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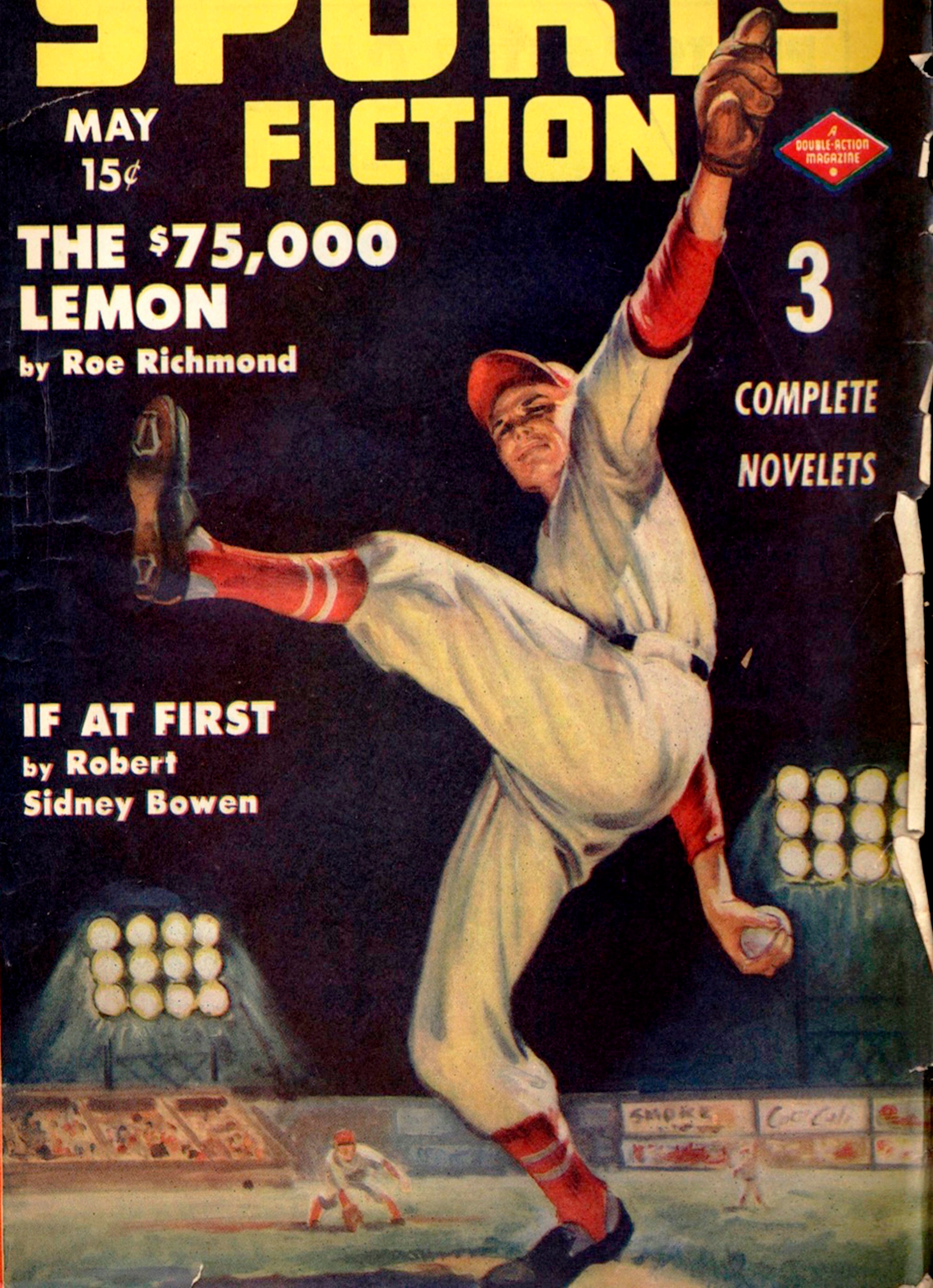
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SPORTS FICTION

Volume 6

May, 1949

Number 4



Three All-Star Novelets

- THE \$75,000 LEMON (*Baseball*) Roe Richmond 6
was what they all called Big Jeff now!
- THE BIG GUY'S IN YOUR CORNER (*Fight*)
Walter Roeber Schmidt 26
but you have to deliver those knockout punches yourself!
- STAR BUST (*Baseball*) Zene Tuttler 42
—and Ganzer was really busted; they didn't even want
him as a relief hurler when the fire couldn't be put out!

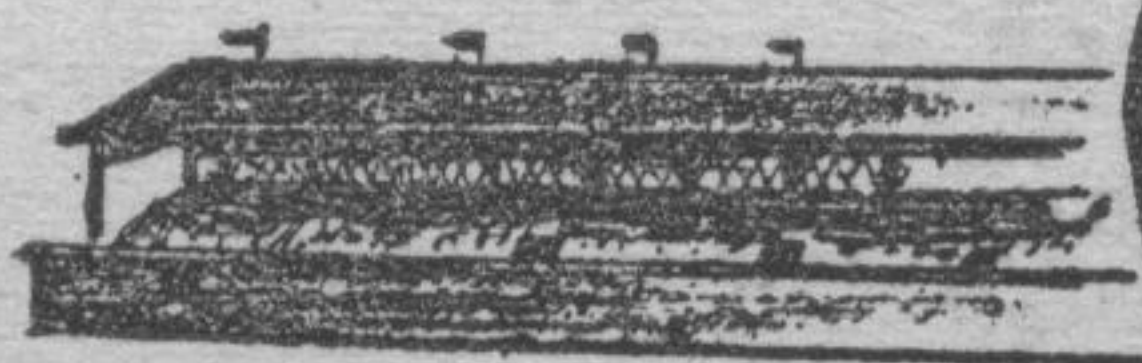
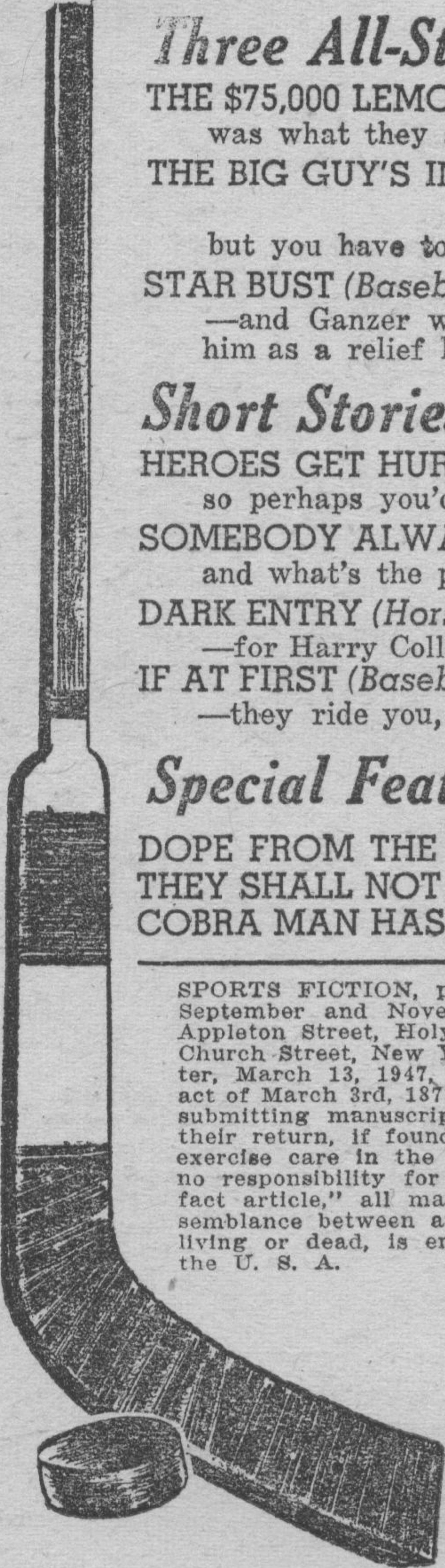
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and what's the point in making a brawl out of a game?
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—they ride you, busher, just ride them straight back!

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Robert W. Lowndes, Editor

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(FROM A LETTER BY E. S. JORDAN, DETROIT, MICH.)

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Feature Baseball Novelet

✓ 1 ✓

JEFFORDS stood in the center of the diamond sweating and shaken; hollow, sick. He still looked big and strong on the mound, rangy, rawboned, rugged—powerful enough to throw one through a concrete wall. But his fast one was gone; Jeffords couldn't break a pane of glass, and everybody knew it.

Once those guys would have been licked before they got up there; once all McCully had to do was announce that Big Jeff was going for the

Hawks and the other team lost most of its heart for baseball. But now they came up there cocky, taking their toeholds, eyeing him with cool disdain. "Throw in there," they said, "and I'll part your hair with one." And they said: "Throw in there and I'll tear a leg off Kennedy." "Throw it and pray." "Throw it and duck."

A bunch of .250 batters, he thought contemptuously; not a real long ball hitter in the lot. And they were belting his brains out, beating him for the second time in the Series.

The first one hadn't been his fault though. Four hits he had given up, four cheap singles and well scattered,

There was nothing left of what had made Big Jeff a big-money player; rookies who used to feel on top of the world if he just spoke to them, were now telling him how to throw a ball. Then he began to learn something of what it was that made the great players really great.

The base coach motioned the runners around the circuit.



but Jeffords, had lost it, 1 to 0. Because there'd been a walk and a stolen base in front of one of those soft singles; because the Hawks only got five blows themselves and never more than one an inning. But the fact remained it was charged to him, and the wise guys were saying: "Big Jeff never wins the big ones. When the chips are down the big guy blows." And worse than that: "He's a business man; he draws his seventy-five grand and his Series split, win or lose. The difference between the winners' and losers' end don't matter to Jeff."

Well, he had probably given them some license to talk that way. He had been reared in poverty, the Jeffords had never known anything else until Jeff hit the big time. He had resolved early to make all he could while he was up there, and he hadn't passed up any chances. "Jeffords, Incorporated," they called him. To hell with them. His folks were going to live well, and his kids were going to grow up right.

After Jeff dropped the opener to the Blues, the Hawks came back and won the next two, getting their hits for Lem Linehan and Gary Bramstedt. Now Big Jeff was back and losing the fourth game, 3 to 1 in the sixth... With one out Thorssen had tagged him for a double into the right field corner, and Bud Ellinger was settling into his stance at the plate, stocky and muscular, his long jaw jutting in under the cap. Ellinger already had batted in two runs and was after another. Jeffords thought they ought to put him on and set up a double play, even if the next hitter, Rokeby, was left-handed.

Hedron, the catcher, was coming out in front of the rubber and Jeffords walked in to meet him. Hedron said: "Mac wants us to pitch him but give him nothing good."

"We ought to pass him," Jeff said, shaking his head.

Hedron looked at him sharply, a shade of scorn in his narrowed dark eyes and about his mouth, or else Jeffords imagined this. "Mac says pitch him; but nothing good, Jeff."

"All right, Jim." Jeffords turned back to the mound, feeling weariness spread with a dull ache across his back and his long right arm heavy and dead. That first day he had stopped them with his curve, but today it wasn't breaking sharp or staying where he wanted it to.

ELLINGER looked too confident and eager up there. Jeffords threw in under that out-thrust chin to shake him out of his toehold, but Ellinger came right back and dug in again. Jeffords tried to curve him low and outside, but it went letter-high and the ball hung instead of dipping away. Ellinger fell on it with fiendish delight and a full-armed swing, the explosion loud and sickening in Jeff's head, the ball taking off on a rifled rising line over left field. It was out of the park, sinking at last into a sea of upflung arms in the bleachers behind the 385-foot sign.

Jefford stood with bowed head smoothing the dirt around the slab with his cleat while Thorssen and Ellinger trotted around the bases. The home crowd clamored for his removal and Jeff couldn't blame them. The Blues led, 5 to 1, and five runs had been enough to win any game in the Series so far. McCully climbed slowly out of the dugout and walked toward the diamond. The Hawk infielders hadn't gathered in around the hill as they would have if Bramstedt, Linehan, Guerin, or one of the others had been working, but Jeffords was used to that by now. To hell with them, too. He was being paid four or five times as much as they were, and once he had been worth it; if he wasn't any more, well, it was just too bad. He was still getting it.

McCully, his thin sharp-featured face cut with harsh lines, stood with hands on hips staring up at the tall broad-shouldered pitcher. "Well, Jeff?" he said.

"I haven't got it today, Mac," said Jeffords. "I just haven't got it."

McCully's leathery face and sun-squinted eyes were bitter. "Seems

like you never have it any more." The manager watched his toe scuffing the earth. "I'm going to leave you in this time, Jeff; it's all yours. I'm not wasting pitchers on this one. You'll have to stay and take it."

Jeffords' mouth tightened and his lean brown face hardened, his gray eyes were cold. "Okay, Mac," he said. "If that's how you want it."

"Don't let up either," warned McCully. "They're planning to cut your salary as much as the law allows. I figured on fighting for you... But I could change my mind."

"You've said your piece, Mac," Jeffords told him. "Beat it and let me go to work."

"Sure," said McCully. "And work hard if you want to get out of here before night; there won't be anybody ready in the bullpen."

Big Jeff looked around at his infield: Kennedy at third, Bordelais in the shortfield, Garland at second, and Rowan on first. They were surprised to see him staying, and no doubt they were secretly pleased that Mac had left him in to take his lumps. The outfielders, Dalmar, Rublee and Jardnich, were shifting toward right for Rokeby, probably hoping that Roke would rap another into the stands. Some 60,000 spectators were voicing their disapproval and disgust at Jefford's continued presence. At that moment Jeff would have given every nickel he had in the world to have his fast one back, if only for the next half-hour.

Then Jeffords faced the batter and forgot everything else, concentrating fiercely on control. Keeping them low and away he forced Rokeby to beat one into the ground. For an instant Jeff feared it was going through the middle, but Bordelais took it in back of second and threw to the stretching Rowan in time for the out.

Two down, the bases empty, and Condant at bat. He had been hitting Jeffords like a cousin but this time Jeff changed up on him and Condant popped high in the air. Garland drifted out into short right to make the catch, and the Hawks went in for the last of the sixth inning.

JACK STEELE was throwing for the Blues and doing a masterful job, on his way to whipping the great Jeffords for the second time in four days. The head of the Hawks' list was up and still fighting, Dalmar topped a slow dribbler into the infield and beat it out with a flashing burst of speed. Rublee grounded out to second-baseman Stedham on the hit-and-run, but Dalmar was down to second.

Bordelais flied to Condant in deep center, and Dalmar dashed to third after the catch. It was up to Trig Garland and Trigger came through with a blast to left that scored Dalmar. Jack Steele bore down then and breezed three strikes past Kennedy to close the inning. The Hawks trailed, 5 to 2.

Jeffords went out to the slab feeling better. There was still time to win this one; that Steele couldn't go on throttling them forever. Jeff made up his mind that the Blues were not scoring any more today. He'd show McCully and his teammates and those howling wolves in the grandstand. He'd show the Blues and all of them whether he was through or not.

Salters, the Blues' backstop, got a fair piece of a slow curve, but Rublee raced into right-center to haul it down. Little Stedham of the eagle eyes, hardest man to pitch to in either league, waited and walked, laughing when Big Jeff kicked the dirt of the mound. Steele hit pretty well for a pitcher, and Jeffords toiled carefully on him. Steele finally stroked one to Trig Garland, who flipped to second. Bordelais snared it on the run, blazed his peg to first, and Rowan took it for the double play with one of his graceful elastic stretches. Jeff sighed in relief and walked benchward.

The crowd rose for the home seventh and begged for a rally, but Jardnich fouled out to Ellinger behind third base. Rowan ripped a vicious drive off Thorssen's mitt. The ball bounced on outside the foul line in right field and Rowan slid into second with a double. Jimmy Hedron went up, his keen young face set, and

slashed one through the left side of the infield. Running hard Rowan rounded third and slid across the rubber ahead of Rokeby's throw. Hedron hustled to second on the throw-in.

In his younger days Jeffords had seen frequent service as a pinch-hitter and he could still lay the wood on them. Jack Steele unleashed all his fantastic breaking stuff but Big Jeff got hold of one, solid and square. The ball went like a bullet straight at shortstop Brand, however, and he flicked it to Stedham to double Hedron off second. Sheer rotten luck for the Hawks; a life-saving break for the Blues. Jeffords swore softly and steadily all the way back after his glove and out to the hill.

The top of the Blues' order in the eighth. Hollis, the left-handed batter who had sliced one to left to lick Jeffords in the opener, led off. Big Jeff induced him to bounce out to Kennedy at third. Young Brand lined a looping sinker to left, but Dalmar streaked in to scoop it off the grass-tops. Thorssen lofted high to right field and Jardnich waited under it to retire the side. Going into their eighth the Hawks were two runs behind, 5 to 3.

