under the microphone, and the loudspeaker said:

"... of the mile run. The winner Joe Gilbert, unattached. Second, Arne Arlson, of the Swedish Union. The time..."

There was a momentary silence, and Joe saw the Swede looking at him, shaking his head.

"... Four minutes, four and two-tenths seconds. The fastest mile ever run in this country!"

And under the lights, Joe shook hands with the gallant little man from across the sea and went his way.

He went into the dressing room. Two

reporters were pesty, but Sol kept them away.

There was a little lady in green inside. She was crying, her eyes wide.

Mollie said, "You crazy fool! Sol told me, just before the race started."

Sol said, "Now wait a minute before you swing, pal. I know this lady, even if you are married to her. She's a fighter too. An' if a dame's good enough to marry a world champ, she's good enough to share his headaches as well as his medals."

Mollie said, "You—you shouldn't have done it, Joc. I nearly died every step of the way. You may have a million things wrong with you. But I know one thing, no matter what the doctors say. It isn't your heart."

"And don't let any of 'em try to tell you different."

Sol had a wire in his hand. The little man's eyes were very bright.

"When you teach them Eastern kids," he said, "send the best one down here to me. I gotta do something to pass the time."

He went away, and Joe sat down. He was very tired, but the pain had gone. And when it came back, he'd know what to do about it. And he'd never be scared again.

Mollie said "About that boy, champ. He'd better be a good one. Because that old man of his is some stuff."

And that, somehow, was better than the medals ever could be.

ANSWERS TO ALL-SPORTS QUIZ

(Questions on page 35)

1. George Case, led the American league for
2. Two.
3. Lou Boudreau became manager of Cleveland at age of 24.
4. Five, held by Wade Killifer of Senators since 1910.
5. Our vote would go to Cecil Travis of the Senators—5 safeties in his first game, 1933.
6. Bob Fitzsimmons and Jack Johnson both defended their titles at the age of 37—and both lost.
7. Braddock.
8. Tom Hyer.
9. Sullivan vs. Paddy Ryan.
10. Sullivan vs. Kilrain; Sullivan won in 75 rounds.
11. False. The tournament he originated was the Augusta National Invitation. The name was changed to Masters by later promoters.

12. False.
13. 340 yds., by William A. Greene, N.Y., in 1941. What gets us is that Mr. Green probably would have had a *real* long drive—if the ball hadn't fallen in that darned hole!
14. Match play—in medal play holes don't count, just strokes.
15. A 58 was shot on an 18-hole, 70-par course by Chandler Harper, in 1941. Lowest major tournament 18-hole score is 62, shared by several pros.
16. The Harvard crew wore red armbands, 1858.
17. 61-62 feet.
18. False. Tris Speaker hailed from Texas.
19. Ray Dodge, former Olympic star, who heads Dodge, Inc., manufacturers of sports trophies.
20. 16—twice as many as the year before.

IT'S A SPORTS FACT



WARREN SPAHN OF THE BOSTON BRAVES, PICKED EIGHT MEN OFF FIRST BASE IN NINE GAMES.

WHEN MARCEL CERDAN KNOCKED OUT TONY ZALE IN 1948, HE BECAME THE FIRST FOREIGNER IN 57 YEARS TO WIN THE MIDDLEWEIGHT CROWN. THIS HAD NOT HAPPENED SINCE AUSTRALIA'S BOB FITZSIMMONS WON THE TITLE BACK IN 1891.

"Red" Grange



RED GRANGE, THE "GALLOPING GHOST," SCORED 31 TOUCHDOWNS, AND STREAKED 3,637 YARDS IN 20 GAMES WHILE PLAYING FOR ILLINOIS BACK IN THE EARLY 20'S. HIS FAMOUS RUNS HAD THE TURNSTILES CLICKING TO THE TUNE OF OVER 700,000 FANS DURING HIS STAY AT ILLINOIS.

SHADES OF OLD GLORY!! WHAT DOES A GUY HAVE TO DO TO WIN A BALL GAME. PITCH A NO-HITTER!



BOB FELLER CREATED A MODERN RECORD OF 18 STRIKE OUTS IN ONE GAME, (AGAINST DETROIT, OCT. 2, 1938) HE LOST THE GAME 4-1!!

MAPO REMARKS

FRANKENSTEIN FIVE

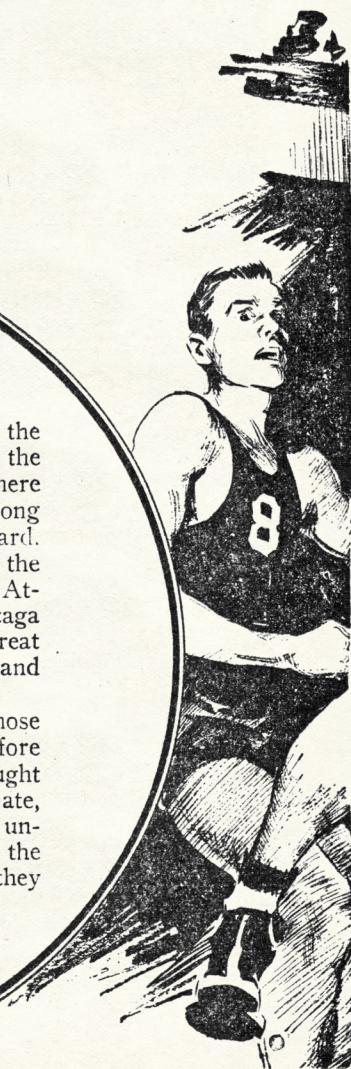
*Meet the immortal Gonzaga five
. . . the hardwood hellions who
were bigger than the game they
played—so big there was only one
team could lick 'em—theirself!*