Dalmar drove one on a line into Thorssen's reaching mitt in back of first. The Hawks were hitting Steele but they kept going straight at somebody in the field. The Blues were the luckiest club in baseball anyway, or they never would have come up with the National League pennant—Rubelee rifled a single over second, and Bordelais smashed another through short. With one gone the tying runs were on the bases and Trig Garland was up, a lithe slender whip-like figure in the white home uniform.

Trigger, deadly in the clutch, teed off and lashed a tremendous clout against the wall in remote left-center near the 420-foot marker. While the crowd went crazy with joy in the stands both runners registered and Trigger Garland slid safely into third with a triple. It was all tied up at 5-5.

KENNEDY fled to medium center and Garland was set to sprint the second the ball struck Condant's glove. The Blues' outfielders were not noted for strong and accurate throwing, but Garland slipped momentarily as he broke for home. It was just enough to be fatal, Condant's peg bounded in ahead of Garland and Salters had the plate well-guarded. Trigger went in with reckless fury and both men sprawled in the swirling dust, but Salters had a firm grip on the ball and Garland was out.

The breaks again, thought Jeffords. What a bunch of lucky bums those Blues are! Well, I'll set them down and we'll do it in the last of the ninth.

Ellinger was the sticker, jaw jutting out, a half-smile on his thin-lipped mouth. Ellinger, the home run slugger, arrogant up there—Big Jeff felt a biting burn of anger and tried to throw one past the brawny third-baseman, but Ellinger was ready and swinging, pulling the ball down the left-field line and romping around to second with a double.

Hedron stalked out toward the slab in his armor, scowling and pounding his mask against his thigh. "What the hell you trying to do, Jeff? You can't overpower these guys with what you got left."

"I'm all right," Jeffords said. "That one slipped."

"Don't let any more slip," said Hedron; "if you do I'll call for a pitcher if he has to come in cold."

"Get back there and catch," Jeffords told him. "I'll throw what you sign for." He glared at Hedron's back as the catcher returned to his post. *Who the hell does he think he is anyway? A young \$12,000-a-year jerk trying to tell the highest-paid pitcher in baseball how to pitch!.. Why, two years ago that punk was tickled pink if I so much as spoke to him. Sweet loving mother, have I slipped that much? The batboy'll be telling me off next.*

Jeff made Rokeby hit on the ground to Rowan, deep behind first, and went over fast to cover. Rowan's snap throw was well-timed and Jeffords took it in stride, crossing the bag in front of

Rokeby, who rammed into him with unnecessary violence. Big Jeff held his feet and the ball, but not his temper. He started after Rokeby snarling: "If you wanta play rough I'll really muss you up!" The umpire and Rowan moved in and clamped onto Jeff. Rokeby retreated laughing and Jeffords went back to the mound, sullen, ugly and smouldering.

One out, runner on third. Breaking off the sharpest curves he had thrown all afternoon Big Jeff got Condant on strikes. He'd show these monkeys he was far from finished. All he had to do was to get a little mad and he could stop any of them, dead in their tracks... Jeffords smiled scornfully at Ellinger on third and prepared to take Salters the same way he had Condant.

But he must have gotten careless or tried to throw the curve too fast or something; it didn't break more than a wrinkle and it was right in the slot. Salters had power and he laid into that one with every ounce in his stalwart frame. The ball went on a high humming line to right field and descended into the lower deck of the distant stands. Stricken thousands sat in stunned silence while Salters circled the basepaths behind Ellinger and the Blues went out in front, 7 to 5.

Jim Hedron didn't even bother to come out from behind the plate. There was no chatter in the Hawks' infield, and from the crowd came only a vague hopeless discordant booing. One voice of great volume soared above all other sounds: "You bum! You seventy-five thousand dollar bum! Dead or alive you ain't worth seventy-five cents!"

There was absolutely nothing on the pitch Jeffords delivered to Stedham, and the little second-sacker slammed it like a shot toward left field. But Bordelais went up in an incredible springboard leap to clutch the ball and end the half-inning. The Hawks went in for their last chance at bat and the dugout was like a den of growling muttering animals, but the anger was directed against Big Jeff more than the Blues.

Buoyed up by that two-run homer Jack Steele was calm, assured and vir-

tually indomitable on the rubber. Jardnich grounded out to Thorssen unassisted Rowan tapped one to Brand who nailed him to first. Jim Hedron, still scrapping and swinging from his heels, drove Condant back to the center-field wall for the final putout.

The Blues' ball game, 7 to 5, and the World Series was evened up at two games each.

S 2 S

IN THE clubhouse there was very little talking. McCully, chewing a cigar that looked enormous in his thin wrinkled face, went directly to his office. Jeffords, sweat-soaked uniform shirt pulled out and unbuttoned, sat in front of his locker with a cigarette and a cold beaded bottle of beer. Nobody spoke to him or glanced at him. He was as much alone as he would have been in solitary confinement. Well, he had wanted it that way and he was getting it that way.

The newspapermen came in and flash-bulbs began to pop and flare whitely. Jeffords looked up and started to say something but changed his mind. His press was bad enough without making it worse. The sports writers never had liked Big Jeff, whether he was up or down. They clustered around him now, gloating over his downfall. "What happened out there, Jeff?" they wanted to know.

"You were there, weren't you?" Jeffords said; "among other things I threw two home run balls."

"Just like that," said one of them.

"You want me to cry into my beer?" Jeffords demanded.

"You'll cry when you see next season's contract!" someone said and there was laughter.

"Get the hell out!" Jeffords said, hunching forward as if to rise.

The reporters went along and soon they were chatting and laughing easily with Bordelais, Trig Garland, Dalmar, Hedron, and others. Big Jeff had never given them any reason to like him, but the chances are they would have disliked him anyway. For one thing he made too much money,

altogether too much for a big dumb farmboy from Kansas; for another he had none of the human weaknesses. He never got drunk, never succumbed to the women who pursued professional ball players, never broke training. And while he had a quick eye for making a dollar he was extremely slow-handed when it came to spending one... They'd really tear him to pieces in their papers tomorrow. Jeffords didn't care for himself, but it did hurt the old folks at home and his wife; and the kids were getting old enough to comprehend some of it now.

Most of the players were out of the showers when Jeff stripped off his damp uniform and went in. He was standing in under the soothing cleansing rush of hot water when Frick, the trainer, hollered in to ask if he wanted his arm rubbed. Jeffords shook his head and waved Frick away. He looked down at the long muscular right arm, darkly tanned to the elbow. What was the use of rubbing it? You couldn't have that fast one rubbed back into the arm. A man just had to use what was left to him. Lots of pitchers go by for years after their fast ball was gone. Even Dizzy Dean got by for a while, and Diz had loved to blow them down with his hard one when he was right, loved it as well as any pitcher that ever lived.

Hellfire and damnation! Jeffords thought. *I could get by if I'd hold onto myself and use my head and not get mad or careless in there...* Today in the ninth he had burned up and grooved one to Ellinger, and then he had gotten careless with Salters. He had licked himself, that's all. Jeffords realized all at once that he was forever licking himself, and in his remorse and despair it seemed as if he had always done everything wrong. He could have been one of the most popular men in the game instead of one of the most hated. It would have been so easy, if only he weren't so damned bull-headed.

This was his first really bad season, although the experts had claimed Big Jeff was slipping last year. The most stupid thing he ever did was try-

ing to break that strike-out record two years ago, pitching a few innings at least every day toward the end of the schedule and just going for strike-outs. Why had Mac let him do it? Why hadn't somebody told him what a damn fool he was? But then, he most likely wouldn't have listened to them.

AT THE start of this season his arm had felt all right and his fast one was still alive; but he couldn't seem to win a ball game. The boys weren't hitting for him and they weren't fielding too hot behind him either. Jeff was losing them all by one run, heartbreakers, 1-0, 3-2, 5-4... And later when the gang started hitting for him his fast ball went dead, and for weeks he kept on getting knocked out and never finished a game. All the columnists wrote that if Big Jeff was himself the Hawks would win the flag at a walk, and now they were telling the world that if Jeffords had been right the Hawks would have swept the Series in four straight. Well, if a man made \$75,000 a year he had to expect that stuff.

In the stretch drive, though, Big Jeff had come back, even if his fast one didn't, and won eight straight, with his curve in perfect command and his change-up keeping the batters off balance. But then at the finish when the Hawks needed one more win to nail the pennant to the mast Mac had thrown him against the Lions, and the Lions had blasted Jeff out of the box with a five-run barrage in the fourth. So the next day Lem Linehan, who wasn't really a pitcher at all but a converted outfielder, had to go in with only two day's rest and blank the Lions to bring home the flag. And from coast to coast the critics pointed out that whenever there was a game of vital importance Big Jeff managed to lose it, perhaps by one run, maybe by four or five.

Jeffords had wound up with an 18-15 won-lost record, the poorest of his career and the first time he had ever won less than 20 games. He was 30-years old and they said he was

all washed up. And for the first time Big Jeff was beginning to believe that they might be right.

When he came out of the showers many of the players had gone and those remaining were nearly dressed and ready for the street. McCully and his coaches were still talking to some newspapermen, and Jeffords wondered why his ears weren't on fire.... One more game here at home and then back to the Blues' city to wind it up. Jeff pondered on who Mac would start tomorrow. Lem Linehan, sorely overworked in the stretch had won the second game and needed more rest before going again. Gary Bramstedt, winner of the third game and another work-horse, wasn't ready yet, of course. It might be young Steve Guerin or old man Sackett or Kirsten, the side-armer.

They had all outshone the great Jeffords this summer. The converted fielders, the ancient cast-offs, the raw untried rookies, every one of them had put Big Jeff to shame. He didn't blame them for despising him. They did the work and he collected the money. Probably none of them got more than \$15,000 or so. And look at young Hedron in there slaving behind the bat day after day, catching both ends of double-headers, working like a dog and getting only \$12,000 for it, peanuts. No wonder Hedron got that look in his eye when he saw Jeffords and thought of that enormous disproportionate salary Jeff was drawing. Well, he'd never draw it again.

JEFFORDS got into his clothes quickly as the room emptied. Playing at home he seldom bothered to dress up, and today he wore a dark blue sport shirt and no tie, baggy gray flannel slacks, an old tweed jacket, and a well-worn top-coat of covert cloth. With the battered felt hat crammed carelessly onto his high cropped dark head Jeff was ready to depart.

Outside there was still a crowd in the October gloom and players were being held up for autographs. In the past Jeffords had been hounded more

all the others together, but now he moved through the milling herd without being hailed or noticed. Big Jeff had always been annoyed and impatient with autograph-seekers and he tried to convince himself it was a relief to be left alone, but actually it made him feel insignificant and unwanted. It was another sure sign of fading glory and fleeting fame.

Shivering a little inside, suddenly cold and lonely, Jeffords went on to climb into a waiting cab and give his home address. He had never grown accustomed to driving in city traffic, so he generally left the car in the garage. In spite of all his success in baseball and business sidelines he was a country boy at heart and always would be. And right now he was as homesick, lonesome and desolate as any country boy ever was in a strange, heedless, overwhelming city... The driver, having just delivered his personal, profane and vituperative opinion of Jeffords to a by-stander, was somewhat uncomfortable at having Big Jeff for a fare, and they rode hurtling forward again as the light changed.

Jeffords was dreading to go home now, knowing the hurt look he would find across Barbara's blue eyes, fearing the chatter of the children. Once Barbara never missed seeing him pitch, but this year she had given up going to the games. "The children, you know," she explained, but Jeff knew it was more than that. She couldn't stand watching him take those beatings; she couldn't endure hearing the fans revile him. It had reached a point where she even refused to read the sports pages.

It must be tough on a woman, thought Jeffords. They don't understand; they take it all to heart. It must have cut Barb like a knife to hear them call me those names and boo me when the other club starts belting me all over the lot. Not very nice or pleasant for a wife to sit through. I don't blame her for staying away, I'm glad she does... But he wasn't wholly glad, because it was another indication of his failing power and might.

At the apartment house Jeffords paid the driver with a hastily-computed ten per cent tip, and the cabby gazed after the big man with bitter eyes and a curling lip. "You big-hearted buzzard!" he said. "Seventy-five grand a year. I hope they cut your guts out in the next contract; I hope you get them ears knocked off every time you step onto the slab!" He spat toward the elegant entrance. "You can't pitch hay, you nickel-nursin' tripe-head!"

Upstairs in the spacious comfortable apartment Barbara greeted him with a cheerful smile, but Jeff saw the pain across her blue eyes. "I guess you heard it," he said, and she nodded her brown head. Then the kids ran to him and wound themselves around his long legs, nine-year old Tommy and Mary Ellen who was seven and Jeffords stroked their bright tousled heads before lifting them into his arms.

"Was it bad, Jeff?" asked Barbara.

"Not very. I threw a couple of bad ones, that's all," Jeffords said. "This isn't my year, Barbara."

"Perhaps you'll get another chance at them."

Jeffords laughed with attempted lightness. "I doubt it. Mac'd probably use the water boy before he threw me at them again."

"Well, it doesn't matter too much, Jeff. It isn't everything."

"Hell, no," Jeffords said. "It's all right, Barb; this here is what matters." He smiled at her from between the little boy and girl he was holding.

It was always grand to come home to them, it always made him happy. But tonight the feeling was tinged with sorrow and regret. Big Jeff was disturbed and dissatisfied with himself, a trifle worried and afraid.... And somehow, even in the warmth and mellow brightness of his own home, Jeffords still felt chilled, lonely, and defeated all over again.

He did not sleep much that night. He was living his life over and the pattern was quite different. Nobody among his teammates, opponents, the fans, sports writers, umpires, autograph hunters, and cab drivers, would

have recognized this reincarnation of Jeffords.

3

LITTLE, Stevie Guerin, slim and frail looking, started the fifth game for the Hawks and did all right. Stevie fed them his slow breaking stuff and every now and then came in with a hard one that was surprisingly swift. He had his control, Jim Hendron was with him every instant, and the boys in the field were willing to risk life and limb in backing the little guy. Jeffords watched the Hawks as if seeing them for the first time, and there was some awe and wonder in his brooding gray eyes.

For four innings the Blues were helless under the spell Guerin was spinning. Meanwhile the Hawks got to the veteran Shotter for two runs when Kennedy homered into the left-field balcony behind Rubelee's single, and the home team was up, 2 to 0.

In the fifth Guerin had to cover first as Ellinger sliced one deep to first-baseman Rowan's right. Rowan came up with it and zipped his peg. Steve Guerin caught it in full flight and spiked the bag barely ahead of the runner. The burly Ellinger crashed into him and knocked the little pitcher sprawling down the right-field-line. Guerin was out cold and time was called. Jim Hendron, Rowan and Trig Garland all wanted to take a slug at Ellinger, and it required plenty of men to hold them back and restore order.

Stevie Guerin came to declaring that he was all right and ready to go on, but everyone else knew he was done for the day. Bud Ellinger told Stevie he was sorry, it hadn't been intentional. Hendron said, "You'll be a hell of a lot sorrier when I come into third base!" Ellinger turned tough and informed Jim he'd never get around that far. McCully walked the protesting Guerin back to the dugout, signalling the bullpen for reliever Rusty Kirsten, who was always warmed up. And Mac sent Lem

Linehan out to loosen up and be ready, along with old Pop Sackett.

Kirsten came in and retired the side, aided materially by a miraculous stop and throw on the part of Trigger Garland. But in the sixth the Blues exploded suddenly in Kirsten's face. With one out Stedham walked. Shotter forced him at second, a sweet play by Bordelais, but was safe at first himself.

There didn't seem to be any particular danger with two down, but Hollis and Brand singled in sharp succession and the bases were loaded. Then the long lean tobacco-chewing Thorssen cleaned them with a terrific triple to right-center and the Blues led, 3 to 2.... Kirsten passed Ellinger, nearly throwing the last one away, and that was all for Rusty. Old Pop Sackett ambled in and put out the fire, at least temporarily.

Shotter, seeming stronger and smarter all the time, went on clipping the Hawks wings. But the Blues, hit-starved until last inning, were on a red-hot rampage now. Condant doubled to left center, and Salters scored him with a two-base blow down the right-field line. Stedham drew another free ticket for himself, and Shotter bunted both runners along to third and second.

Pop Sackett was looking kind of shaky. McCully called Linehan in from the bullpen and walked out to take the ball from the old man. Sackett shuffled off the field munching on his chew. "Hell of a fireman I am," he remarked. "Musta been pouring kerosene instead of water."

Lem Linehan, the rifle-armed outfielder, struck out Hollis and Brand to kill the Blues' threat and leave two runners stranded. But the visitors now had a 4-2 advantage.