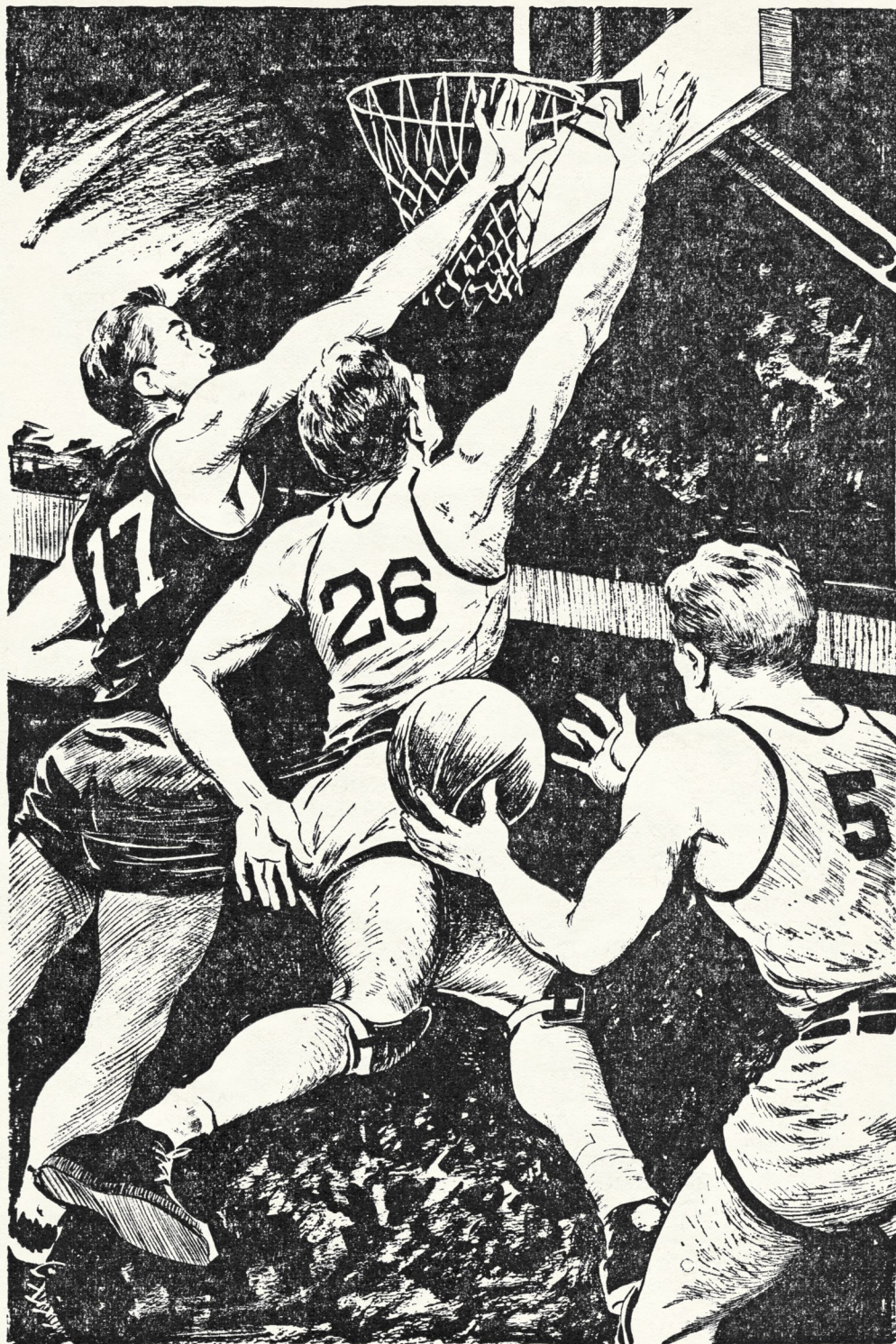
He took it, climbed an invisible
ladder . . . but the ball was
behind him. . . .

By DON KINGERY

WHEN small Gonzaga University sank the proud galleons of mighty Atlantic in the first game of the basketball season—there were no more than a few raised eyebrows among the members of the so-called “expert” board. Gonzaga was a small cornbelt school nestled in the rolling hills of Iowa, and everybody knew that Atlantic had been caught asleep. The Gonzaga game was only a shakedown cruise for great Atlantic—defending National Invitational and NCAA champions.

So the experts said it was only one of those raffles that now and then hit every big team before the real grind starts. Atlantic had been caught napping by the Tigers. The loss was unfortunate, but not disastrous. Very few major teams go undefeated, and Atlantic was Number One in the nation. Nobody doubted that, come April, they





would again be rulers of the basketball world.

One of the few who did raise an eyebrow, however, was Ken Looney—dean of the country's cage coaches and the man who had led Atlantic to three straight national titles. Looney came back from Gonzaga wearing the dazed expression of a man who had seen something he still could not believe.

"They're loaded," he told newsmen. "I don't know how they got that way—but they're loaded. My club played its best game—but this Gonzaga team could run circles around the best clubs I've seen in many a year."

Then Looney rocked back on his heels, tipped his hat in a characteristic gesture, and said, "I've never seen any team play the kind of basketball that bunch turns out. It's a little unbelievable. I'm going out on a limb for the first time in my career. Gonzaga will be in the Garden this winter—and unless somebody can derail that gang of wild men they will probably win every title the game offers. . . ."

It was to Looney's credit that not one of the reporters chided or joshed his statement. They dutifully reported that a new power was rising in the Midwest, and several selectors picked Gonzaga as their "dark-horse" team.

One of the nation's better sportswriters did a column on Looney's statement. Two days later one of the papers found its way to the dressing room of Gonzaga University. There, a skinny young man with red hair and freckles frowned as he pored over the newsprint.

It was late in the afternoon, and the sun streamed through the dirty windows of the small dressing room. Steam hissed from a huge boiler set in the middle of the room. Clothes were strewn around on benches or hung from nails on the board walls.

Gonzaga did not have an impressive plant. But it did have an impressive schedule. The schedule seemed somehow ludicrous in its present surroundings. It was tacked on the warped door that led into the gymnasium, and on it were such names as Carter, Tech, Midwestern, Pacific, Central—and Atlantic in a return game. The name Atlantic was also on top of the sheet, and somebody had written the score, 76-64, next to it.

Down at the bottom of the sheet was a single sentence, written in a schoolboy scrawl. It said, *Jackpot—Madison Square Garden.*

The whole thing might have seemed ludicrous to a stranger. But there was nothing funny about the ham-handed, towering giants who were tugging on practice suits. To a man, they were big, poised and aloof. Their eyes seemed to hold a hidden amusement, as if they were about to spring a surprise on the world at large—a surprise that had been a long time in the making.

The red-haired player—aptly named Rusty Wade—tossed aside the newspaper and picked up his practice shoes. He looked around, spotted a hairy-chested individual at the other end of the room. "Hey, Moose," he called. "They say we've got a chance for the whole jackpot."

Moose Martin, powerful guard of the Tiger team, looked at Rusty Wade. "They ain't heard nothing yet, redhead," he grinned.

Rusty smiled as he laced his shoes. It was very nice to be part of this Tiger club. In a way it represented a reward for the many months of work, the extra jobs he had taken so that he could stay in school.

It also represented a thing of pride to Rusty. Never had he hoped—even in his wildest dreams—to be able to play on a championship basketball team.

And while Rusty had not been part of the "Three-year plan"—dreamed up by Coach Bob Kelly in what had seemed an insane moment three years before—nevertheless he felt a glow of pride at being a member of the squad. True, he was not a varsity player, but he had lettered for two years. He was number three man on Kelly's bench. He had seen action against Atlantic. He would play against Carter in two days. . . .

It was a nice thing—this year's club. Rusty Wade felt pretty good about the whole thing.

ABE WALTERS interrupted Rusty's thoughts with a hearty slap on the back. "Let's go, guy. Daydreaming again?"

"No. Just thinking."

Rusty followed Abe through the door and onto the court. The Tigers were taking warm-up shots, and they moved with the

flowing, practiced skill of a bunch of pros.

Kelly had taken these varsity players—all five of them—when they were freshmen. For the next three years he had worked, teaching, training, drilling them into a swift and brilliant unit.

It had been a masterpiece of coaching, Rusty knew. Five men who thought and moved as one. All of them deadly shots. Not five men, really—but a machine. A beautiful and tremendous machine . . .

Rusty picked up a rolling ball, faked easily, spun and lofted a shot at the goal. The ball hit the rim, bounced away. He moved in, grabbed the ball and cripped it. He tossed the ball to Jim Jacobs and said, "Hit one, Jim."

The towering Jacobs laughed, then wrist-snapped a long shot at the bucket. The ball swished crisply through the net. Jacobs nodded. "That's the way you do it, Rusty."

Then Bob Kelly came into the gym, a stocky young man with gray eyes and a slight bald spot on the back of his head. Kelly had been a top collegiate player four years before—and he had taken the Gonzaga job with plans for big things. The "Three-year plan" was a dream of Kelly's.

That dream had come true this season.

Kelly blew his whistle, waved the squad toward him. He was frowning, and the thought worried Rusty. Kelly was a cheerful fellow, always handy with a smile or a joke. But now he stood stiffly, lips pursed, face grim. "Scrimmage," he said. "Varsity against second team. Thirty good minutes."

They broke. Rusty wriggled into a red shirt, and Kelly said, "I want Rusty with the first team. In Smith's place."

First Larry Smith looked puzzled. Then he frowned. The rest of the varsity looked at Kelly. There were questioning looks, but the coach was bland, serious.

Then Smith stepped aside. Rusty peeled the red shirt, handed it to Smith. He stepped into place with the varsity—Moose Martin, Abe Walters, Jim Jacobs and Harvey Johnson.

They didn't act very glad to see him, Rusty reflected. He didn't get it himself. He was a fair player, but not in the same class with the varsity. Gonzaga had never run to depth. Rusty was a shade under six feet

tall and lean as a splinter. He looked slightly anemic standing beside the tall Jacobs.

The whistle bleated. Jacobs kicked, went up and palmed the ball over to Moose, who whipped it to Johnson in the same motion.

Rusty broke swiftly, then curved away from the middle. The subs had jammed the circle.

Rusty called, but Johnson went in, his big frame twisting into the lay-up. The ball hit the backboard, spanked into the bucket. The lights on the scoreboard flickered.

Rusty frowned. Something was wrong here. He had never played with the varsity before as a unit, but he knew the patterns and knew the plays. The Tigers weren't playing the kind of ball Kelly had taught them.

He backpedaled as the subs brought the ball in. Moose Martin sprinted, stole the ball from a sub. He bounced it to Rusty, then broke, shouting for the return pass.

Men streaked. Johnson was far down-court, waving his arms. Rusty looked, saw a sub heading for Johnson. Rusty flipped the ball to Jacobs, moved forward.

The play stuttered, then fell apart. Moose and Johnson were too far ahead of the play. Rusty's hesitation had given the subs time to cover.

Jacobs didn't pass the ball. He dribbled, then climbed into the air and lobbed one toward the goal. It switched the net for a field goal.

Moose trotted past Rusty. "Pass the ball," he said. "I was wide open."

Rusty could only nod dumbly.

It became obvious in a matter of minutes that Rusty couldn't play the same brand of ball as the varsity. They ran like fire-horses, faked and dribbled like madmen. Rusty was methodical, precise. He didn't care to shoot himself—but he didn't like to take the chance of an interception. Rusty was what the game calls a "safe" player.

At any rate he slowed the varsity down to a walk—until the geared-up machine stuttered and fell to pieces trying to check its own momentum.

An angry group of players left the court after practice. Moose's face was red with anger and Johnson was glaring at Rusty.

Rusty still couldn't put his finger on the thing that had been wrong out there. He knew that something was terribly wrong. Then he shrugged. He had been the slow

cog—had probably loused up the whole works.

In the shower, Moose was still fuming. "Take it easy," said Rusty. "I didn't ask to play on the varsity."

"You're damn right you didn't," snapped Moose. "And we're gonna see that none of you subs play on it again."

Rusty gaped. "What's the matter, guy? Remember me? I'm Rusty. The guy you've known for three years. I don't coach this team. Kelly does that."

Moose looked at him blankly, and Rusty stopped talking. Because suddenly it hit him—square in the face.

He looked around at the varsity players—tried to shove the ugly realization away from his mind. But it stayed there. He walked out of the shower, wrapped a towel around his lean middle and knocked on Kelly's door.

KELLY was sitting in his musty little office. His face wore a grim scowl. He glanced up as Rusty walked in.

"I saw something, coach," said Rusty. "It scared me."

Kelly's face was dour. "You're a little late," he said. "I saw it before the season started. And after the Atlantic game it hit me on the chin like a sledgehammer."

Kelly grimaced. "Sit down, Rusty." Then the coach leaned forward and spoke in a voice tense with emotion. "You remember the story of the man who built a monster—and that monster turned on him and destroyed him?"

"I saw it in a movie," said Rusty. "Wasn't it called. . . ."

"Frankenstein," said Kelly, his voice like a bitter whiplash in the small room. "I've got one, Rusty. I had a dream of a perfect basketball team. A beautiful machine. A creation that would beat any team in the world. So I took five big, clumsy kids. I worked, sweated, drove them. I took them further than any team has ever been taken, geared them up until they were unbelievable. It was a dream-team. And now I see it's going to turn on me and destroy both me and itself."

Kelly's voice was strained. "Three years, Rusty. Nine months a year. Working, working—and now what is it?"

Kelly paused. "You saw it?"

Rusty nodded, dazedly.

"Glory mad," said Kelly. "They're stark, raving mad for glory. I've seen it drive older men crazy—and these are only country boys who've never known any glory. In two more games they'll be out of their heads. I made a mistake. I told them what I was trying to do. Preached it to them that they would be the greatest team that ever took a basketball court. I had to—because you can't work men as hard as I did without letting them share the dream with you."

The coach's face was a harsh mask. "Wait till Jacobs and Moose and Walters and Johnson start fighting each other to see who gets the biggest share of the glory. I know what they're thinking. What a dream that is, Rusty. To be the greatest member of the greatest team in the game. That's what every one of them is thinking, living and breathing. And in two more games they'll blow sky-high with the greatest explosion ever heard. I created this team—and it's become a monster. . . ."

Kelly stood up, walked to the window and looked out. "So I've got to plan."

Rusty had to strain to hear Kelly's quiet voice. "I'm going to do something dangerous," said the coach. "Fight fire with fire—and even then it might blow up in my face."

Kelly whirled. "You're going to be my fire, Rusty."

Rusty stared. "Me? Why—I But listen . . . I mean how—"

"It's a wild plan," said Kelly. "You're going to gear down this crazy machine for me and try to keep it from blowing up. I can promise you nothing. They'll beat you up behind the gym. Maybe they'll do it every day. They're wild, Rusty. Wild with that taste of glory. They'll hate you and they'll try to break you. But you're my only hope. I tried you in there today—and I saw it could possibly work. Gear them down. Keep them from each other's throats. If they hate—have them hate you. And pray that something happens before they explode."