IN THE Hawks' seventh Jardnich jolted a single through the hole into right. Rowan popped out. Jimmy Hedron hammered one on a screaming line to left-center, and Jardnich scored all the way from first. The

play went to third and Condant's throw had Hedron beaten, but Jim went into the bag with a savage slide that turned Ellinger upside down and the ball rolled away in the boiling dust. The umpire stepped in immediately before Hedron and Ellinger could start swinging at one another. Jimmy and the tying run died on third as Linehan and Dalmar went down before Shotter's sinking slants. The Blues were still on top, 4 to 3.

Linehan took the Blues in order in the eighth, stopping their three big hitters, Thorssen, Ellinger and Rokeby. But try as they might the Hawks couldn't get anything started against Shotter... In the ninth Lem Linehan cut the enemy down one-two-three again amidst rapturous roars from the crowd.

The Hawks fought with cold ferocity to even it up in their ninth, but the breaks were still going against them. Kennedy's scorching liner burned straight into Bud Ellinger's glove. It took a tumbling somersault catch by Hollis in right to retire Jardnich. And Rowan hit one a mile to center but Condant jumped and speared it off the wall.

The Blues were going home with a three-two lead in the Series, needing only one more to clinch the championship. The Hawks were faced with the necessity of winning the last two games on foreign soil, and in the clubhouse Lem Linehan confessed that his arm had gone lame in the eighth.

Everybody except me, Jeffords thought bitterly. Every son-of-a-gun and his brother but me... I can't hold it against Mac though. I had my two chances and kicked both of them away. What the hell do I expect, orchids for that? I'm not the great Jeffords any more. I'm just another broken down pitcher, highly overpaid. So far gone that my wife doesn't even dare to come and watch me work.

That night on the east-bound train several telegrams were delivered to

Jeffords. All the players were getting wires but he would bet that theirs were not at all like his. He had three terminating endorsements he had been making in the advertising of certain products, and four canceling personal appearances that had been scheduled after the season. There were a few requests for tickets, and a couple of crackpots had used the Western Union to tell him how lousy they thought he was. The last one was from a big national magazine saying that editorial requirements would prevent them from using his life story as they had planned.

Big Jeff sat there for a long time, alone as usual, staring at the crumpled yellow papers in his large hands. They really poured it on a guy when he was down, and no mistake. When you were on the floor they put the boots to you, but good... For once Jeffords didn't bother to figure out how much of a financial loss those messages represented. That didn't matter now, any more than the salary cut he would be handed next winter.

What Big Jeff wanted was just one more chance, to be out there on the hill with that ball in his hand and those Blues coming up in front of him.

4

THE SIXTH game started out as a pitcher's duel between Bad Bill Vasoll of the Blues and southpaw Gary Bramstedt of the Hawks. They were both on and they were both rough. Vasoll a big blustering powerhouse, Bramstedt a calm cool knuckle-baller. Inning after scoreless inning rolled by, Vasoll's fast one flaming and Bramstedt's floaters fluttering weirdly.

Sitting back in a corner of the visitors' dugout Jeffords watched his teammates closer than ever before and learned a lot of things about baseball that he had never paid any attention to in the past. The Blues, wanting to end the Series right here, were going all out. But the Hawks backed bloody and groggy against the wall were like men fighting for their very

lives. It was something to make your blood leap and sing, your spine tingle and your throat ache, Jeffords discovered. It was something he had missed out on all these years while he was pitching to win for Jeffords, break records for Jeffords, lead the league for Jeffords, get a salary raise for Jeffords. Suddenly, seeing the reckless fire and fury of his teammates, he felt small and humble and ashamed.

There was Rowan at first base stretching low in under the driving legs of a runner to come up with a bad throw from Kennedy and hold onto it for the putout, although the flying knees bashed him and the cleats trampled over him. And Dalmar in left taking off in a long daring dive to snatch the ball just before it struck the turf. Rubelee racing back in center, flinging himself high to clutch that wicked drive and smash on into the green fence, toppling back half-stunned but gripping the ball tight in his gloved hand.

There was Kennedy at third, taking the full shocking impact of that crazy hopper on his jawbone, pouncing tigerlike after the ball and firing it across to Rowan to nip the runner by half a step. And Trigger Garland going from his second base position way out into left-center to snare a blooper that Bordelais lost in the sun and everybody else had given up on Jim Hedron, blocking the plate against Ellinger before the throw got there, knowing that Ellinger was out to get him, bearing the brunt of that cruel collision and catching the ball at the same time, riding Ellinger down in the storming dirt inches shot of the rubber.

There was Bordelais cutting loose his double play throw even after Thorssen belted him solidly with a brutal body block and Bordelais was falling breathless and in pain. And Jardnich hurling himself against the base of the right-field bleachers and reaching in to take one away from the cash customers. And there was Gary Bramstedt, just a kid who had been shot to pieces in the South Pacific, pitching like an old master, keeping that butterfly ball outside

and low, inside and high, always on the corners, never too good.

Jeffords watched and learned as the tense thrill-packed innings unreeled, still scoreless going into the seventh but no dull moments in this pitching battle. And Big Jeff was in this game, living, breathing, and fighting it, far more than he had in most of the games he'd worked himself. For the first time in his life he was really pulling for the team to win a game that he was not participating in.

MCCULLY eyes him occasionally, although Jeff was unaware of it, and the faintest hint of a smile showed about Mac's grim mouth and squinting eyes when he saw the big pitcher writhe and shift on the bench, kick his cleats and gesture with his great hands. *Maybe, McCully was thinking. Maybe that's the answer. There's a thin chance anyway, and all the chances we've got left are thinner than a new razorblade.*

The Hawks tied it up in the eighth seventh on Dalmar's driving double to right-center and Bordelais' blistering single past third base. The Blues came right back with two runs in the home half-inning. Brand beat out a drag bunt and Thorssen thumped one through the middle. Gary Bramstedt braced and whiffed Ellinger, but Rokeby hit one off the boards in left-center and both runners counted. The Blues went ahead 2 to 1.

The Hawks tied it up in the eighth when Rubelee lined one high into the right-field seats. Bramstedt set the Blues down in short succession in the bottom of the eighth with the help of Kennedy's great barehanded stop and Rowan's equally great pickup of Ken's low peg.

The ninth inning with the score at 2-2. Trigger Garland opened fire with a shot that almost tore Ellinger's head off his shoulders. Bad Bill Vassoll was tiring and he walked Kennedy. The wily Red Bartol trudged in from the bullpen to take over and put down this uprising. Red lured Jardnich into flying out and got Rowan on a grounder. But Jimmy Hedron

came through in the crisis with a smoking slash between third and short. Garland coasted over but Kennedy had to sprint hard and hit the dirt to make it. That was all but the Hawks had winged to a 4-2 lead.

Gary Bramstedt, pitching beautifully, mowed the Blues down in the last of the ninth and it was all over. The Series stood deadlocked at three games each, and everything rested on that seventh struggle tomorrow. Going through the tunnel to the dressing room, silent in the midst of his jubilant mates, Jeffords felt as if he had pitched the full nine innings that afternoon. But he was happy as well as tired, happier than he had been in a long time.

Jeffords pulled off his jacket and decided on the spur of the moment to see McCully before the newsmen got to him. On his way to the office he passed Bramstedt's locker and something made him pause and lay a big hand on the boys' sweaty shoulder. "Great chucking, Gary." Bramstedt turned and the surprise on his face was almost ludicrous as he saw Jeffords there. "Thanks, Jeff," said Bramstedt and stared after the big man as he moved along the line. "I'll be damned," murmured Bramstedt, shaking his head.

Jeffords halted again at Hedron's locker and said: That's the way to hit 'em, Jimmy." The catcher looked up from his stool with a bright boyish grin. "Hell, I had to, Jeff. I knew that left-hander of our couldn't go extra innings!" Jeffords smiled gravely and went on as Bramstedt heaved his glove at Hedron's damp-curved head. The others were all watching when Big Jeff rapped and disappeared into the manager's private room.

"What the hell's eating the big guy?" Someone said. "He's acting human!"

Trigger Garland, a 33-year old veteran himself, smiled. "When they start slipping they begin to get more human, boys."

In the office McCully sat on the desk, his thin leathery face looking small, shrunken and withered behind

that big cigar, his eyes slitted and cold. "Well, what is it, Jeff?"

"I—I can go tomorrow, Mac."

"You?" McCully said. "Asking for a chance to work?" He shook his narrow balding head. "The boys have no confidence in you, Jeff; I have no confidence in you any more. And you?..."

"They can't beat me three times running," Jeffords said. "No team ever did that, Mac."

"Lineham claims his arm's feeling better. If he's right tomorrow he's starting."

Jeffords' lips tightened and his gray eyes struck deep and bitter into the manager. "Okay, Mac." He started to wheel away.

McCully's voice followed him. "But don't go out on the town tonight, Jeff. You'll be in the bullpen tomorrow. I want you ready."

"I'll be ready," said Jeffords dully and went out the door. He would be ready all right, but it wouldn't do him any good. Mac had no intention of using him. Mac'd throw everybody else in there before he called on Big Jeff. There was no use in hoping. Jeffords had been given his chances and he had failed. His teammates didn't want him; Mac no longer wanted him, and Jeff was getting sick of himself.

He wished he'd felt this way earlier. A man always seemed to learn his lessons in life too late.

5

THE BLUES had rested their great southpaw, Lefty Wayne Sproull, an extra day in the event of such an emergency as a seventh game. The Hawks had been lucky to beat Sproull in the third game, and the wise men of the press didn't believe the Hawks could do it again. Especially since behind Sproull was that superlative curve-baller, Jack Steels, while the American Leaguers had no first line twirler who was really right and ready for the supreme test.

Lem Linehan said the soreness had gone out of his arm and he appeared

to have all his speed and stuff in the pre-game warm up, but most close observers doubted that he could go the distance. And after him McCully might as well draw names out of a hat, for he had little or no choice. Mac finally announced that Linehan would be in there, and sent Jeffords out to the bullpen. But that didn't mean much because Mac had practically his entire mound corps working in the pen today. This was the big one. Everything they had been striving and straining for since spring training wrapped up in one last ball game.

The field, still emerald green in autumn, was manicured, combed, brushed and polished to perfection. An over-capacity crowd of some 45,000 bulged the National League park. The October afternoon was clean, bright and sharp as a steel blade in fall sunlight. This one was for the Championship of the World, for all the record books, history and posterity. What a man did or failed to do today would live forever.

It started off evenly. That outfielder's arm of Linehan seemed strong and fast as ever, and this Sproull was all that the National League bragged him to be. In the bullpen Jeffords sat a little apart from the rest and saw his chances of a redeeming break dim by the minute. That rifle-armed Linehan was going all the way. "Lem's got it, I reckon," drawled old Pop Sackett and others nodded confirmation. Little Stevie Guerin said: "That guy's always got it in clutch." It was a mild rebuke to Jeffords but he said nothing, felt nothing but his own self-disgust.

Then it happened in the fourth, the Blues exploded with sudden and terrible power. Hitting right down the list: Hollis, Brand, and Thorssen doubling both runs home. Thorssen lounging lankily at second and big bashing Bud Ellinger moving into the plate. Just after three hitless innings. Linehan's arm must have gone again to let them bust loose like that.

The bullpen had been busy since the first single rattled out but no-

body had been working too hard or worrying too much. It happened so quick there wasn't time to warm up anyone, except Kirsten who had been ordered to throw from the beginning of the game. McCully was out in the center of the diamond talking to Linehan and stalling as long as he could. It looked as if Lem wanted to stay in. They were arguing but it may have been an act. All the relievers were flinging hard now, but there wasn't time for anybody but Kirsten to get ready, and the side-wheeler had lasted just two rounds in his previous appearance.

MAC WAS signalling the bullpen now and Linehan was heading dejectedly for the Hawks' dugout. Kirsten soberly picked up his jacket and started in, but the umpire posted on the foul line said something to him and Kirsten turned back and waved at Jeffords: "It's you he wants."

"Me?" Big Jeff stared in amazement and other brown faces showed considerable surprise, turning to Kirsten, staring in to the playing field.

"The ump says to get going," Kirsten muttered, pulling on his jacket and settling back against the wall. "It's you all right."

As Jeffords grabbed his jacket old man Sackett's slow sad voice came from the tobacco-filled mouth: "What the hell, Jeff? You ain't likely to get charged with this one."

Big Jeff started to spin in automatic anger, but oddly there was no anger in him. He smiled at the old man. "No, Pop; but I'll get credit for the win." He went out through the gate and started the long walk in.

Then the first booing hit him in the face, and in a minute it filled the whole park with hoarse jeering sound that was somehow hideous and chilling in the clear October afternoon. It was not the kind of booing that is a tribute to greatness, the kind the Babe and DiMag got. It was more the blood-cry that used to ring in the ears of the fabulous, feared and hated Cobb. And yet worse than that.

Old-timers claimed they had never heard its equal in any ball park anywhere. It was inhuman, a jungle roar.

Its impact was so great that Jeffords faltered and bowed under it momentarily, wondered briefly if he could go on walking into that deluge of hatred and scorn. He had seldom been booed before this season and never anything approaching this. Then he thought: *Barbara'll be hearing this on the air, and the kids. And out in Kansas the old folks.* The anger that hadn't come before blazed through him now and he would have walked into the jaws of hell itself. Head high, strides long and firm, Big Jeff went on toward the diamond where even his own teammates didn't want him.

Last of the fourth with nobody out. Two runs in already, Thorssen on second, husky Bud Ellinger waiting with a bat. McCully handed the ball to Jeffords and took his jacket. McCully said: "I watched you yesterday, Jeff; I think you can do it." Savage sound was still beating down upon them, an endless storm.

Jeffords nodded. "Thanks, Mac. I think so too."

But the booing had shaken him, he wasn't warmed up, and he didn't have much against Ellinger. The Blues' slugger hit off the left-field wall for two-bases and it was 3 to 0. The crowd was laughing now and it was worse than the other noise to Jeff. Laughing at the man who for nearly ten years had been rated the greatest right-hander of modern times. The infielders didn't cluster in about the box to shield and cheer him. Jim Hedron didn't come out from his backstop position; he merely made a disdainful gesture as he crouched to signal.

Rokeby was up, a dangerous left-handed batter who pulled them hard. Jeffords tried to curve him outside and low, but it broke too far and waist-high, right across the middle. Rokeby stepped and swung with joyous might, and it sounded like a gun shot in the green enclosure. Almost instantly there was another sharp im-

pact behind first base. Rowan actually swayed back on his heels from the force of that one but he held the ball and pivoted toward second. Ellinger fell back to that bag, no chance for a twin-killing. Rowan carried the ball deliberately toward the mound, his sweaty bronze face tautened harshly, his eyes fixed on the pitcher:

"Keep throwing like that and you'll get some of us killed. Or maybe that's what your trying to do!"

Jeffords took his vicious snap throw in silence. There didn't seem to be anything to say. Big Jeff was alone in the center of the inferno, surrounded by enemies in both gray and white uniforms with 45,000 howling for his head. At least there was one out. Pure luck but it counted.

Condant caught hold of a curve that hung and powered it past third on a line. Kennedy was in the path of the projectile and made another of those instinctive self-defense catches. It was so fast that Ellinger had no time to get started, and once more he plunged safely back to second. Kennedy stalked out toward the hill snarling:

"What the hell you trying to do?" He shook the ball at Jeff. "I oughta drill this right through you!" And he almost did.

Big Jeff spoke this time, coldy quiet: "Get back and play that bag."

TWO DOWN. If Jeff could get one more he'd have half-an-inning to warm up in and he'd be all right. But Salters was a big strong left-hander. If he ever got the wood on one like that it would land in the bleachers or outside in the street. Working with care Jeffords kept them away from the Blues' catcher with better success. Salters finally lofted to Rubelee in center and the nightmare was over. Jeff hurried off to get warmed up right.

Kennedy said: "If he pitches any more I want a mask, protector and shin-guards!"

"He went in cold," Manager McCully said. "He'll be all right next time. Quit crying, boys, and get us some runs."

Trig Garland went out to lead off in the fifth. So far Wayne Sproull had retired them in one-two-three order every round. The left-hander had amazing control of his speed and breaking stuff. The Hawks weren't getting anything at all good to cut at. But this time Trigger leveled on one and lined it singing over second base.

Kennedy was in an ugly mood as he planted his cleats and concentrated all his wrath on the Blues' southpaw. Sproull used a mean screwball on righthand hitters but one of them didn't fade away enough. Kennedy unloaded on it with all his rangy rawhide power. It sounded like a homer, looked like one as it rocketed high to left. And it was, clearing the wall and the railroad tracks beyond, a tremendous clout that tied it up at 2-2.

Big Jeff looked up from his labors and smiled sweatily. Good old Ken got so mad he hit one out of sight. Sproull was shaking his head as if he couldn't understand it. The fans had been shocked into silence after a polite spatter of applause. There weren't enough Hawk rooters in the eastern park to make much noise.