Kelly looked at Rusty Wade. "Will you do it?"

Rusty heard his own voice. It sounded weak and thin. "I'll do it," he said.

Kelly sat down, leaned back in his chair. "A beautiful machine," he said. "Now it's a monster—a Frankenstein. . . ."

2

Hardwood Hell

THE power of the printed word is startling. A horde of scouts and reporters descended up on Gonzaga two days later when the Tigers met Carter. They were there to see what Looney had called "unbelievable basketball"—to see the team that could take every title in the game. Looney of Atlantic was a respected figure. When he spoke, the basketball world listened.

The people who saw the game were not prepared for what they saw. The year before, the Tigers had played with the jumble and stutter that precedes perfection. Kelly had geared up his team to breathless speed and efficiency—and the scorching speed and delicate timing had not yet blended.

A seven-month practice grind that had started a week after the last season ended, had put the final polish on the Tiger juggernaut.

In the early minutes of the game the Tigers blistered the court, faking Carter crazy and bombarding the basket from every possible angle. The scoreboard blinked like a pin-ball machine as the Tigers attacked a shattered Carter team.

Then—with Gonzaga leading by twenty points after ten minutes of play—Johnson tried to dribble the length of the court, ignoring Moose, who was in the open. Johnson's one-handed bank shot was good.

Then it was Jacobs in a solo down the sideline, firing from far out and making the goal good.

It wasn't evident from the stands. But Rusty, sitting with Kelly on the bench, saw the change. A moment before the Tigers had been a team—now they were five men hungry for personal glory.

When Jacobs fired one from midcourt—and made it—Kelly stood up. He nodded at Rusty.

Rusty peeled off his jacket, trotted to the timer's table. "Wade—for Smith."

The horn blew. Rusty went onto the court, waved Smith off. From the stands a loud and derisive catcall drifted down. "Leave them in there!" shouted a voice from the crowd.

Rusty grimaced as he joined the varsity. He looked at their faces—saw desire aflame in them. Then Rusty said, "I'm running the offense. Kelly's orders. The guy who doesn't pass me that ball takes a seat on the bench."

They gaped, then looked at the bench. Kelly was standing there calmly. Then the varsity looked at Rusty.

It was a tight instant. It could go either way. It was cut thin as a split hair. Then Moose looked towards the bench and in that moment Kelly waved to the subs. They stood up expectantly.

That did it. The varsity was sullen, but Rusty knew he had won—for the moment.

It was Gonzaga's ball. Moose flipped it to Rusty, then broke. The Tigers sprinted full-speed.

Rusty took a deep breath, clenched his teeth—and held the ball!

The effect was immediate and frightening. The stands heaved in a roar of noise. Moose was shouting, his face contorted.

Rusty dribbled easily, waited. When Johnson cut for the basket, Rusty raised his arm. But it was Johnson, trailing the play, who got the pass and made the crisp shot.

The game broke from a sprint to a walk—and the fans weren't liking it. They took it out on Rusty and on Kelly. Rusty remained calm, feeding whoever was open regardless of who it was.

The Tigers fumed, threatened, sulked. The tempo of the game faltered. Carter took advantage of the lull and spurted.

Carter was gaining. And with ten minutes to play in the game they tied the score at 56-56.

Rusty was worried. Moose was sulking, refusing to go in there. Johnson was free and Rusty found him with a pass. The shot was good. Carter came downcourt and knotted the score again.

It see-sawed for what seemed like hours—as the hands of the big clock turned.

Then, with the score tied at 62-62 and the clock showing ten seconds—Rusty took his first shot of the night. The ball arched up, hit the rim and teetered there. Then it fell through and the game was over as Carter tried to unravel for a last attack.

The dressing room was a cauldron of hate. Moose slammed the door of his locker viciously, glared at Rusty. "You stupid busher!" he snarled.

Rusty reddened, but he took it. Then Johnson was coming toward him, eyes wild. Rusty tried to defend himself, but Johnson's hard fists found him. He reeled back, then bore in, swinging. Then Kelly was between them, shoving, yelling.

The fight subsided. Kelly faced the team, hands on hips. "I'm running this team," he barked. "Rusty has his orders from me, and he'll have them again against Midwestern. He'll keep on having my orders until you guys play like a team instead of a gang of individual glory hogs!"

That night Rusty took his first beating, in the showers after Kelly had gone. He left the gym with a black eye and broken lips. He walked across the campus to his boarding house and lay across the bed—trying to talk himself into sticking, into not giving up. He didn't sleep that night until the dawn was seeping through the drawn shades.

THE newspapers picked up the dirge after the Tigers barely nosed out Central in their next game. Gonzaga had been brilliant for ten minutes—and then Rusty Wade entered the game and the sparks fizzled out.

What the fans didn't know was that Kelly was watching—saw the exact moment when the Tigers quit playing the team game and started trying for a hunk of personal glory. And when Kelly's shrewd eyes saw it, he whipped Rusty into the game instantly.

But the fans and the writers were up in arms. One columnist wrote, after the Central game:

We saw the Gonzaga Tigers against Central. For ten minutes they were the best team these eyes have ever seen. They were everything Ken Looney said—and more. But then they slowed down to a walk—and the finger of blame points to a young man named Rusty Wade. Wade seemed determined to throw the Tiger machine out of gear with his slow, methodical tactics, which at times included standing still and merely holding the ball. We do not presume to second-guess Coach Bob Kelly. But it looks to us like Kelly is playing a favorite—Wade—and that same favorite is a square wheel under a streamlined racer. How about it, Kelly—how about taking the wraps off your club? A college court is no place for favoritism. . . .

Kelly talked it over with Rusty. The

coach said, "It gets rough now. They'll read that stuff—and believe it. Can you take it?"

"I'll try," said Rusty. "I don't know why—but I'll try."

"You've got to keep them geared down," said Kelly. "You can't let one man score more than another, unless the game itself is at stake. They'll be after you now, Rusty. Stick it out. Learn something from this season—and learn it so you'll never forget."

Then Kelly paused. "What course are you taking here?"

"Phys Ed," said Rusty. "And not because it's an easy course."

Kelly nodded. "I'll remember that—if I'm still around next season."

Abe Walters gave Rusty another black eye after the Midwestern game. The big guard was almost out of his head with anger after Rusty had favored Moose in the game. Moose was covered by a mediocre player, and the Tiger ace had roamed virtually unchecked all night. Rusty, desperate when the other Tigers couldn't shake loose against a tough defense—finally fed Moose. Moose made 36 points.

The rest of the Tigers spent the last few minutes of the game trying to get in on the scoring act, with the result that Midwestern started a late spree of its own. The final score was 65-61 in favor of Gonzaga.

When Rusty came out to practice the following afternoon, Moose greeted him with a friendly slap on the back—and immediately hated him again when Rusty fed the ball to Jacobs in a scrimmage against the subs.

That afternoon Rusty got his third bruised eye—but he sliced Moose's lip before it was over.

Rusty went home and reflected that he was getting to be quite a boxer in his senior year at Gonzaga. And deep inside him was the insistent worry that the whole thing was inevitably approaching the exploding point.

The varsity tried to freeze the ball away from Rusty the following week against Tech—and Kelly stood up and started calling subs off the bench. Moose looked at the bench, then shoveled the ball hurriedly to Rusty.

Rusty fed Walters that night and fought Johnson after the game. The next day he walked into Kelly's office and threw a pair of shoes on the desk. "I'm through," he said.

"What's the matter, Rusty?"

"I'm a lightweight," said Rusty bitterly. "I don't mind playing basketball—but I can't whip these heavyweights after the game."

Kelly frowned. "You won't quit," he said. "You want to know why?"

"As long as it's me that's concerned—I wouldn't mind knowing," said Rusty.

"Because you've got a dream—just like me," said Kelly. "Go ahead—get it off your chest. Then you'll feel better . . ."

Rusty's shoulders slumped. "I'm tired, coach. It's a big load. . . ."

"I know. But here's a thought to keep you going. If we win a title this year, I'm going to have an assistant coach next season. I'm a funny guy, Rusty. I like a man with a dream."

Rusty stood there for a long moment, then he grinned. "You're right, coach. I just got fed up for a minute—that's all."

Kelly picked up the shoes. "You want these back?"

"I'll need them against Pacific," said Rusty.

Kelly grinned. "Now let's talk real shop. We're going to have a visitor against Pacific. Ken Looney has wired me for tickets. He wants to see us play."

Rusty had almost forgotten. He snapped his fingers. "That's right. Pacific—then Atlantic again."

"Looney's smart," said Kelly. "And we can't fool him. Because we can't win any way but the way we've been playing. . . ."

"That's a pleasant thought to sleep on," said Rusty. "You mind if I think about it, too?"

"Two heads are better than one," said Kelly.

PACIFIC was tough. They had Ted Jagard, the scoring wizard, and a host of fleet forwards who liked to run. Rusty hunched on the bench and watched Jagard glide downcourt, then put on the brakes and loft a long one from the corner. The ball socked into the bucket.

Two minutes had faded into the mists since the game started. Moose had banged in a pair of quick field goals and then Jagard had struck. It was going to be close.

Rusty looked up at the stands, hunting Looney. He knew the Atlantic coach was up there.

A sudden roar made him turn. The Tigers were moving swiftly, with amazing grace and dexterity. The ball shuttled in a tan blur—then Jacobs went high and cripped it for two points.

Kelly glanced at the clock, then looked out at the court, a grim-faced young man with a lot on his mind.

Gonzaga rolled. Jacobs hit again, then Moose and Johnson in quick succession. Even mighty Pacific was stunned by the relentless attack of Gonzaga. The score mounted as Walters went in for another crip. Then Smith was hitting a long one from the middle of the court.

Pacific called time—but it was to no avail. The Tigers surged downcourt, flooding the basket.

Gonzaga pushed to a 22-8 lead with only eight minutes of play gone. Then Moose streaked downcourt, hesitated, then dribbled in through the pack and dumped one in.

Kelly's face tightened, and he turned to Rusty. Out on the court, Jacobs stole the ball from Pacific, went down the sideline and arched a long shot at the backboard. The ball spanked the wood, then slanted through the net.

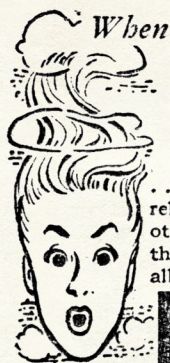
Rusty stood up, but Kelly waved him back. "Let's pray for a minute," he said. "Let's hope it doesn't blow up. We can't let Looney see it. . . ."

But Jacobs was firing another long one—and then there was no defense out there. It was every man for himself, and hoop glory for the man who could make the most points. Rusty saw the change—saw the hungry flush in their faces. Then Kelly's shoulders sagged in complete dejection and he waved a hand at Rusty.

Jagard had been in the shadows too long. He took advantage of a suddenly-loose Tiger defense and ripped through for three consecutive field goals. Then the horn was blowing and Rusty was joining the Gonzaga team. He waved for time out, huddled them at midcourt.

"Kelly wants some defense," he told them. "Let's give it to him. Offensively I run the show—and the guy who's open is the guy who gets the ball. Let's show some pepper out here."

Moose Martin was fuming. He had scored twelve points already, and he wanted to pad it up. Johnson and Jacobs had

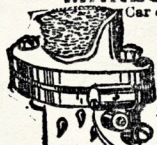


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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

already made plans to run wild singlehanded. Rusty could see that.

They clamped down a little on Jagard—and the track meet was over. Rusty dribbled, held the ball, made them shuttle it back and forth. The high pitch of the game fell off. Point production dropped—and Pacific started whittling down the Tiger lead.

The score was 48-42 at halftime—and in the third quarter Jagard broke loose momentarily. It cost the Tigers four precious points.

Rusty knew it would be close. He could feel the slow, uneven pulse of the Gonzaga offense. There was no spark. He shoved his worry into a corner of his mind.

Johnson crippled after Rusty had stolen the ball from a Pacific forward and brought it downcourt slowly. Then Moose was free for an instant under the bucket. Rusty called, got the ball—and sent it in to Moose, light as a feather. Moose leaped, slammed the ball into the bucket viciously. Gonzaga had a six-point lead.

The fans were getting nasty. They had seen the Tigers literally scorch Pacific off the court early in the game. Then Rusty had gone in and the Tiger offense fell apart. They didn't like it.

It was nip-and-tuck until the final minutes of the game. Then the Tigers—frightened by the scoreboard—became a unit. They showed a brief but devastating flash of their old form and it sunk Pacific. The game ended with the Tigers leading, 76-73, and Jagard was trying to hit the bucket from everywhere on the court.

It was close. Too close, Rusty thought, as he went into the dressing room with the angry, sullen Tigers. He looked back, saw Looney talking to Kelly.

"I saw the guy," Kelly said as he walked into the dressing room.

"What does he know?" asked Rusty.

Kelly shrugged. "He's smart. He saw it. You can't hide it from a guy like that."

Then Kelly said, "Nice going in there. We pulled it out again. I don't even want to talk about it tonight, though. I'm beat, Rusty. . . ."

"You go on," said Rusty. "Let me try something."

"Don't stick your neck out."

(Continued on page 104)

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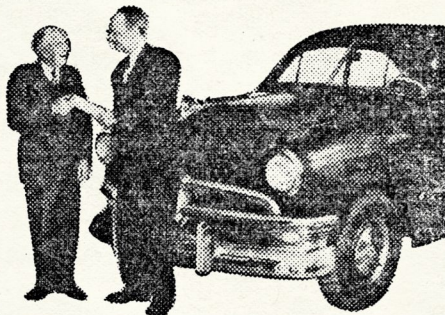
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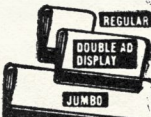
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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 102)

"Don't worry. I'm getting smart myself, maybe."

Kelly shrugged again, and Rusty saw the lines of worry and tension on his face. "Good night, coach," he said.