But Sproull came back strongly with a dazzling array of stuff that stopped Jardnich, Rowan and Hedron in succession. It was easy to discern how Sproull had won twenty-seven games in his league.

Jeffords felt better walking out to the slab this trip, his arm loose and his big rawboned body warm and sweating. The booing was almost as bad as before but it no longer bothered him. He had a lot to make up for, he had been given this unexpected chance, and he was going through for the club if he had to throw his arm clean off, if he ruined it forever. He had watched the others give everything yesterday and realized what a debt he owed them. Pitching them into the winner's share would pay it off in part anyway... But he couldn't get one over to Stedham and issued his first pass.

Sproull was the Blues' batter and pretty fair for a hurler. Mixing fast and slow curves and nicking the corners Big Jeff struck him out on four

deliveries. Hollis was a lefty with a nasty habit of poking outside balls to left. Jeffords broke everything inside on the hands and Hollis popped feebly to Rowan.

Brand, the Blues' fine rookie shortstop, was always bad news up there, for he could either beat out bunts or hit over that left-field fence. Jeff figured him to lay one now, a surprise with two out, and he kept it high. The kid took a ball and then bunted foul, off to the right of the plate. A low pop, so low that no catcher had any license to get near it, but Jim Hedron came out with a long crazy dive and mitted the ball as he skidded on his chest-protector.

"Great play, Jimmy," said Jeffords coming in beside him.

Hedron grinned. "You've got it now, Jeff. All we got to do is get you a couple more runs." In the dugout Hedron announced that Big Jeff was on and really right today. The other Hawks were unimpressed. They'd wait a few more innings before they accepted it. They had seen Jeff blow too many times this summer.

JEFFORDS was first up in the sixth and he looked questioningly at the manager, half-afraid Mac might use a pinch hitter. But McCully waved him on: "It's yours, Jeff. Grab a bat."

Big Jeff was hungry for a hit but Lefty Wayne Sproull had too much stuff and evened up by fanning his rival. Dalmar and Rubelee did little better, hitting the ball but not getting any wood on it, both easy outs.

Jeff had the toughest of the Blues to tangle with in the home sixth. The tall powerful Thorssen generally murdered right-hand pitching, but Jeff made him hit into the dirt and Garland threw him out. Ellinger got a rousing ovation as he stepped in. Big Bud pulled on to left fairly hard but Dalmar got under it.

"You're the luckiest lug in baseball, you seventy-five thousand dollar lemon!" Ellinger shouted as he turned back.

Jeffords smiled at him. "It helps, Bud, it always helps."

The Blues were all lined up along the top step of their dugout heaping fiery insult and invective upon the pitcher, but Jeff felt that he could take anything now. And he took Rokeby swinging to end the frame.

Bordelais opened the seventh with one of his blazing singles to left, but Trig Garland drilled into a Brand-Stedham-Thorssen double play and hopes of a rally faded. Kennedy, swinging for the fence again, failed to even foul one this trip. It was still hitched at 2-2.

Walking out to the hill Jeffords still felt good and strong although it seemed that he had been pitching an unduly long time. The strain was heavy here, the tension such that it filled the air. The infield lay in shadow now, the atmosphere hazed with smoke and autumn, and Big Jeff knew that if he had his fast one these last three innings would be routine. Well, there was no sense in that kind of wishful thinking. He'd get by with what he had left.

The thousands were up for the Blues' seventh and giving Jeff the business again, but he scarcely heard it any more. The seventh started lucky for the home club, however, as Condant chopped an outside pitch toward first. An easy skipper but Rowan dropped it and kicked it around until the runner was well across the bag.

Salters, batting from the other side, slapped an outside curve toward third. Kennedy scooped the ball neatly and threw to second, but ten feet above Bordelais' frantic glove and far into right field. So, instead of a double play and the bases empty there were two men on and nobody out, and the stands were in a maddened furore of excitement and delight.

Big Jeff took a few strides toward third base, and Kennedy looked up from kicking the dirt with a snarl of defiance, expecting the pitcher to blister his ears. Once Jeff would have but not any more, not today, and he hoped not ever again.

"It's all right, Ken," said Big Jeff. "We'll pull out of this."

Kennedy's snarl relaxed into a look

of surprise and then creased with a grateful grin. "You're damn right, Jeff!" he said, pounding his glove. And all at once the Hawk infielders were talking it up, plenty of pepper and ginger, chattering away at Jeffords as they never had before.

Little Stedham wanted to walk again, of course, but Big Jeff compelled him to swing or sit down. It was a slow tricky twisting hopper along the third base line and the fleet Condant was flying for the pan. Kennedy came racing in to snatch the ball barehanded and fire it homeward in the same motion. Jim Hedron caught that perfect peg and blocked Condant down six inches off the rubber.

The other two runners were safe at second and first, but there was one against the left-center wall then Jeffords saluted Kennedy for that magnificent play. Ken smiled back and the other infielders kept up that running-fire of talk, real fighting talk now.

They let Sproull bat for himself to keep him in the ball game. Big Jeff bore down with everything he had and whiffed Lefty for the second time. Two away.... Hollis was always troublesome, hitting to all fields. Jeff pitched him inside as before but Hollis turned on one and hit it like a bullet down the first base line.

There it goes! thought Jeffords. *Two runs....* And then he was leaping across to cover first because deep behind the bag Rowan had come up with an impossible lunging bare-handed stab of that wicked drive. Rolling over at the edge of the turf Rowan flipped to the bag and Big Jeff spurted and stretched to take it in front of the runner.



JEFF AND Rowan walked in together and the Hawks swarmed around them at the dugout steps. Kennedy came in for his share of acclaim too, but Ken said, "Hell, we owed it to the big guy after putting him in that hole."

Rowan looked up from the bat-rack with a wild grin. "We owe him some runs too. This is a good time to start getting 'em!"

Jeffords pulled on his jacket and sat down near McCully. The little manager glanced shrewdly at him: "How you feeling, Jeff?"

"Never felt better in my life." It was the truth; there was a warm glowing sensation inside Big Jeff, different from any other he had known. "One run, Mac, and I'd feel perfect."

McCully grunted. "That left-hander's making monkeys of us. Three lousy bits. They've had only four. Just one off you, Jeff."

"I don't give a damn about that," Jeff said. "All I want is a run."

Jardnich couldn't solve the sliding sinking stuff that Sproull mixed like a magician with his blinding fast ball. A strike-out victim. But Rowan went up, long, limber and grim-faced, to ram a single between first and second. Young Jim Hedron hammered one against the left-center wall then and Rowan, running like wildfire, went all the way from first and slid under catcher Salters for the score. Salters got untangled in time to nail Hedron trying to take third on the throw-in. McCully went crazy on the bench but Jeff said:

"Take it easy, Mac. There's our run and the kid brought it home."

Jeffords didn't beat the breeze again but his best effort was a fly-out to Rokeby in left. He carried his hat back to where Hedron was cursing himself and getting into his armor. "What the hell, Jim. We wouldn't have batted you in anyway. Forget it, kid. We've got that big run we needed."

"Thought sure I could make it," Hedron mumbled. "Must be awful damn slow."

The Blues went into the bottom of the eighth trailing, 3 to 2, but with all their power coming up: Brand, Thorsen, Ellinger, Rokeby.... Jeffords was tiring a bit now, more from the constant pressure than the physical efforts. *The longest game I ever worked,* he thought. *And I've only been in here since the fourth. Well,*

I've got a long time to rest this winter.

He got Brand on a bounder to Bordelais, Thorssen on a sky-scraper to Jardnich. Ellinger took a three-two count and then walked, although Jeff would have sworn he got a corner and Hedron kicked like a mule on the call.

Rokeby hoisted a long towering one toward right-center and Big Jeff sighed in thankful relief. Nothing to worry about with Rubelee out there, even if he had to go a considerable distance. Then in sinking horror Jeff saw Rube catch his spikes on something, stumble and nearly fall, with the ball dropping beyond his reach. Rube recovered and made a gallant try, but it glanced off his fingertips as he slid headlong on the grass.

Ellinger, running with two out, naturally scored with ease. Rokeby held at second with a fluke double. The count was deadlocked once more at 3-3. It was enough to break a heart of stone, and Big Jeff could feel the strength seep from his fingers and drain from his limbs. Hedron had asked for time out and was walking to the mound. Before he got there the four infielders had gathered around the slab. And suddenly Jeff felt better, he was all right again, secure in their close friendly presence, ready to go on throwing.

"I'll get this guy," Big Jeff told them quietly.

This guy was Condant and Jeff got him all right, breaking off some beautiful stuff, sending him down on strikes.

"Guess we need another run," Jeff said, smiling gravely.

Rubelee stopped reviling himself long enough to mutter: "We'll get it for you, Jeff."

THE HEAD of the Hawks' list in the top of the ninth and every one fighting mad. Dalmar sliced a single through short. Rubelee dragged a bunt and beat it out with incredible speed. Bordelais, the handsome and talented shortstop, went into his famous crouching stance against Lefty

Sproull, who was quite cool and unperturbed in any situation. Bordelais shattered this calm with a 400-foot blast to the flagpole in right-center, clearing the sacks and pulling up at third himself. The Hawks led, 5 to 3.

Wayne Sproull, the truly great southpaw, was trudging wearily off the field, shaking his head and no doubt talking to himself. Jack Steele, the big bitter-faced curveballer with the chew bulging his jaw, was coming in. A tomblike silence prevailed in the stricken stands as if all the Blues' hopes were dead.

"That oughta do it," someone said in the Hawks' dugout.

Big Jeff smiled. "If you boys want to get some more it's okay with me."

"That's right," said McCully, "Keep after 'em, keep it rolling. You can't ever tell."

But Jack Steele had no intention of giving up any more runs. Bordelais died on third while Jack disposed of Garland, Kennedy, and pinch-hitter Allgaier, a remarkable feat for any finger to perform.

Last of the ninth with the Blues two runs back. The tail-end of their order up but that didn't mean a thing, and Big Jeff knew it as well as anybody. Salters and Stedham were ever-threatening. Chances are Steele might bat himself if one or both of the others got on. If not that pinch-hitter Connors could, and often did, wreck a pitcher with one devastating blow. There were no soft pickings, especially in the World Series final.

Three more men to get out; this was the ultimate test. Poised on the rubber Jeffords felt ready for it, knowing there were eight good men behind him, and for once they were really with him all the way. It was a splendid feeling to have. He whirled into his smooth easy windup, kicked high, and came down with it. A good pitch but Salters smashed it right back at him, a thin blurred streak past his head, out over second into center field, a solid single. Thank God for that two-run lead Dal, Rube and Bordy had given him.

Little Stedham was up there, cocky

and jaunty as ever, sneering and taunting the pitcher. Strive as he might Jeff couldn't get them in there to the wily hawk-eyed jockey. Hedron argued on a couple while Stedham laughed at him. Ball four and Sted scampered down the line jabbering his contempt for Big Jeff. The tying runs were aboard with none out.

Sweet loving mother, I can't blow now, I've got to come through for them. I can't let them down. Not after the way they fought back for me. Not now when they've finally accepted me, made me one of them, after all these years.

They were letting Steel bat after some discussion. They needed a sacrifice and Jack was an expert bunter. Trying to keep it high Jeff almost threw the first one over Hedron's head, and Jim came out shaking the ball angrily at him. Jeff told the catcher he was okay, he would settle down. He had to if he wanted to stay there. McCully was up on the top step and the bullpen was active.

Steele took a strike and squared off to lay the next one. Jeff had it shoulder-high on the outside edge. The ball popped shortly into the air on the first base side. Charging in like a maniac Rowan snared it barely above the turf. The runners returned safely but there was one gone. Jeff would stay in the ball game. To pitch to one more man, at least.

The lead-off boy of the Blues, Hollis, a crafty poke hitter, dangerous in all directions. Runners on first and second... Big Jeff was straining to shake off his weariness and settle down, retain that keen edge just a little longer. He was dead-tired now, a heavy iron-band across his shoulders and the pain of fatigue knifing his back, his arm weighted, his legs dull and springless. The sweat-soaked flannel clung and dragged on him.

For an instant he considered giving it up; he had done his share, let somebody else finish. All he'd have to do was give Mac the sign... His head jerked then, his lips firmed, and his aching eyes were pale slits of fire. No more of that business. After ten years he was at last a ball player's

pitcher. He'd go the route and he'd save this one for them.

JEFF pitched very well to Hollis, had him struck out once if Jim could have held the foul tip. But given that life Hollis dropped a miserable blooper out in left-center, barely beyond the reach of anyone, and the bases were full with one away. *What a break!* thought Jeffords. *And they had the nerve to call me lucky!... Get the hell back in your hole, Mac; that wasn't my fault and you damn well know it!* McCully had started out but retreated at Jeff's violent gesture. The potential winning run was on first now.

The brilliant young Brand up with a full house before him. He might bunt or hit away. Jeff figured him swinging and poured everything at him, concentrating with aching intensity on control, changing up on his curve. Even so Brand lifted a well-hit ball to left, deep but high enough for Dalmar to tear back and take it nicely near the wall. Salters scored after the catch, coasting over. All Dal could do was whip it in to third and drive Stedham back to second. It was 5 to 4 now.

Two on, two out, and the terrible Thorssen coming to bat, the long lean tobacco-eating slugger who leathered right-handers without mercy. Jeff had stopped him twice today but he'd been fresher then... Time was called as McCully came ambling out of the dugout, and this time Jeff did not wave him back. Not because he feared Thorssen, but because he was thinking of the team instead of himself. It was best to talk it over at this stage. The left-handed Thorssen didn't do so good against southpaws.

"What do you think, Jeff?" the little manager inquired casually.

Once in his selfish pride and arrogance, now that it had gone this far and there was only one more out to make, Jeffords would have flared wrathfully and demanded the right to finish his ball game. Now he said simply: "It's up to you, Mac."

"Gary's ready. That left-hand stuff of his might be safer."

"What if they switch batters? Who've you got then?"

"They won't pull Thorssen," Mac said. "Not him, Jeff."

Jeffords frowned. "I hate to go out, Mac. But you're the boss. Whatever you think best."

"I hate to yank you, Jeff," said McCully. "But I think we'd better call on Bramstedt."

"That's it then." Jeff handed him the ball.

"You did a great job, Jeff. It's still your ball game."

As Big Jeff walked in toward the dugout a surprising and wide-spread round of applause greeted him from the hostile crowd, but it meant no more than the later booing had. Jeff barely touched his visor and went on to a real welcome. Every Hawk reserve was out in front of the dugout to greet him, and there was a quick catch in his throat, a strange smarting in his eyes. This meant something, this really mattered.

Sitting down to watch the finale it occurred to him that they could have passed Thorssen and pitched to the right-handed Ellinger. But it didn't matter, he was too tired to care, and he never mentioned it to anybody.

Gary Bramstedt, the fine looking kid with the icy calm and poise of a veteran, came in to go against the

mighty Thorssen, the tying run on second, the winning run on first. Bramstedt turned loose all that bewildering flutterball stuff of his. Thorssen thrashed the air with terrific but futile strokes. Thorssen struck out and the Series was over.

"Thank the Good Lord," breathed McCully, and he was white and aged. "If it had turned out different they'd have crucified me back home!"

Bramstedt came running in with the others, laughing and happy as kids, he and Hedron with their arms around one another pushing the final ball into Jeffords' reluctant hands. "It's yours, Jeff, you won it! Boy, what a piece of pitching! And what a club we'll have next year!"

"I lost two for you," he said. "The least I could do was help win one."

Walking down the ramp with his teammates, belonging with them now, Big Jeff knew that he had won something a lot more important than a ball game that afternoon. Yes, even the crucial game of a World Series.

"I don't think you'll take too much of a salary cut, Jeff," said McCully.

Jeffords smiled. "I'm not worried about it, Mac—not now. I can stand one if it comes."

McCully nodded firmly and pleasantly. He knew exactly what Big Jeff meant.

THE END

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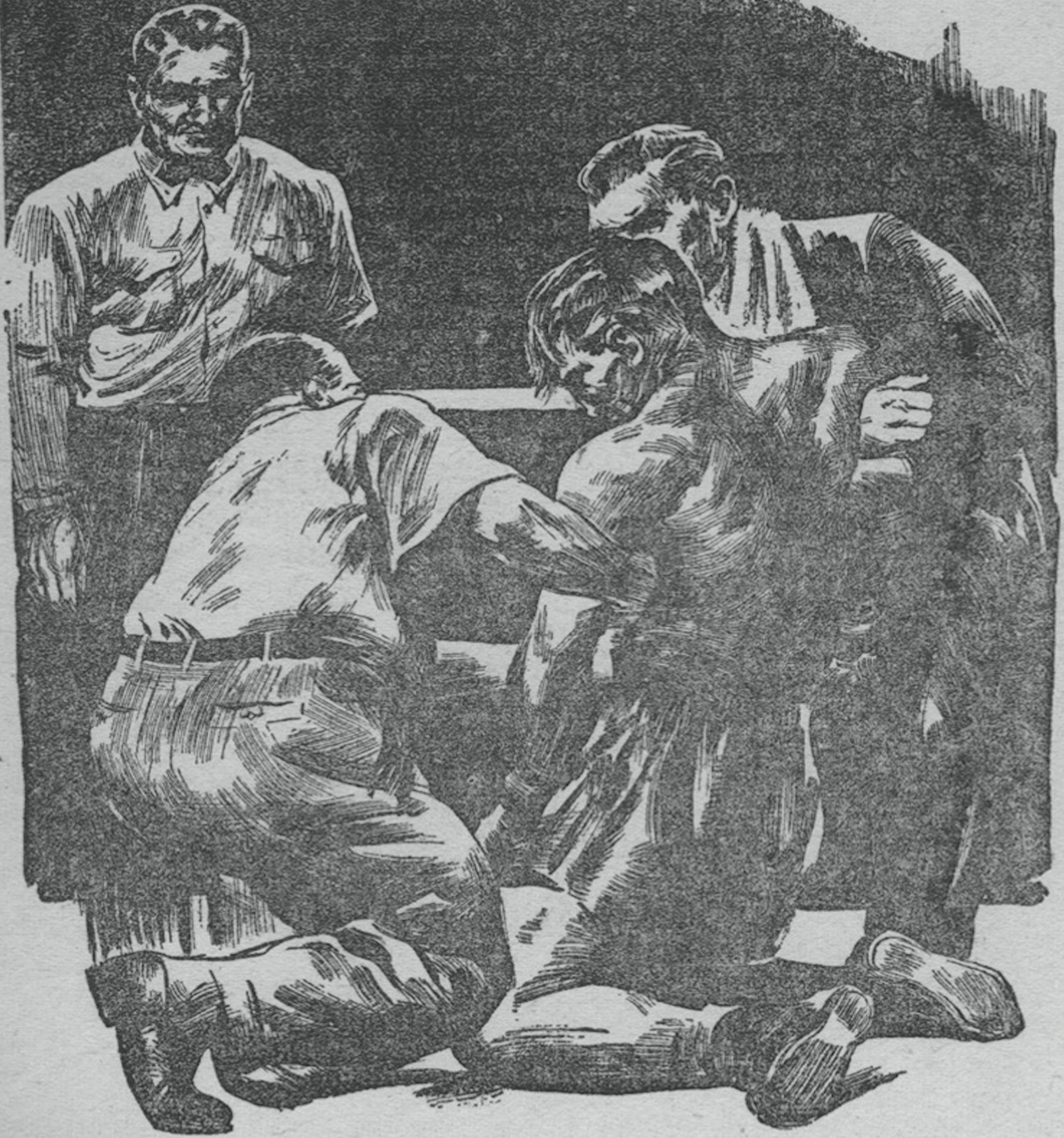


A Red Leather Fight Novelet



Whip Malone had encountered other fighters who wanted to make big money quick — but none with a reason like that of Hank Charlton. And he had to keep publicity away from Charlton, because if the man Charlton was doing it for found out about Hank's ring career, the deal was off. There was no time for the kind of preparation a champ-challenger needed — Charlton had to stake the works in one red-leather gamble now!

Malone tried to brush off
the little priest . . .



WHIP MALONE looked up from his battered desk in the Oneta Gym, which was his gym, at the tall, broad-shouldered blond man who stood in the doorway. At a glance Whip knew this was not one of his stable of pugs—this stranger was dressed right and when he talked the words came out

right: "You're Mr. Malone?"

Whip nodded and, for some reason he couldn't understand himself, took his brogans off the top of the desk. "That's right," he said. "What can I do for you?"

The big feller came all the way into the room now, and closed the door. "Would you like to sign K.O.

Klempner to fight under your tutelage?"

Tutelage—fine talk in the Oneta! Good thing the door was closed.... would he like to sign Klempner? Judas Priest, K.O. was third-spot contender for the heavy crown. Whip said: "Who wouldn't? Sure, I'd like to have him. He's a shade old, maybe, but still a lot of good fights left in him. If this is the champ's last go coming up against Sailor Horn, like he says, K.O. might make it to the top yet. Tell me more."

The stranger grinned, showing nice even white teeth. "Then how would you like to take on a man who's beaten Klempner twice?"

Whip frowned, trying to think who'd beaten Klempner twice. His memory wouldn't go back that far; no one ever had beaten Klempner twice. Once maybe, but never the second time; K.O. always beat them the second time.

"Name's Charlton," the stranger said. "Hank Charlton."

The name rang no bells in Malone's mind.

"I'm sorry; that's his fighting name, Hank Charlton. I can't tell you his real name; there are reasons. But Charlton, as he calls himself now, beat Klempner a few years back, twice, when they both were amateurs."

"A few years back? Hell man, Klempner's been a professional since I can remember."

"You're not so old. A few years on Klempner maybe, and this Charlton."

That was right. Whip wasn't so old—38. A poor fighter, but loving the game he'd turned to managing and promoting. "Okay," Malone said, "so this Charlton licked K.O. when they were fighting for glory. Klempner'd kill him now."

The stranger shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe right away he'd kill him. But not in six months. Neither would Sailor Horn kill this Charlton, in six months—well, make it a year, after Hank's had time to smooth out the rough spots and get himself into 10-15-round shape."

A nut, coming here with a line

like that. Only trouble was he didn't talk or act like a nut. No, he was smooth, confident, earnest. About 30, Whip judged. Probably had picked up this Charlton somewhere and was trying to make a fast sale. Well, there was a quick way of putting the kibosh on that. "Bring him around," Whip told the man, shrugging and putting his feet back on the desk. "I'll throw him in there with one of my boys." He gestured out toward the gym proper. "If he's a quarter, even an eighth as good as you say, I'll take him on."

"Thank you." The stranger turned, opened the door and went through it. He came back in a split-moment, with a small black leather valise in his left hand; he closed the door again, approached Whip and stuck out his right. Malone took it, found his own hand in a vise-like grip. "Hank Charlton's glad to try out for you, Mr. Malone."

So *this* was Charlton. More surprising things had happened to Whip, but not in such a hurry. He got up. "And I suppose you got your trunks and things there in the valise?"

Hank Charlton nodded. "Come on." He laughed. "I'll show you where to change." They walked down the hall toward the locker-room.

WHIP studied Charlton as he changed, saw that he was in good shape.

"I've been boxing regularly, to keep in condition," Charlton said. "Three or four rounds at the most, though, shadow boxing. That's why I'll need a little time."

That cockiness again. No, it wasn't cockiness, but confidence; a quiet, disturbing confidence. There was another thing that bothered Whip: the man's age. Malone figured he could not be under thirty. Let's see, if he'd beaten K.O. back when they were simon-pures.... "How old are you, Charlton?"

"Twenty-eight."

Whip kept looking at him, hard.

"Okay," Charlton laughed. "Thirty-one, and that's the truth. But all the good ones in the heavyweight divi-

slons are ancients. That keeps my chances even."

"Chances of what?"

"Making a lot of money, Mr. Malone." Hank Charlton had straightened from tying the laces of the soft boxing shoes his voice was low, sincere, with a shade of impatience, and desperation in it. "I've got to make a lot of money, fast; that's why I'm here."

"Everybody's got to make a lot of money, fast, Charlton. Ever know anyone who didn't?"

"With me it's different." He threw a towel around his wide shoulders. "I never needed money in my life, except a little to help me through school, until now. Actually I don't need money now, personally, either. But I've got to raise a hundred thousand dollars within the next year. That's—"

"A hundred grand!" Whip stared at him.

"Precisely."

"And you ain't even a prelim boy yet. You're crazy!"

They entered the big, light, airy place where the pugs were punching bags, shadow-boxing, skipping rope; over in one corner a ring was set up and two lightweights were dancing around inside it, pecking at each other. "Give me one of your good boys, Mr. Malone," Charlton requested.

"I'll give you what I think you can handle," Whip growled. And three rounds is all you get to prove yourself."

"Very well."

The lightweights left the ring and Whip motioned to a burly, hairy-chested pug who was trying to tear the big bag loose from its overhead chain with rights. He came over, sweaty and grinning. Charlton didn't wait to listen to whatever Whip wanted to say to the burly one, entering the ring and letting a handler help put gloves on him.

"Look, Monk," Malone told his rough-and-tumble club fighter, Monk Lafitte, "I don't know much about this character. He might be a bum, he might have something. Take it easy for a minute or so, to feel him out then you're on your own. Understand?

But I want to find out how good he is."

Monk grinned; his glance slid up toward the big blond. "He looks might pretty, Whip. Shore he won't faint at the sight of blood?"

Whip grinned as Monk slid through the ropes.

AS USUAL, whenever a brand-new fighter showed, trainers and pugs and any newspapermen who might be around gathered to watch. The bell rang, they came out of their corners.

Monk had a crouch and kept his left shoulder high, protecting his chin. Charlton stood up fairly straight his left out, flicking, his right cocked close to his chest.

Monk came in, weaving, looking for an opening. His left darted out and landed high on the stranger's head; the right cross missed Charlton's body and Lafitte went slightly off balance.

Hank's balled left hand flicked out twice, fast, and found Monk's face. The blows weren't severe, but it was evident they carried a sting because they left little red spots where they landed on Monk's cheek.

Lafitte charged and let fly with both hands. If either one had landed, it would have blasted Charlton out of the ring. But he danced out of the way, quickly and lightly; Monk's gloved hands swished harmlessly through space.

Whip was getting interested now, as Monk's temperature rose and the stranger calmly evaded the sledgehammer blows. Monk bore in again, nailed Charlton in a neutral corner and slammed away at him.

This time Hank didn't try to get away; he just stood there. Whip's heart jerked up into his throat as Charlton ducked and dodged, but Whip's anxiety was unnecessary; Lafitte never landed a solid punch. Two wallops were deflected off Charlton's forearms, he ducked under a couple of others and rolled away from the rest.

Fight reporter Hi Skellen of the *Globe*, next to Malone, whistled through his teeth. "That's not bad! Who is this guy, Whip?"

The wiry little manager-promoter ducked answering him by ringing the bell. Whip couldn't answer, of course, because he didn't know himself who this was.

The fighters sat in their corners and a couple of handlers waved towels in front of them. Whip clanged the bell when the minute was up and they went at it again.

Monk was boiling mad, being showed up before the ever-enlarging audience. This blond target was as illusive as a shadow, with a left hand that constantly bit into the burly battler's tough, grim face. Now he hemmed Charlton into a corner and went to work on Hank's body.

Monk's fists pumped into the stranger's mid-section like trip-hammers until Charlton finally tied him up. Those shots had hurt; they'd been tough, bruising smacks. But Charlton didn't wilt. He was still standing up straight.

And now Whip saw that the stranger's eyes suddenly had turned cold; his mouth was just a hard, determined line; otherwise there was no indication of any anger within him. Whip wasn't even sure it was anger—determination maybe.

Again Monk came in. Leading with his left, he started to cross with his right. He never finished the cross; Charlton rolled and Monk's jab went over his shoulder.

And simultaneously Charlton's right whipped crushingly upward off his chest into Monk's face. Lafitte's mouth fell open as if it were on a hinge; his eyes bulged, his legs dipped. Hank fainted with his left; again his right shot forward. It landed flush on Monk's jaw. Monk hit the floor, out like a light. Hank Charlton silently crawled through the ropes and went straight on back toward the locker-room.

Skellen tried to collar Whip then. Who was this? Where did he come from? Where had Whip picked him up? When was he going to start? Where? But Whip stalled him off with a promise to give Hi the story later, exclusive, and hurried after his new battler.

"Well," Charlton asked as Malone

entered the dressing-room, "what do you think? Can we do it, Whip?"

"I dunno," Whip answered, still stunned by the cool perfection of that knockout. "Monk's just a club fighter and you don't make a hundred grand in the clubs. But we'll give it a good try, Charlton. A very good try."

"Fine!"

"In two-three years," the manager went on, "unless some youngster who's not on the horizon yet comes streaking along to take it all, we might be in the big dough. Like you say, you're no older than Horn or Klempner or the champ."

"A year, Whip. Less, if possible; but no longer. And I don't care about the title. Just the money."

He was deadly serious. But now, Malone thought was not the moment to discuss it. "Get your shower, Hank," he said, "before you dry off."

Charlton turned and went into the showers.

LATER at a small, good steak place Whip frequented when he was not too low of scratch, the manager looked across the red-and-white tablecloth at the neat, dark-suited, blacktied stranger who had walked into his life that afternoon, and asked: "Let's suppose you get your hundred grand—it don't cost nothing to suppose—what then?"

"Then I go back to my own life, Whip. The life I love. This is merely a business expediency, fighting. Retiring may not be entirely fair to you once I get the necessary funds, but I hope you'll understand. If you want to back out..."

"At twenty percent I pick up twenty grand if you reach your goal. Twenty grand isn't to be laughed at."

Besides, Whip thought, *he'll change his mind when and if that championship looms into view. He'll never stop at his quota, if the big money starts rolling. He'll want more, and more....*

"Would you like a written contract?" Charlton was saying. "I came to you because I'd heard you don't believe in written contracts—that how two men felt about each other is

a more important contract than one signed in ink. But if you want to change that, because of the unusualness of our setup, it's all right with me, Whip."

"We don't need ink, Hank." The slim, wiry little manager took a long quaff of beer, set the glass down. The steaks arrived then, sizzling and savoy, and they went to work on them hungrily.

When the plates were cleaned, the two men leaned back in their chairs relaxedly. Whip lighted a cigarette, took a few puffs, said: "I've got a problem. Hi Skellen, a newspaperman, saw your workout today and wants a story; there're going to be other newspapermen asking questions."

Charlton nodded. "Yes, of course; I can see that."

"I don't care a tinker's hoot personally where you come from or what you need the dough for; that's your business. But I've got to give the boys something to print, and our stories better be the same."

"Could we say I'm from Australia. A discovery. Something like that. I'll be glad to go along with whatever you dream up."

Whip nodded. "How about photos? Okay to take photos, if ever they want 'em?"

"That'd be all right. I've shaved off my mustache and this crew haircut isn't the way I generally wear my hair. No one at home will recognize me from a newspaper picture, I'm sure, the way I am now. There's one person, beyond all others, I don't want to know what I'm doing. To that person, I'm in Europe—Rome, to be exact. If he ever suspected what I was doing he'd stop me, I fear, immediately."

Malone inhaled, let the smoke filter out; he was aware of Charlton studying him, probingly. "Our lives are going to be closely entwined for these next months," the fighter stated slowly. "So I'd like you to know this, Whip: I come from a small city in the northwest. Everything about what I'm doing is honest. No criminal past being hidden"—he smiled softly—"or anything like that. I won the western Inter-collegiate boxing

title when I was at U. of Washington. Afterwards, I attended another college, in Spokane. They had outdoor professional bouts just beyond the school property and sometimes—"

"Sometimes you couldn't resist."

Charlton nodded. "To help pay my way through."

"Then you've fought pro."

"Very small-time, and a number of years ago, before the war. This money I'm fighting for, it's not for me but for something bigger and more important. I need the money for a lot of people. A lot of little people."

Whip frowned. "Like I said, what you want the dough for—all those little people—makes no matter to me. Whatever you make, I get 20 per cent. That matters, plenty. The more you make, the more I make; I'll do my best to see you make enough at least to pay for my time. Ready to go?"

"Yes."

"Pick up the check, then. That kayo you scored back there didn't earn us a dime."

"Right, Whip. It didn't earn us a dime. Shall we flip?"

Malone sighed, took a quarter out of his change pocket, flipped and caught it, looked questioningly at his fighter.

"Heads," Charlton called.

It was heads. Whip paid the bill—six dollars and some odd change, left a tip.

Outside Charlton said: "You know, that was very fortunate. All I've got to my name is a single five-dollar bill and a return railroad ticket back to where I came from."

Malone swore with good-natured irreverence.

"Please don't use those two words in profanity, Whip," Charlton requested. "Any others, but not those two."

The manager looked up, saw that his heavy was earnestly serious. "Okay," he said, shrugging, "but they use the Big Guy's name in vain in the fight racket all the time. You're going to hear it plenty."

"I know," he said quietly, "I know. But we won't use it, Whip."

Malone shrugged. "We won't," he stated, "if it'll keep you happy. I always try to keep my bread-and-butter

pushers happy, they fight better that way."

Charlton put an arm around the little manager's shoulders. They walked on up the street.

2

HANK Charlton knocked out his first professional opponent under Whip Malone's sponsorship. In his second bout he won a unanimous club decision over a tough trial-horse. The next was an armory slugger, and Hank dropped him for keeps in the third.