Then he walked into the shower, left Kelly standing there, puzzled.

MOOSE was waiting for him, eyes wild with anger. Rusty looked at the big man. "I hope you guys are happy," he said.

"What's the matter punk?" snapped Moose.

"You had a team," said Rusty. "A great team—and then you got the swell-head. You wanted to hog the glory. To hell with Gonzaga and hooray for me—that was your fight yell. Well, you wrecked the playhouse. I hope you're satisfied."

It was suddenly silent in the room.

Moose scowled. "You wrecked it, you punk busher. You and Kelly. We could have rolled over everything we met—until you took over. How does it feel to wreck a great team—busher?"

Rusty spat his answer. "You're jerks, all of you. And you're blind and selfish and stupid."

Moose moved forward, face contorted with hate. Rusty ducked his shoulders, threw the right hand. It caught Moose on the jaw, rocked the big man backwards. He slipped and fell.

"I'm even better than you fighting," said Rusty. "And now you can have your damn team. I'm through. When Atlantic gets through with you I'll be standing there laughing."

Rusty turned, started toward the door. Then he looked back. "By the way—when you beg me to play I'll come back in. Not before. . . ."

He heard Johnson's yell, then the big body was slamming into him, knocking him sideways. He felt Johnson's fist strike him above the eye in a slash of blinding pain. Then he fell on the wet floor, his right ankle turning under him.

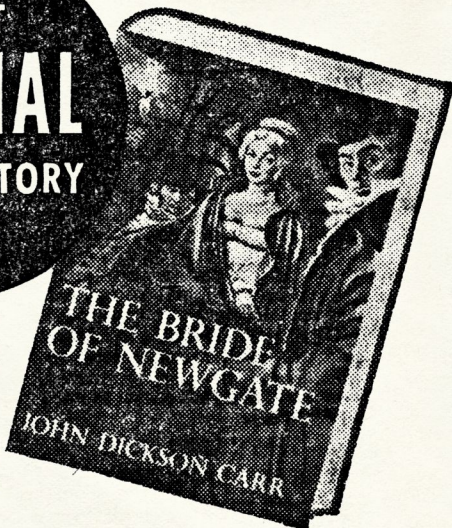
When he got up his leg almost buckled with pain. But he stood there without showing it, and he said, "I'll be on the bench—when you need me. Just ask real nice, that's all. . . ."

(Continued on page 106)



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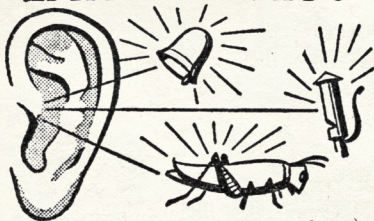
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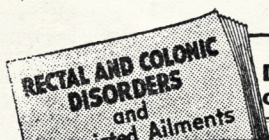
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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 104)

And then he walked out of the room on an ankle that felt like it was on fire. He dressed and hobbled out of the door. It was a long way to the boarding house but he walked it. It had been a chance, he thought. He had thrown it in their faces. He knew when they met Atlantic they would need him before it was over.

And he would be there—with an ankle he could hardly walk on and an eye he could barely see out of. He grimaced. One's senior year, he reflected, was seldom dull, if you were lucky enough to be a member of a dream team.

3

Hoopster's Showdown

ATLANTIC'S gymnasium was huge. The bleachers were spacious as the plains of Iowa, and eighteen thousand fans had jammed their way into Kelsey Memorial gym to watch the Atlantic Bulldogs match wits and skill with the Tigers from Gonzaga.

Ken Looney had a big squad. They covered one end of the court, tall, rangy and fast. A hand high in the stands blared out the Bulldog fight song.

This game had been well-publicized. The fans were here to see whether Atlantic could beat the surprising Tigers. True, the Tigers had not shown their early-season sparkle recently. But perhaps they had been playing under wraps—pointing for the big test against Atlantic.

Kelly sat with Rusty on the Gonzaga bench, watching the Tigers warm up. Rusty's ankle was strapped in yards of tape. He said, "I loused it up, coach. I really busted your appcart—"

"Forget it," said Kelly. "How much will that ankle take?"

"I don't know. I can run pretty good. When I cut it gives on me. But I'll play. . . ."

"We'll see, Rusty. Just sit and cross your fingers and hope. We'll soon know how much Looney figured out."

Then the horn was blowing. Kelly blinked, said, "Great Scott!"

FRANKENSTEIN FIVE

Rusty stared. The Atlantic varsity was sitting on the bench! Looney was sending out five subs to meet Gonzaga!

"What's his angle?" breathed Rusty.

"I may know—but it scares me to think about it," said Kelly.

They found out in a hurry. When Jacobs won the tap and flicked the ball to Moose, Atlantic deployed like frightened rabbits into a zone defense. Gonzaga streaked—and it was Johnson finding the hoop from the far corner of the court for the first two points.

"They're playing defense," said Kelly. "Looney read us like a book. You get it, Rusty? He lets us run wild—figuring we'll do it anyhow. But he doesn't demoralize his varsity by having them face us. He saves them until we start playing that solo stuff—then he shoots his big boys in to outscore us."

"We got to do something," said Rusty.

The coach's glance was quizzical. "I'm open to suggestion," he said.

It had the makings of a rout out there. But Atlantic fans held a respectful silence. Looney was the big man in basketball. Nobody questioned him in anything pertaining to the game.

And as the scoreboard flickered maniacally, Rusty knew that Looney had truly seen through Gonzaga.

It didn't take long. Under the relentless bombardment, the score mounted magically. It was 13-2 for Gonzaga after five minutes—16-4 after seven minutes. When the clock had turned ten minutes behind its red hands, Gonzaga was leading mighty Atlantic by a 26-7 score and the stands were squirming restlessly.

Still Looney sat stiffly, his legs crossed, his varsity gathered about him like a brood of young ducks. When Moose streaked downcourt, ignoring Johnson, and crippled one—Looney uncrossed his legs and nodded. When Johnson fired one from mid-court that fell through the net, Looney grinned faintly.

The grin became a smile as Jacobs cut off a pass intended for Smith, then shot the ball. Smith muttered, Moose shrugged—and Looney stood up and waved at his varsity.

Looney held his team on the sidelines—until Johnson tried to dribble the length of



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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

the court—until Moose tried to flip one in from behind the backboard instead of passing the ball out—until Smith tried a left-handed hook shot that didn't even hit the backboard.

Then Looney sent his varsity in—five big men with stiff pride in the way they moved. Men who did not look afraid of Gonzaga—or any other team that ever took a court. Atlantic was proud with the air of triumph, and when the whistle started the game the Bulldogs came downcourt like hungry wolves.

IT WAS a masterpiece for Looney. Moose, trying to solo with the ball, found himself encircled by three Atlantic players. He fought for the ball, refusing to pass to Jacobs. Atlantic won the jump that followed the tie-ball and moments later Jed Blount, Bulldog ace, socked in a push shot.