From then on, every other week Whip found a prelim spot for him on some good club card, being very cagey about who the other battler was. After he knocked out Abe Eberhard in a semi-final at the Casino, the newspapermen followed up the original Hi Skellen story with variations of their own, plus a few quotes which they obtained from Whip.

Here, they said, was heavyweight from Down Under who looked like maybe he was a comer. The non-writing boxing critics also evinced interest.

Then one morning before a workout when Whip and Charlton were alone in the dressing-room, the fighter said: "We've got to make some money. It's been four months now. Those preliminaries were necessary, I know, Whip, but there was no real money in them; we have to start making it in the thousands now, the big thousands, very soon."

Malone pursed his lips wonderingly. "I didn't want to rush you too fast, Hank, but maybe you're ready to move up. Would you like to take an all-or-nothing chance?"

"Definitely. We've got to, Whip; we can't wait for the slow build-up."

"I'll see if I can get Sailor Horn."

"Horn!"

"That's right. His manager spoke to me yesterday. They're looking for a tune-up before they meet the champ outdoors in June."

"How much would be in it?"

"I can get at least five grand."

"Take that match, Whip! Five

thousand is worth fighting for!"

It was a tough spot, of course, but a nice one, Malone knew. If Charlton got beat they'd lose no ground, for Hank had no rep to speak of yet; if Hank beat Horn they'd have a legitimate squawk that Charlton should meet the champ in June, not Horn. Yes, it was a good setup, a very good setup.

Whip played it through the middle, allowing Horn's manager to believe he was meeting nothing more formidable than a club fighter in a tune-up, and selling the Garden management the idea of giving a chance to a newcomer who had drawing-card potential because he was a good-looking, flashy-working "foreigner".

WITH the match set, Whip's curiosity about Charlton, which had been growing daily as the big blond mowed them down, finally reached a point where he could restrain himself no longer. He knew what part of the country Charlton came from, knew he once had been western intercollegiate champ and that he had fought pro.

On his way to the library Whip told himself it would be best if he knew the whole truth. Wasn't it entirely possible that something might arise wherein it would be advantageous for him, the manager, to know all? There *could* be an accident, or some such eventuality, and he'd then have to know. Yes, it was best. He was protecting Charlton's interests as well as his own.

He went to the 42nd St. library and got back files of the Spokane newspapers, the *Review* and the *Chronicle*. In the *Review*, the a.m. sheet, he found results of fights that included a draw between a Henry Chambers and Terry Cheston. And then in the *Chronicle* he found a small feature story headlined:

FIGHTIN' PREACHER

Henry Chambers who looked classy enough in his draw with one of our local prides, Terry Cheston, is studying for the priesthood at Gonzaga.

"I don't think it's wrong to

help pay my way through school," he said, "by boxing a bit outside. The exercise is good for me. We don't have a boxing team at the college, you know, so this way I solve two problems."

Whether he will fight again, and how soon, Henry says it's entirely up to his superiors. If they don't mind, he is willing to go on the next card.

There was more, to the effect that he would not let fighting interfere with his studies and that he had no intention at all of making a profession of the break-busting business. "I'd like to work with children when I graduate," he was quoted as saying. "Perhaps a boys' school, somewhere, if it's felt I'm worthy of such a trust."

Malone went on through the papers, eagerly, all that day, seeking to pick up another, further thread of his fighter's early life. At last, way down in the corner of the first page he found an item:

CHAMBERS TO ORPHANGE

Henry Chambers who has competed in a few boxing matches here while studying at Gonzaga college for the priesthood, has been appointed by his superiors to be assistant superintendant at St. Anthony's Orphanage at Lavelle, Washington. Superintendant of the orphanage is Father Richard O'Malley, well known for his great and kindly work among youth of all races and creeds in this area....

There was more, and the usual follow-up stories in the next day's editions, with Chambers stating how happy he was to be with a man like Father O'Malley and the good Father stating how extremely glad he was to have such an inspirational young curate as Henry Chambers serving with him in the interests of God and God's children.

After that Whip could find nothing. Maybe there was something, but if so he had missed it. He returned

the volumes of papers to the boy at the take-out desk.

"Geez," the young attendant stated as he took back the volumes and began checking them off, "Spokane is getting mighty important all of a sudden."

Whip frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

The youngster shrugged. "These same volumes were borrowed just yesterday."

"They were!"

"Yep. By a long, lanky guy with greyish hair."

The coincidence was too strong, Malone realized. A lean man with greyish hair could only be Hi Skellen and no one else!

WHIP TURNED away, fast. Somewhere the newspaperman must have picked up a clue and.... In a great rush, as Whip went through the door he hardly recognized the person he all but bowled over until after he'd murmured "Excuse" and began hurrying on again.

He swung around, grabbed the tall thin man by the arm. "I want to see you, Skellen," he growled at the newspaperman.

Skellen grinned amiably and said: "Thought I'd come back and do a little bit more research on one Hank Charlton, nee Chambers, before I write the story. You chiseler, you—giving me a phony like that 'Exclusive'."

"Hi, let me buy you a beer and I'll tell you the part of this story you don't know. That you'll never know unless I tell you."

"You! I wouldn't believe anything you fed me again, ever." The reporter wasn't sore, merely resolute, Whip knew; after all, he *had* given him an exclusive no matter how phony it had been.

But this new situation called for drastic measures. If word reached Father O'Malley what was going on here back east—Whip shuddered to think what would happen to the upcoming Sailor Horn fight, or any other fight with the good Father's assistant-superintendant in it. And

what would happen to Whip Malone's potential twenty grand caused the little manager to shudder as violently as if he had the ague.

"Tell you what, Hi; we'll go see Hank together. You'll believe *him*, won't you?"

"Yeah," the reporter agreed after a moment's deliberation. "I'll have to believe him."

They went downstairs, caught a cab. "I just found this out myself," Whip stated, "about his being a sky-pilot, so help me Hannah! I knew he was no foreigner, but I didn't know he was what he is. Now, I've managed everything!" He shook his head. "How'd you get wind of it, Hi?"

"Television. Some character who referred a lot out that way and now is retired and living hereabouts recognized the stance and the mannerisms and so forth. He tipped me off."

THEY FOUND Hank Charlton in his hotel room. He gazed questioningly at Hi as he greeted the newspaperman.

Whip didn't beat around the bush. This was no spot for that. He told his battler exactly what the score was, and that Skellen was about to break the story.

Charlton frowned. "I don't think you'd want to do that, Mr. Skellen. I'm sure you wouldn't, if printing your story meant robbing a couple of hundred children of the better health and happiness this money can give them."

"Eh?" the reporter queried. "I don't catch."

They sat down. "You see, it's like this, gentlemen." Charlton's voice was low, his gaze moved evenly from one to the other of them as he spoke. "Father O'Malley, a kind but strict man of over sixty, is my boss. The head of St. Anthony's. It's a fine orphanage. The children are treated as well as in a private home; they get love, kindness, good food, the works. Yes it's a fine place, St Anthony's—but it needs a gym. The present one is crumbling, unsafe; it's not light and airy and the kind of place for children to play in in winter or whenever the weather's bad outside."

"You're boxing to raise enough to build a new gym?" Hi Skellen put in.

"That's right. We can't raise all of the necessary money through the parent church. The quota they're allowing is high, but not enough; you know how costly materials and labor and such are these days."

The newspaperman frowned. "A year and you'll be in this racket so deep you'll never be able to get out. You'll never want to get out. The money will be so easy to pick up if you keep going good you'll find yourself in a torment of doubt. You'll—"

"No, it's just for the gym." His voice was firm, definite. "Whip knows that I'm through as soon as I've got the money for it. Will you both come out and attend the cornerstone exercises?"

There was a short silence; the room was very quiet. The only sounds came from the traffic down in the street, and the ringing voices of kids playing in a school playground nearby. Skellen was drawing hard on a cigarette he'd lit and Whip knew the battle that must be going on inside the reporter. After all, here he had a whale of a personal-interest story which he couldn't use without taking the chance of being a complete no-good heel.

"Now, Mr. Skellen," Charlton asked, "will you do this for us—for me and the orphanage. For Father O'Malley too, really, for he wants that gym as much as anyone else. Will you hold on to your story until after the Horn fight?"

"If I do, and you win, you'll want me to hold it till after your next, and your next. You'll want me to sit on it until you're ready to quit. Some other scribe will smell it out, and I'll still be sitting on what should be my yarn when some other paper breaks it."

"No one else will smell it out," Whip countered quickly. "That was a fluke, that referee noticing the stance. You can tell him he's wrong and he'll forget it. No one else will get wise. And even if they do, they'll have to come to us, won't they, for some kind of verification—for confirmation or denial? No sheet would

dare run the yarn of this sort without doing that. You have our word of honor, Hi, if any other reporter gets wind of it and comes to us I'll get hold of you fast and stall the other guy so you can be first with it."

"It's a terrific story," Skellen said. "If I broke it, the publicity would overflow the Garden for you. You'd make more money that way and then your next fight—"

"Perhaps, Mr. Skellen," Charlton agreed. "But there wouldn't be any more fights. Father O'Malley is a strict man. Professional prizefighting and church work—well, they just don't go together. Oh, he's a man who likes all sports, even prizefighting—he used to attend the Spokane cards regularly. But he'd order me home, I'm sure, even if he didn't want to. He'd feel he *had* to order me home. You understand."

"Sure, I understand." The reporter sighed deeply, shook his head, looked at Whip. "Okay, I'll hold it. But if anyone else beats me to this yarn, Malone, I'll dig up everything no-good out of your past and print it, with the trimmings! Now let me out of here. I need a beer to cool my fevered brow."

3

OVERHEAD, the ring lights blazed down hotly. All about the squared circle, from up-front press rows to the banked tiers that ended in the rafters, a packed humanity sat, waiting to see how long it would take for Sailor Horn to put away this Charlton character. Whip, though he now knew Hank was better than a small-club fighter, could not help feeling also that they were reaching too far, too soon.

After all, the Sailor was an experienced pro, a tough puncher who could also take a wallop without flinching. He wouldn't be meeting the champion for the heavy crown in June if he was a bum. If Hank just put up a good fight—that would be all right. A good fight, even if he was kayoed, would help Whip keep them up among the top ten. *Well,*

Whip thought, *this is it. This is what he wanted. If he gets his head knocked off....* The announcer's voice, introducing the fighters, broke in on his thoughts: "In this corner—challenger for the heavyweight crown of the world, Sailor Horn, the pride of Ohio! Weight, two-ten." Horn, a blue robe about his thick shoulders, stood up, danced around a bit and waved a mitt as the crowd howled a greeting. The announcer turned, waited for the cheering to die down.

"And in this corner—his opponent, Hank Charlton of Australia, undefeated in seven professional bouts in the U.S.A.! Weight, one ninety-nine." The packed stands raised a mild, half-hearted cheer. Hank rose and waved a glove.

The referee called the fighters to the center of the ring. Whip stood at Charlton's side, as the ref gave instructions about breaking when he told them to, no hitting in the clinches, and stuff like that. They touched gloved hands, went back to their corners.

The Garden was plunged into abrupt darkness, except for the dull, red exit-lights and the hot glaring lights above the ring. The crowd was suddenly silent. The bell clanged.

CHARLTON came out as always, left extended, right cocked at his chest. Horn moved around slowly in a semi-crouch, shuffling, picking at the air with his left hand, weaving his head a little, trying to feint Charlton out of position.

Sailor swung a right which landed on Hank's arm. Charlton backed away. Horn shuffled after him and swung again, failed to connect. Hank retaliated with a light left to the Ohio mauler's face. They clinched, broke as the referee slapped their backs. They sparred.

Horn let go with a haymaker, but Hank ducked and the blow swept harmlessly over his head. Sailor, forcing the fighting, connected with a one-two; the crowd roared as Charlton hung on.

As they broke out of the clinch, Hank tagged Horn with a sudden,

jolting right that made the Sailor blink.

The bell rang and they went back to their corners.

Hank didn't need any working over between rounds, Whip saw. Just the towel. And he didn't need much talking to, either. He was fighting just the way they'd planned that he should fight. Let the challenger come in for a round or two until Charlton became accustomed to his somewhat awkward crouching-shuffling style.

"Watch his one-two, Hank," Malone cautioned. "He throws it fast."

"And it hurts when it lands," Whip's fighter said; he took a sip of water. The warning buzzer—ten seconds later they were at it again.

As Charlton got up off the stool to go out, Whip noticed the change in him. He was all right one second, and the next he suddenly fell all apart!

He stopped in his tracks, staring out into the crowd behind Sailor Horn's corner, his defense forgotten, hands half lowered. Whip cried a warning, but Hank never heard it. Horn crossed a terrific right to the jaw and Hank's knees dipped. There was the dull thudding sound of Horn's fists—left, right, left—smashing into Charlton's face. Then Hank was reeling, hurt, as the crowd came to roaring life.

Bam....sock, sock, sock. Charlton was being slugged as his body sagged against the ropes, as his hand instinctively sought to cover his face.

Horn was trying desperately, determinedly, to finish it. But Hank kept rolling and ducking instinctively, half-unconsciously, his arms across his face, as Whip screamed through the din for him to clinch—to clinch and hang on.

Hank's arms finally, heavily, caught the flailing fists and he hung on, hugging the Sailor to him. Whip saw the glassiness in his fighter's eyes. But the manager thought he saw, too, an expression of relief spread across Charlton's countenance as his punching parson, who wasn't doing much punching now, looked again through the glaze that must be covering his view out toward that same ringside

spot beyond Horn's corner.

The ref parted them. Hank backed away, unsteady but game and still on his feet.

Sailor came in; Hank backed away. Horn jockeyed him into a corner, but now Whip was pleased to see that his man began swinging back at Horn. There was no sting in the blows, but they were a help defensively.

The crowd was pleading: "Put him away, Sailor. Put him away!"

Hank clinched again. The ref broke them; they sparred in the middle of the ring. The crowd settled back.

CHARLTON'S head seemed clear now. Strength was returning to the legs. For the moment, at least, he was out of danger. Whip breathed easier; that had been close—too close!

Malone turned now to throw a quick glance to the spot at which Hank had been staring when Horn, seeing the opening, had tagged him at the opening of the round.

There was a group of people in evening clothes, and some in regular clothes. Then Whip's eyes stopped dead on an elderly man with iron-grey hair who was dressed in the dark suiting and high round collar of a clergyman. The man in black was sitting forward, quietly interested.

Whip never knew what took place, then, until he read about it in the papers the next morning, because he never saw it happen. All he knew was that he heard the dull intonation of a gloved fist smashing against hard flesh and the sudden wild, surprised roar of the crowd as it rose en masse to its feet.

Whip wheeled around. Sailor Horn was down, and the ref was waving Hank Charlton to a neutral corner!

Hank stood in that neutral corner with one arm strung out along the top rope, grinning down happily at his manager as Horn rolled over once and then lay stone-still, his face buried in the canvas. The place was bedlam as the Sailor was counted out.

Whip stunned, but pleasantly so, sprang through the ropes, threw his arms ecstatically around his heavy-weight.

Charlton laughed happily: "He got careless," he said.

When the ref had finished holding Hank's right aloft in the time-honored token of victory, Whip led the way quickly to their dressing room.

All the way up the aisle, through the milling, roaring crowd, Whip expected to be intercepted by the elderly man-in-black who'd watched the fight with such strange, quiet interest. But the Father did not appear.

Whip shut the door behind them, locked it until the reporters would arrive, which would be almost immediately. "That was wonderful, Hank. Wonderful! Wham! I don't know how it happened, but it's great, terrific! Maybe we can slice Horn out of that match with the champ now, and get it for ourselves!"

Charlton nodded elatedly, sat down. Whip cut the gloves off his hands. "But what happened to you out there, in the opening of that round?" Whip was sure he knew and dreaded asking the question, but he must know for sure now, fast.

"I thought I saw Father O'Malley."

"Thought! Wasn't it O'Malley?"

Charlton moved his head. "No. I saw the black clothes and high white collar. He was an elderly man and I thought—"

"But it wasn't O'Malley," Whip reiterated.

"No, just someone who looked like him for a flash second. From where I was, and with the lights and all I—"

"Never mind," Whip breathed. "Here, you cut off the other glove. I'm too weak to do it."

TH-RE WAS a banging at the door. "The press," Hi Skellen's voice sounded from outside.

"Coming," Whip called. His legs felt spongy as he crossed the room. *We'll never get by with this*, he told himself. *Never!*

He let them in. The photographers took pictures while the writers asked questions. Then Whip chased his fighter into the shower, taking over himself.

"Going after the champ now, Whip?"

"Yes, we're going after him," Whip said. It was hard to believe his own words ringing in his own ears. Not yet six months, and they were going after the champ. *Father O'Malley*, he pled silently, *stay 'way from my door*

There was a great hue and cry in the press after the startling upset, some claiming it was a single lucky punch which had happened to land flush that had won the fight so unexpectedly for Hank Charlton, others saying that he looked like a real fighter.

The champ said nothing, for awhile. Then, realizing that the gate with Horn had been massacred by what Charlton had done to the Sailor, the champ announced that Klempner and Charlton should hook up and the winner of *that* would get the June bout for the title in June.

Whip played it easy. "We'll play hard to get," he told his battler. "Out to the sticks for us, to pick up all the loose change we can during the next couple of months. It'll be pretty good change, Hank. And I won't take on any one I don't know, either!" He shook his head in mock sadness. "Poor Sailor."

"We'll get Klempner, Whip? He won't get away from us."

"He won't get away. His manager thinks your win is a fluke. They're anxious to get you, and take you. The champ won't go with them unless they fight us. We'll make 'em a little hungry, so the terms will be right."

"How much should a Klempner fight get us, Whip?"

"Indoors, about thirty grand."

"And if we won, how much with the champ?"

"It would be good, Hank, very good; you'd be well over what you need for that gym. Well, tomorrow we pack. The next day we'll take off. Cleveland first stop."

They moved six times, never going further west than Chicago. Wherever they fought Whip's gaze always swept the ringside, seeking and not wanting to find Father O'Malley sitting there. Hank had a snapshot of the Father and had shown it to Whip; the

manager knew what he looked like now—a small, austere-appearing man whose eyes, though, held a nice twinkle.

AS THEY moved, K.O. Klempner's manager found them, by wire and by telephone, until, finally, Whip got the 22-28 percentage split he was angling for. He told them he and Hank would come through New York on their way to Providence, where they had a bout soon, to sign the contracts.

They signed, the fight scheduled for the end of March in the Garden. Klempner, a huge red-headed giant of a man, showed no recognition at all of ever having seen Hank before, which meant that Charlton's "disguise"—his close-cropped hair and lack of mustache—must be okay.

As soon as the Klempner contracts were signed Whip and Hank ceased barnstorming. "A two-week's rest," Whip directed. "We don't want you to go stale. Then a bit of training—your wind, mostly, so you can pace yourself to fifteen rounds if you have to."

They spent a week at Atlantic City and a week in New Hampshire. They came back and trained then, easily at first, as the press day by day built the show into the most exciting and important match of the era.

"The entire heavyweight situation has been scrambled into the damndest omelet of the past ten years by the shyrocketing advent of Hank Charlton into the role of challenger." Hi Skellen wrote. "Just when everything looked cut-and-dried between K.O. Klempner and Sailor Horn, either one to get the title shot, in bounces The Foreigner, as he's called around Jacobs Beach, to stand Gus Fan, and maybe next week Klempner too, on his ear. Was Charlton lucky, or is he really good? That's what Gus H. wants to know, following the surprise knockout over the Sailor, and that's exactly what all of us are going to find out next Friday night at the Garden when the Red Giant and the man from Down Under crawl through the ropes...."

§ 4 §

NOW AS they crawled through the ropes an S.R.O. house sat in buzzing anticipation through the various introductions of past and present champions, who were handy, and who were being used to kill the clock until it was close to the pre-announced radio and television time.

The gloves had been donned in the ring, and finally the two main contestants were introduced. Whip took his usual look around ring-side. It was all right; no O'Malley.

The bell rang. Whip got down out of there.

Klempner circled slowly, flicking out with his left. Hank moved with it, watching, waiting. K.O. feinted, crossed with his right. Hank rolled so it slid harmlessly over his shoulder. In close he tattooed the red giant's mid-section which was hard and firm, the mid-section of a battler in top condition.

"Break it," the ref barked. They danced away from each other.

Klempner came forward again, leading, seeking. The left flashed, found the side of Hank's head. Charlton backed away, leading with his own left lightly. The bell rang.

During the next two rounds K.O. did all the leading; he bulled and roughed Hank whenever they were close. All the same, Whip figured Klempner was ahead by only a small margin, when they went out for the fourth. Hank had been pacing himself and now he'd go to work. But K.O. went to work too. Klempner was after Hank now, in this fourth stanza. Whip could read the fierce determination now in K.O.'s eyes, in the sharpness of the blows Hank blocked on his forearms and elbows.

Hank jerked his head quickly and Klempner's left missed his chin by a fraction of an inch. Hank drove his own right deep into K.O.'s stomach. The other man's hands came down a trifle, instinctively covering, and Hank smashed home a left. It was high, missing the button, but the crowd cheered as they returned to

their corners at the bell.

Hank sat down. He was breathing hard, from deep inside, but it was strong, even. As Whip worked he realized that K.O. was staring across at them, wonderingly, perhaps a little worried. Hank spat water into the pail. "He's a better fighter now, Whip, than as an amateur," Charlton admitted. "Much better."

"So are you," Whip said.

The fifth and sixth were tough, rough rounds. K.O. had a powerful right and Whip knew that if Hank were the slightest bit sluggish on his feet, if fatigue should cause any slowing down of the reflexes, that right would catch his man flush—and that would be that.

But Hank stayed with K.O., trading punch for punch, blocking and weaving and jabbing with him.

A small cut was opened in Hank's cheekbone and Whip worked on it during the eighth and ninth till it stopped bleeding and almost disappeared. Klempner had a lump over his right eye where Charlton's left jab had caught him a number of times. "Keep that left going whenever you can, Hank," Whip instructed. "Work that eye."

Charlton nodded. "How we doing, Whip?"

"All right. Anybody's fight so far."

An expression of vast relief swept over the fighter's face. "That's good," he breathed. Whip frowned. His man sounded tired. What Whip had said wasn't quite true. Whip figured it was 5-3 and one even in Klempner's favor.

The warning buzzer. "Keep movin' now," Whip stated. "Keep movin'. Don't let him get to you. Keep your left going and watch for an opening for your right."

Hank nodded, rose with the gong, went out, left leading, the right cocked. Klempner circled, sparring.

KLEMPNER'S right thumped against his head and Hank backed away, hurt, jabbing with his own left. K.O. came in powerfully, boring, swinging, trying to follow up his advantage. Yes, Charlton was right about Klempner. He was a bet-

ter fighter—better than Sailor Horn. At least tonight he was. And Hank was tired.

Then hope surged fiercely back into Whip as Hank's left found Klempner's bad eye three times and he banged the right across to the cheek once before the huge red-head stopped trying to knock him over.

Hank feinted, went in close, jabbed, clinched. The ref's hands slapped their backs for the break. It was fast now, fast and punishing. K.O. landed with a one-two that shook Hank. Charlton kept working on Klempner's eye. Across the ring K.O.'s manager's heavy, oily face was hanging over the ring apron, the dark eyes glinting like a wild bird's. *Sure, Whip thought, a wild and worried bird. If we beat K.O. tonight we're on top of the heap!*

They were in a corner. Hank was hemmed against the ropes by the streaming power of Klempner's sledge-hammer blows raining upon him. One found the mark. Hank, visibly tired, grabbed, hung on as his knees bent and a mask of pain crossed his face.

Smash-smash-smash. Hank reeled as the crowd shot to its feet, roaring. Klempner's left and right found Charlton's head. Hank stumbled, groped for the ropes. K.O. slammed him again, and he went down. The timekeeper's hammer began striking against the ring floor, vibrating through Whip's body tensed against the apron as, through the pandemonium, he shouted: "Take nine, Hank; take nine!"

Dull, Hank nodded. But Whip could tell he was only half conscious to what he was nodding. His breath was coming in great, deep sobs. He's exhausted, Whip thought; he'll never go all the way. It was foolhardy to hope he could, with only seven months behind him....

Six....Hank reached up with a hand, caught a strand of the rope. At seven and eight he began pulling himself upward. Nine.... He made it to his feet and, covering weakly, backstepping, tried to avoid the avalanche of K.O.'s hammering fists.

He took a barrage of blows in the

face and body before he was able to clinch. He hung on, tenaciously, making the ref pull them apart. Went on the bicycle again; but his legs were wobbly and K.O. caught up with him easily, nailed him with left and right. He staggered, almost fell. The bell rang.

Whip helped him to the stool, the ammonia bottle ready in his hand. As he administered it, a voice said, from the apron: "I think you should stop this fight."

Whip looked down as he held the bottle under Hank's sniffer—and almost dropped the bottle. For there stood Father O'Malley, exactly as he was in the photograph. And the way he said "I think you should stop the fight" told Whip he knew very definitely who it was on the chair—crew haircut or no crew haircut—punched nearly into insensibility.

"Go away," Whip told the priest as he drew the ammonia from his fighter's face. "Go away!"

THE GOOD Father cocked his head querulously; Whip paid no attention whatever. There wasn't much of the minute left to get his battler back in shape. Sponge. Hold the waistband out from the stomach that was going like a bellows. Patch that cheek cut again. Cold water at the back of the neck. Swig-water to rinse the mouth. Slap-slap-slap with the hands, working the muscles of the top arms, the legs. Warning buzzer. Ten seconds. Ten desperate seconds. "How's it, fella?"

A game gasp: "All right, Whip. I'll be all right. Just tuckered—out."

Anyway, it wasn't thick talk and it sounded as if he knew what he was saying. "Stay away from him, Hank. Coast. Stay away this round." The bell. A black-frocked arm was brushing his and Whip realized the priest was still there, crouched directly beside him. It was no time for niceties; "Go away, Father," Whip said again, not turning to look at him but keeping his eyes on every move Hank made up there as the weary fighter side-stepped, back-pedalled and sought to block anything Klempner threw. "Go away and give the guy his

chance. Break it up later, if you want to, in the dressing room or wherever you say. But don't cost him this one. If he loses it, don't you make him lose it."

The little man in black said, sternly: "I was called to the city on church business, which concluded this afternoon. I like a good fight and decided to see this one before returning home tomorrow morning. Even from where I was sitting in the end mezzanine I knew—"

"Sure Father. Look, I'm busy. I gotta try and pull my man out of this. See you later. Hank, the left—the left, Hank! That's it!"

"This Father O'Malley?" It was Skellen who had joined them.

"For crying out—!" Whip snorted. "This corner a convention hall or somethin'! Yeah, this is Father O'Malley. Hi Skellen, Father. A reporter. Take care of the Father, Hi; keep him to yourself. See me right after it's over, in the dressingroom. Hank, come back. Come back, fella! Let him lead."

Hank came back, letting K.O. lead. The two forms—Hi and Father O'Malley melted away. What the hell, Whip thought, why bother to try and win this one when we'll never get to fight the next one no matter what happens. The bell clanged.

Hank said when he came back. "That was Father O'Malley."

"Yes." Whip worked furiously over his man.

"It's over then."

"No, it's not over. When I started with you, it was just for the money. Now it's not; I want to see you make it; I want to see that gym." He was suddenly angry, and in his anger Whip's voice rose and fell like a lash. "Now you go out there, and you win this fight. You make that little white-collar boss of yours so gosh-darn proud of your comeback, so awe-struck at you getting up off the floor to win after being practically knocked out that he'll have to believe in what you're doing. He'll have to believe that because of what your fighting for the big guy's in your corner."

Hank gazed squarely into his manager's face. "You know, Whip," the

fighter said quietly, "you're a very religious man."

"Nuts! You get out there and win this fight, then you can tell me anything you want!"

"Like a lot of other people, good people, no matter what their profession or calling, you hide it deep down inside. Let it come out more often, Whip; it becomes you."

"I make the sermons in this corner, Curate. Now go out there and beat that guy's ears off! You're tired but you still can punch." He pulled the stool from under his fighter as the bell clanged, dropped down to his usual place. Almost onto Father O'Malley.

"You back again, Father!"

THE LITTLE priest said: "I know nothing of your record as a manager of fighters, Mr. Malone, but your record as a manager of men, judged on what I just overheard, must be very high."

"He's tops, Father. And I like what he's trying to do, under the severest kind of handicaps. When a feller wants nothing for himself out of a deal like this, and he takes all the beatings, you've got to be for him."

"I'll go back to my seat now," Father O'Malley stated. "Mr. Skellen explained the situation, but I must take steps—reluctant as I am to do so."

"Sure, Father; sure," Whip answered vaguely, his attention riveted on Hank. "See you in the dressing room. Or back at our hotel. The Monmouth."

In the middle of the ring, the two heavies were sparring and Whip saw now that Klempner was tired too, very tired. He'd hit Hank with everything but the ring-post and now, having thrown everything into the effort to knock Hank out in the last two rounds, he was arm-weary.

"Two minutes," Whip heard K.O.'s manager calling up from the opposite corner.

Klempner feinted with the right and in his momentary arm-weariness the right was a split-second late. Hank's left smashed to the big man's

bad right eye and the blood spurted. A cross to the cheek stopped K.O. in his tracks. Then the red-head was boring in again, hard, fast, fists blasting through Charlton's guard. Hank hit out, fighting back. The Garden was a madhouse. Klempner landed an upper-cut. Hank clinched. As they came out of the clinch Hank's mind and hands and body worked with instant, lightning-like precision. He jolted Klempner in his tracks with a right to the head. Klempner seemed hurt.

"Watch it now! Don't be over-anxious!" Whip screamed up to battler. "He's still got plenty left to tag you with. Watch his playing possum!"

Hank nodded, wearily kept working.

Feint—*bang!* Then the left, into that eye—*bang!* Expecting a right—Hank gave him the left again, into the mid-section this time. Then the cross, as Klempner's body bent over ever so slightly. Socking, thudding sound as Hank's balled fist crashed against K.O.'s jaw.

"Don't wait!" Whip yelled. "Again. Again!" Hank let him have it, again, as Klempner wavered there, body and mind quivering uncontrollably, eyes goggling blankly, his chin hanging out like an invitation sign.

Klempner crumpled and slid to the deck, a puff of rosin exploding into the air above the canvas as his big body hit it.

The crowd was screaming and above all of it Whip's voice got through, yelling: "Neutral. Neutral corner."

Hank already was on his way there.

"Forty seconds, Hank. Forty!"

Klempner rolled over, got up at nine. Hank, cautious but sure, moved in, swiftly.

"*Bam!* His right smashed against K.O.'s chin. Then the left thudded, flush. Klempner went down again, this time as if his feet had been cut from under him.

Hank stood in the neutral corner, his breath coming like a bellows watching the ref finish the count.

(Continued On Page 96)



Star Bust

A Gripping Diamond Novelet

by ZENE TUTTLER

(Author of "Goal-Line Gamble")

Everyone laughed at Ganzer's goof ball, and at Ganzer himself, too; he was the warm-up boy for the pitchers in the bullpen, not even worth shoving in as a relief man when the game was lost. But Ganzer wasn't ready to quit, yet . . .

THEY called it the Goof Ball. Rip Sewell of the Pirates had his blooper pitch; Red Barrett of the Braves his mush ball; but Goose Ganzer's goof ball was strictly out of this world. The ball came towards the plate like a white duck waddling, hesitated, suddenly seemed exhausted and collapsed into the catcher's glove. The batter took a vicious cut at the pitch and lifted a pop back of the mound. Ganzer scurried back and trapped it.

The overflow crowd which stood along the foul lines howled. It was in high spirits for the big game which would get underway right after batting and fielding practice. This

clowning was an appetizer for the real stuff. The goof ball was just a stunt; there was no telling how far a batter would knock Ganzer's circus pitch in a real game.

Ganzer trudged off the mound after the Mohawks had their cuts in batting practise and the crowd gave him a hand. He was an old favorite with the fans, even if he was just a batting-practise pitcher and a clown now. Ganzer had been with the Mohawks fifteen years and had been their hurling ace not so long ago.

"That the pitch you got Hans Wagner with?" shouted a fan. "How did Wee Willie Keeler hit against it?"

A grin spread over Ganzer's big, bronzed face and his dark blue eyes lighted. He was thirty-five, but listening to the fans you'd think he was seventy. He walked to the dugout,



No one
wanted
a story
from
Ganzer.

wiped a shirt sleeve over his perspiring brow, and sipped on a glass of water from the cooler.

All was briskness on the field and in the dugout. Manager Ramsey went through a last minute check of the Bruin batters with his starting battery. Then he barked, "I want every pitcher not in the game out in the bullpen. And stay there until I flag you in."

The Mohawk pitchers and catchers started for the right field bullpen. These three games with the Bruins would make or break the Mohawk flag chances. Ramsey was shooting the works. Ganzer started after them, then checked himself. He had toiled every day during the summer in the bullpen and the manager had not used him. What chance would there be of his pitching in the big three game series for the pennant? Absolutely none.

He slumped down on the bench and eyed the crowd of seventy thousand with deep longing in his eyes. A few years ago he had been the key figure in Mohawk plans. Now he was forgotten in the biggest pennant test the Mohawks had since he came up with the club twenty years ago. The only reason he had not been discarded was because it was late September. He would feel the axe next year with half a dozen others who had not helped the Mohawks in their stretch drive. Ramsey was no sentimentalist. With him, baseball was strictly a cold blooded proposition. Either you won for the team, or you made way for someone else who would.