Rusty was stunned by the relentless mastery of Looney's coaching. But he had still another surprise coming—because Atlantic was ignoring virtually every Tiger except the one with the ball. And that man was being smothered by two and three men from Atlantic's sliding defense.

"What does that guy use?" said Rusty. "A crystal ball?"

Blount of Atlantic was an All American. He set the pace for the Bulldogs, and within minutes the whole complexion of the game had changed.

Atlantic came from behind. Swiftly, surely, unstoppable—they moved that ball. And the Tigers went to pieces. They tried to match the Tigers—not as a team—but as five stars who could not believe they were not invincible.

Atlantic gave them the truth. They gave it to Moose when he missed three straight shots and then cracked and threw the ball wide of the backboard and into the end zone stands.

They gave the truth to Johnson when he tried to dribble through the defense—and found out he was no longer in possession of the ball. Jacobs found it out when he tried to sink two long ones from midcourt—and missed them both because of a knifing Atlantic defense that bobbled up before his eyes and threw him off-balance.

FRANKENSTEIN FIVE

Atlantic tied the score—and Gonzaga called time. Then Atlantic went ahead by a 38-28 score as Blount ripped the net with four straight field goals and two free shots.

Rusty was standing up without knowing it, shouting against the massive wave of noise from the packed stands. Gonzaga had been shattered. The monster had finally destroyed itself.

Moose called time, and on his face was a shocked pain—as if he had been caught in a vicious trap and mangled.

The Tigers were proud—in their own way. They looked at the bench—at Rusty and the coach. Then they went back to battle against Atlantic.

It was to no avail. After the halftime intermission, Atlantic returned to the attack. The score mounted, and it was 56-30 with fifteen minutes to go.

Then Moose called time again, and he was walking toward the bench. His face was no longer aglow.

"I never thought it could happen," said Moose. He shook his head, dazedly.

"It could and it is happening," said Kelly.

Then the rest of the varsity was at the bench. Kelly looked at them, said, "You thought it would be great to become Mister Basketball. You aren't a team anymore. You've five guys out to grab a hunk of personal glory. I worked with you for three years—and you forgot everything I ever taught you when you saw that glory dangling before your eyes."

Jacobs said suddenly. "I guess we forgot a lot of things. I guess you're right, coach. It caught up with us. We're getting pounded to death out there—and we can't do anything about it."

"You could," said Kelly. "But you've forgotten how."

Then Kelly looked at Moose. "You guys are shaken. I know that. You'll never beat Atlantic the way you are."

Kelly turned, looked at Rusty. "Get ready," he said.

Rusty peeled his jacket, flexed his right leg. Kelly looked at the varsity. "Who sits down?" he said.

It was Moose who shoved his pride away into a dark corner and said, "Me. I'll sit down. . . ."

Rusty tested his ankle, found it only fair.

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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

Then he was leading the Tigers to war against great Atlantic.

IT WAS a long and tortuous road. Atlantic had built up momentum, was champing at the bit, ready to run away with the game.

Rusty brought the ball in, a skinny man with freckles and a big load on his shoulders. He chanted the numbers and watched his teammates fall into the pattern.

The ball came back and he hooked it in to Jacobs. Men cut sharply, crossed—then Smith was open, streaking in for the bucket. Rusty fed the ball, underhand. Smith took it in stride, went up into the air.

But Jacobs was coming, tall body slanting as he turned. He took the ball from Smith and went up. Blount challenged, but was an inch short. The ball hit the board, fluttered the net. It was a goal for Gonzaga.

Rusty went back on defense, favoring the ankle. For a moment he had felt the smooth mesh of gears on that last one.

Blount came on, swift and deadly. He took a pass, sprinted, then stopped. He put on the brakes in a squeal of scorching rubber, and he lifted himself into the air, shooting with one hand.

Jacobs jumped higher than Rusty had ever seen a man jump. The ball hit his fingers, bounced off on a slant. Rusty dug in, almost crying aloud from the fiery pain in his ankle. He reached the ball, flipped it to Johnson. Then he was running.

Johnson crossed over, ripped the ball behind him to Jacobs. Jacobs went high, slammed the ball in to Smith. Then Rusty was turning the corner behind the broad back of Walters. He ran, holding his breath. Then the ball was there, light and perfect. He took it, climbed up an invisible ladder. He raised his right arm, but the ball was behind him, socking into Johnson's hands.

Rusty came down, then heard the roar, saw the lights blink. Johnson had made the goal.

They were with him, then. He tried to increase the tempo—felt them follow. They were gaining back their once-shattered confidence. They were becoming a team again.

They crept up on Atlantic—and suddenly Rusty was straining to keep up, trying to

FRANKENSTEIN FIVE

stay with the Tigers. The machine was gaining momentum.

Atlantic missed a shot, and Jacobs recovered. Rusty yipped, got the ball. He dribbled once, passed without looking. Johnson was there and he took it, shuttled it into Smith. The ball streaked out to Rusty and he palmed it to Jacobs.

Then the play broke. Jacobs rammed through, took the blistering hard pass and lobbed it into the air. Johnson leaped, palmed the ball up into the basket.

And at that moment Rusty turned to go back downcourt—and ran into Jed Blount's elbow. He felt the flash behind his eyeball, then the court rocked crazily. He saw the ball coming and he reached out. Blount cut across, grabbed it. Rusty dove in, slapping at it.

It was something like being run over by a freight train.

But he had the ball. He flipped it to Johnson, and sat on the floor. He watched the Tigers rumble downcourt—saw Jacobs climb the ladder and make the goal—and he knew the Tigers were a dream team again.

The whistle blew. Johnson was lifting Rusty to his feet. Then Moose was there, supporting his other arm, and Rusty hobbled to the bench.

Then he was sitting next to Kelly and the coach put a hand on his shoulder and said, "A nice job, coach."

"You said—coach?"

Kelly nodded. "Next year. I think we'd make a pretty good pair—"

"Will there be any more dream teams?"

Kelly laughed. "That's basketball, Rusty. Sure, we'll build another dream team. But we'll know a little more about it next time. . . ."

Rusty grinned. Then he leaned back to watch the greatest basketball team in the game. Atlantic was going down again—its proud galleons were shivering under the assault.

Rusty felt his sore eye, winced. Then he laughed aloud as Moose whipped in and scored another goal. One's senior year, Rusty reflected, could sometimes be the best of all.

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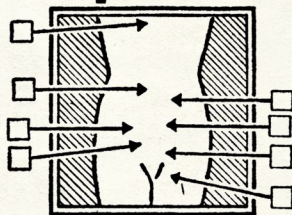
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FIFTEEN SPORTS STORIES

(Continued from page 34)

In the Holland locker room even the amiable Hooker looked angry. But Fischetti was the spokesman. He said, "That lousy grandstander. If you don't take him out, coach—"

"Lou," Joe Corson said, "we can beat these guys. We can take them to the cleaners."

Fischetti stared at him.

"They have two men on me," Joe Corson said. "It leaves you wide open. I want to tell you guys something. That game I played upstairs was the kind of game I played in high school. A one man show. I got away with it in high school. I was pretty sure I couldn't get away with it here. Not for long anyway. Personally I don't think much of it. It looks nice to the spectators but basketball's a team game. If we feed you this next half, Lou, we'll upset their appletart. Then if they go after you I'll try and cut loose again. Now let's go up there and take these boys apart."

HE HEADED for the door and the team came trotting after him. They went out on the floor and State was using the same tactics. Joe Corson got the ball and he had two men hanging with him. He fired a pass to Clayton, cut for the corner, and when his two men broke with him, Fischetti was in the clear. He was unguarded as he sank an easy shot.

State began feeding substitutes into the game, relying on fresh men to stop the Holland attack. But Fischetti broke loose for three straight goals and it was a ball game once again.

It went down toward the finish and then with four minutes to go big Clayton and Fischetti had four fouls apiece.

Hooker called a time out. They sprawled on the floor and Hooker turned to Joe Corson. He said, "Looks like it's up to you."

"We'll go from outside," Joe said. "It's taking a chance but we're behind."

They went back into the fray and Joe Corson had the ball again. He hung back, handing the ball off to the guards and taking it again, and when Fischetti broke for the corner his guard shifted just a little as Joe feinted the pass.

Pulling the ball back to his chest, Joe Corson let it ride. It was off the backboard but Brad Clayton didn't need to go up for

THE BACKWARD FORWARD

any rebound. The ball slid through the netting and Holland had a one point deficit.

Joe called for another time out. "We play it cagey now," he said. "We stress possession. This next time we work it down, I think we have time not to go for those long shots. They're too risky if we miss. But we got to stop them coming down."

State attacked and Hooker batting a pass to one side, broke it up. Fischetti was on the ball and he passed over to Joe Corson. He brought it down slowly, handed it off to Hooker, and then sifted through the defense. He and Fischetti cut back and forth and finally Clayton had the ball in the keyhole. He went up in the air as though to shoot, then passed to Joe Corson.

He was ready to let it go but the angle was tough from the corner. He went up in the air and then as Fischetti cut in toward the basket from the opposite side, he looped the ball to him. Fischetti took it without breaking stride and poured it through to give Holland a lead.

State, trying desperately, lost the ball on running at midcourt. Holland stalled, passing back and forth and finally Corson took a pass to the left of the hoop and hooked it in.

The gun ended State's last vain attempt to get back in the game. Joe Corson, exhausted, started slowly for the stairs and Coach Baird blocked his way.

"Tonight you were the player I saw in high school," he said. "Twenty-seven points. What happened?"

Joe Corson said, "I still got plenty to learn. But I thought it might do some good if I cut loose tonight."

Coach Baird said, "A top player can be a showboat or he can be something else. A sparkplug, a leader. A guy who sets the pace and makes a team play over its head. Like you did tonight."

Still a little fearful, Joe Corson walked slowly down the stairs. He was afraid he might be mobbed when he got down there and he was right about that. But as it turned out they just wanted to shake his hand. He felt that relaxation that comes after a hard-fought victory. He wouldn't have to leave town tonight, Joe Corson guessed, he'd be around Holland for quite a while.

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There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

Policy Pays for a Day, a Week, a Month, a Year—just as long as necessary for you to be hospitalized!

JUST LOOK

The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for about everything—for every accident, and for all common and rare diseases after the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious disease such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diseases involving female organs, sickness resulting in a surgical operation, hernia, lumbago and sacroiliac conditions originating after the policy is in force six months are all covered . . . Hospitalization caused by attempted suicide, use of intoxicants or narcotics, insanity, and venereal disease is naturally excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your \$1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY

Benefits At Small Extra Cost
 Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays \$50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO

Benefits At No Extra Cost
 In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
 For Hospital Bills, up to . . . \$500.00
 For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to \$500.00
 For Orthopedic Appliances, up to \$500.00
TOTAL OF \$1,500.00



3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY

for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS \$100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid **DIRECT TO YOU** to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of \$50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums. Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This Is What \$100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this **READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU**. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

REMEMBER—\$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY \$14.25 PER DAY!

Examine This Policy Without Cost or Obligation—Read It—Talk It Over—Then Decide

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospital Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of Nebraska and with policyholders in every state. **SEND NO MONEY**—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

FREE INSPECTION . . . MAIL COUPON

The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

The Service Life Insurance Company
 Hospital Department N-11, Omaha 2, Nebraska
 Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....
 Address.....
 City or Town..... State.....

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Assets of \$13,188,604.16 as of January 1, 1951
 Hospital Department N-11, Omaha 2, Nebraska

WHAT Every AUTO MECHANIC Wants to Know

A motor vehicle is a machine of many parts, each part designed and constructed for its own special function.

All good mechanics, like good doctors, should know the working theory and operation of each part and understand what causes trouble and how to remedy it.

LET AUDELS AUTO GUIDE SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS

Every auto mechanic, helper, serviceman and operator can use a copy of AUDELS AUTOMOBILE GUIDE. The information it gives saves time, money and worry. Highly indorsed by all users. It presents the whole subject of auto mechanics from A to Z in plain language and simple terms.

This Big Practical Book gives full information with working diagrams covering the principles, construction, ignition, service and repair of modern cars, trucks and buses.

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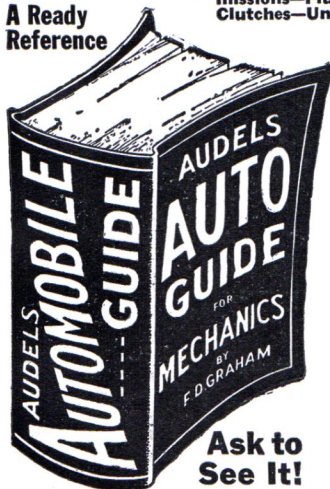
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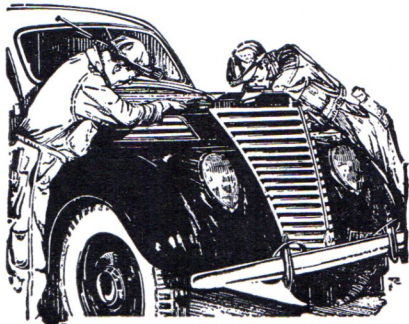
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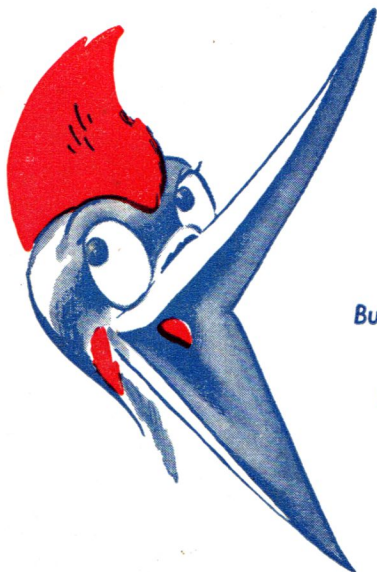
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