"Ganzer!" He started, turned around and saw Ramsey scowling. "Out in the bullpen!"

Hope flared in Ganzer's eyes. His heart pounded like a rookie's in his first big league chance. "You mean you want me to warm up?"

"No," Ramsey said in disgust. "Go out there and warm up the other pitchers. We only got three bullpen catchers and we need four; everybody pulls his weight in this boat."

Ramsey threw a heavy catcher's mitt at him. It slid through Ganzer's frozen hands, thumped against his chest and fell to the dugout floor.

Someone chuckled. Ganzer leaned over with a hot face and picked the glove up; he walked up the dugout steps and headed for the bullpen.

The fans spotted him. "You'll need more than a catcher's mitt for protection when you throw your Goof Ball, Goose!" they shouted. "Better put on the shin pads and chest protector!"

GANZER waved automatically at them and plodded towards the bullpen. They wanted some more laughs from him, but he was not in the mood to furnish laughs right now. He needed no further proof of the contempt in which Ramsey held his pitching. Warming up relief pitchers in the bullpen! He had been in baseball a long time, but that's the first time anything so ignominious had happened to him. He was through, he had reached the end of the road. Even horses were turned out to pasture when their racing days were finished. But there would be no green pastures for him. Not with the fireball gone from his right arm, and a bank account which teetered between red and black all the time.

The bullpen gang grinned a welcome. Ganzer said, "Manager sent me out to dry-nurse you guys."

Lank Charley Jones laughed; "Bullet Bill Savage smiled; Young Lefty Cy Munn scowled. "Does that old windbag always have to haunt me? Why doesn't Ramsey get rid of him?"

Ganzer ignored him and said, "I'll show you fellas how to throw the crossfire today."

Jones said, "I gotta bear down and be ready, Goose."

"Yeah," said Savage. "Those Bruins got murder in their eyes. Rube Kenton will need all he's got and the breaks to go to the route against them today."

Munn's brown eyes gleamed. "Show me how the crossfire's done."

A roar from the crowd signalled the beginning of the game. Everybody in the bullpen stopped to watch Rube Kenton go to work against the slug-ging rivals. Ramsey had fired the Mohawks down the stretch using Kenton, Savage, and Munn in that order,

with Jones doing yeoman fireman service. Kenton was a cool pitcher with a lot of zip, a good hook, and pitching savvy. Savage had a fireball, a sharp hook which he used for a waste ball, and a smart change of pace. Munn was a strong armed rookie who reared back and fogged his pitches through. The club had resented him last year when he got a fifty thousand dollar bonus for signing with the Mohawks, but he had stepped into the breach this year and won fifteen games.

MUNN was the weak link in the trio of Mohawk starting pitchers. Ganzer had been indiscreet enough to tell a reporter in spring training the rookie never would be a top pitcher until he learned to pitch with his head as well as his arms. The strong-armed rookie had made the prediction look foolish by winning consistently in the Mohawk stretch drive. But Ganzer had not retracted his statement; he had been around too long to think a fireballer could get by on speed alone without getting his ears pinned back.

Kenton retired the first three Bruins to face him. The first three Mohawks went down in order. Jones shook his head. "She's gonna be a tough ball game today all the way."

It was Kenton today, Savage tomorrow, and Munn for the third game of the series in Manager Ramsey's plans. The Mohawks needed all three for a sweep of the series to win the flag. The standing read:

	W	L	Pct.	GB
Bruins	96	55	.636	—
Mohawks	94	57	.624	2

Munn beckoned to Ganzer and said, "How about that crossfire?"

"Yeah, sure." Ganzer stepped on the practise rubber and showed Munn how to throw the crossfire by stepping to the side and throwing his arm across his body as he threw the ball. It was a very effective pitch when done properly.

"I see," smirked Munn. "Now you

get back there and let me see if I can work it."

Ganzer went back of the bullpen plate. Munn winked at the others, pulled back his arm and without warning fired a speedball down the slot. Ganzer barely got his glove up in time to knock it away from his chest.

"How was that?" chuckled Munn.

Ganzer shook his head. "You're gonna get a sore arm cutting loose without warming up first."

"Don't you worry about me, Windbag; I never had a sore arm in my life. You just worry about catching the ball when I throw it."

Again Munn blazed one in. It splattered into the pocket of the big mitt and sent a sharp pain through Ganzer's hand. He tossed the ball back. Munn made a hooking motion with his wrist and blazed a sharp hook at the plate. Ganzer lunged and barely got it as it broke.

Munn laughed. "That one almost took your glove along, Hasbeen. Better look out for this one!"

Munn whipped over a terrific hook which Ganzer reached for and misjudged. It cracked against his forearm and bounced away. Ganzer winced at the pain which stabbed through his arm as he went for the ball.

"Okay, Junior," Savage said. "You've had your fun; now lay off him."

"Mind your own business," retorted Munn. "I want to show old Windbag a trick or two so he won't go shootin' off his mouth every chance he gets."

Jones said, "He's no regular catcher. Ease up or I'll punch you in the nose."

Munn threw his glove down and advanced on Jones with clenched fists. "You and who else?"

Ganzer broke between them in alarm. A fight between the pitchers Ramsey was counting on would demoralize the club when they needed harmony the most to take the dreaded Bruins. He shoved Jones away and said, "That's all right. I did a bit of catching in the bush leagues once. Just rusty, that's all."

He went back of the bullpen plate

and took his beating as Munn poured his supposedly warming up pitches across. The young rookie had speed to burn and Ganzer fervently wished he had thought to stick a sponge in his mitt when he was leaving the dug-out. When Munn turned away for an instant, Ganzer hurriedly wadded his handkerchief and stuck it into the glove. His hand felt like raw beefsteak and swelled with each pitch.

OUT ON the field the Mohawks were giving the dreaded Bruins the battle of the season. The game went into the eighth inning before the Bruins broke the scoreless deadlock with two runs. Ganzer watched and uttered a silent prayer that the Mohawks would come back with a rally. The Mohawks scrapped back for one of those runs and got a man to third with one out. The stands were a roaring mass of humanity. A loss would drop the Mohawks out of the flag race for good. A win would keep their chances alive.

Ramsey sent in a pinch hitter for Kenton and the crowd roared as the man flied deep and the tying run scored. Jones started to warmup fast. The next man grounded out and the bullpen buzzer rasped once, Jesse Jones' signal.

Ganzer watched him take the long walk to the mound with wistful eyes. No. 1, that had been his signal once when he took a regular turn on the mound for the Mohawks and saved games in relief. But he had hit the skids in '47 and some reporter dubbed him strictly a war pitcher who had folded when the stars came back from service. That was strictly hooey as Ganzer had won twenty games or more during '39, 40, and 41. It was just that his fireball had slowed down and left a big hole in which Ganzer had nothing to put during the '47 and '48 seasons. He thought he had it now, but Ramsey couldn't take a chance on him with every game meaning the difference between a flag and second place.

Charley Jones made short work of the Bruins in the ninth. The Mohawks got a man on in their half, but couldn't plate him and the game went

into extra innings. The Bruins drove a chill into Ganzer and the crowd by scoring a run on a hit, sacrifice and blooper in the first of the tenth.

2

ALL BULLPEN activity ceased as the Mohawks came in to bat. Ganzer glued his eyes on the hitter and there was a tight feeling in his chest. The batter lined out and the crowd groaned. The next man singled to center and the mob was on its feet. Then the Mohawks showed the fighting hearts which had enabled them to come thundering down the stretch by rapping out three straight singles with two out to drive two big runs across and win the ball game, 4 to 3.

The big throng swept out on the field and pounded each Mohawk's back. They danced over the diamond and the Mohawks rushed into the clubhouse to escape them. In the clubhouse, the team whooped it up like a gang of kids. Flash bulbs popped and reporters scribbled. Everybody seemed to be talking at once. Manager Ramsey made a statement to the press in which he gave his men full credit for winning. Rube Kenton explained how the Bruins got those two runs off him. Charley Jones said his arm never felt better. Bill Savage announced he was ready to stand the Bruins on their ears tomorrow. Cy Munn bragged he'd blank the Bruins in the third game.

Then the sluggers had their turn telling what kind of a pitch they hit for the tying and winning runs. Everybody had something to say except the red-faced, blue-eyed husky Mohawk who sat in a corner of the clubhouse with a quiet smile on his face. He was glad for the club and he was glad for each Mohawk. But he couldn't help wishing with all his heart that he had some of his old stuff so he could help them in the bitter pennant fight.

A reporter spotted him and said, "Hey, Goose, you've always got something to say; how about it?"

Munn cracked, "That windbag has

too much to say. All of it wrong and at the wrong time."

The smile left Ganzer's face. He said, "We'll win tomorrow. But those Bruins will be out for blood in the third game."

Munn's face reddened. "Maybe you can stop them with your Goof Ball in the third game!"

The reporters laughed and it was Ganzer's turn to flush. "Only wish Manager Ramsey would give me the chance; I only wish he would."

THE JABBER died down as the men showered and dressed, then left the clubhouse in groups of twos and threes. Only Munn and Ganzer were left. Ganzer waited until Munn started for the door, then walked up to him and said, "No offense, kid, but you'll have to use your head as well as your arm against those Bruins. They murder straight speedball pitching."

"When I need your advice, hasbeen, I'll ask for it!"

Munn turned away and went out. Ganzer tried to keep pace with him, but the rookie walked too fast for him. He started to turn off at the corner, then stared after Munn. The young star was not heading for the hotel, he was going in the opposite direction. It was none of Ganzer's business, but he was curious. Munn had seemed worried about something and he was in a very big hurry.

Munn turned the corner and hailed a taxi. Ganzer hailed another and followed him. They drove across town and Munn got out in a residential district and walked into a drugstore. A middle-aged man in a double breasted blue suit came out of a phone booth and they sat down opposite the soft drink counter. Ganzer went in and slipped into the booth next to them.

Munn was saying, "You'll have to wait until pay-day for five hundred more. Here's two hundred."

"You're stalling, Munn," clipped the stranger. "It shouldn't take a big league star that long to pay off your debt."

"I tell you I'm paying as fast as I can."

"I don't know, Munn. Maybe you'd like Ramsey to know about it. And what do you think would happen if I turned these bits of paper over to the press?"

"You wouldn't get anything then. The Commissioner might bar me and we'd both be busted. I'll pay up; just be patient."

"You better. Or I'm going straight to the papers with my story. They'll pay me something for it."

Ganzer jerked the newspaper out of his pocket as they got up and buried his face in it. Munn went out first, then the stranger left and went in the opposite direction. Ganzer hurried out of the booth after him. He caught up with him in the middle of the block.

"Hey, you!"

The stranger turned. Ganzer took one look at his impassive face and flat eyes and recognized a professional when he saw one. There had been rumors about Munn gambling and generally living over his head. Nothing had come out in the open yet. It would not be so good for the young fireballer's future career in baseball if it ever did.

"How much he owe you? Ganzer asked.

The cold eyes swept Ganzer's face trying to place him. "Nothing."

"I'm here to pay. What do you care who pays as long as you get the money."

"Who are you?"

"His brother."

"You're a liar. You're a club flat-foot trying to get the goods on him."

"Say that again and you'll be lisping. If you're still conscious. Got the IOU's on you?"

The stranger hesitated. Finally he said, "Yeah."

Ganzer led him into a nearby cigar store, yanked out his checkbook and said, "How much?"

"Three thousand, five hundred. I'm not asking for anything except what he owed. I could have lost, too, you know if —"

"Skip it." Ganzer frowned at the balance figures in his checkbook. He wrote out a check and said, "Here's

three grand. You'll get five hundred tomorrow."

The stranger handed him IOU's for that amount signed by Munn. Ganzer tore up the IOU's and walked out, heading for his hotel. There wasn't much he could do to help the Mohawks, but no pitcher with a gambling debt over his head was going to be at his best against the slugging Bruins. Maybe Munn would pay him back sometime, if he ever found out what happened.

ANOTHER CROWD jammed the ball park for the second game of the big series. The Mohawk pitchers and extra catchers headed for the bullpen en masse after fielding practice was over. Goose Ganzer warmed up with the pitchers this time.

Ganzer lobbed the ball to the catcher and Munn shook his head in disgust. "Why don't you give up, Windbag? What are you out in the bullpen each day for? Ramsey hasn't used you since May and never will again."

"Never can tell what'll happen," said Ganzer. "Always best to be ready." He was whistling in the dark and he knew it. But warming up in the bullpen during the game was the only way he knew to keep the tightness out of his system as he watched the Mohawks struggling for the pennant.

Munn said, "They better have a bullpen in the Old Man's Home next year. Or you won't know what to do with yourself."

Ganzer's face tightened, but he ignored the remark and turned to watch the game. Bullet Bill Savage was really burning them across for the Mohawks. Craftily, he used his speedball for a waste pitch and cut the corners with his curve. He had the Bruins popping up or hitting into the dirt for six innings. He made one too fat in the seventh and the Bruin clean-up man parked it in the bleachers for a home run.

The Mohawks fought right back to tie up in their half of the seventh. Savage blanked the Bruins in the eighth and went out for a pinch hitter in the home half of the inning. The pinch hitter came through with a

single to score a Mohawk from second and Charley Jones went out in the ninth to protect the slim Mohawk lead while the fans stood on their feet and begged him to mow the Bruins down.

Ganzer sweated with each pitch as Jones combined his sharp hook with a back breaking chance of pace. The first man grounded out. The next batter beat out an infield hit. Jones rose to the occasion and fanned the next Bruin for two out.

Ganzer pounded his hand into his glove. "Just one more, Charley, just one more!"

Munn shook his head at him. "You'd think the ol' Windbag was pitchin' the way he's sweatin'."

Jones got a strike on the batter, then missed the corner for a ball. The next pitch was fouled off. "Inside above the knees," muttered Ganzer. "He'll never see it, Charley."

As if he heard it, Jones broke off a sharp curve inside just above the knees. The batter swung and missed for strike three. For the second straight day the crowd came tumbling out of the stands bellowing approval.

3

THE MADHOUSE was repeated in the clubhouse after the game. Cy Munn was the center of attraction this time, it would all be up to him in tomorrow's game. The Mohawk bid for a pennant rode on his strong right arm. Munn basked in the limelight. "I said I'd blank them," he boasted. "And that's just what I'll do tomorrow. Shut 'em out!"

"The Bruins murder speedball pitching," a reporter reminded.

"Not the kind of fireballs I'll feed them," scoffed Munn.

Ganzer frowned. The young right hander's words sounded hollow to him. The cocky rookie acted as if he were whistling in the dark. He waited until Munn was alone and said, "Anything bothering you, kid?"

Munn scowled at him. "Nothing's bothering me. And if it were, it would be none of your business."

Ganzer hesitated. He could not tell

Munn not to worry about those gambling IOU's. It would worry Munn more to know his secret had been found out.

Ganzer said, "You got nothing to worry about. Tomorrow's just another ball game like the fifteen you won this season."

Munn shot an angry look at him and walked away. Ganzer went out into the hall and walked up the stairs to the club offices. He entered Business Manager Frank Laney's office and said, "How's chances for a five hundred advancement?"

Laney blinked behind his bifocals. "What is it this time? You already sent almost your whole salary to the Home, Goose? Aren't you ever going to learn to save something up for a rainy day? You're not going to last forever with the Mohawks, you know."

Ganzer sighed. "Be lucky if I'm here next year. What's the story, Frank? My name on the exit list yet?"

Laney shrugged. "Lotta talk going around that half a dozen men will cut loose at the end of the season. But so far Ramsey hasn't sent any list in yet, so we don't know who they are." He pulled out a large checkbook, wrote out a check and handed it to Ganzer. "You better forget about the Home for a while and start thinking about yourself."

"Thanks." Ganzer took the check and put it in his pocket. He would have resented that kind of talk from anyone else, but Frank Laney had been with the club almost as long as Ganzer. "And one more thing, Frank, rustle me up a block of one hundred tickets and put the price on my tab."

"One hundred tickets!" wailed Laney. "We're practically sold out for tomorrow. I'll have to hustle and scrape to get that many bleacher seats together." He looked sharply at Ganzer. "The Home again?"

"Yeah, Frank. I've been waiting all season hoping Ramsey would pitch me and then get the kids down to see me in action. But tomorrow's the last day of the season and it's now or never."

Laney shook his head. "That St.

Joseph's Home for Orphans ought to make you president all the things you've done for them."

"They did plenty for me when I was a kid there, Frank."

"I know, Goose, but good gosh, man, you can't afford it. Five grand every year and always big blocks of tickets for important games. You've got nothing left for yourself."

GANZER GULPED, looked at the floor and traced a pattern in the dust with his shoe. "I've got a couple hundred kids in the place who think I'm their hero, and the friendship of every one of the priests. How many friends you got, Frank?"

Laney smiled. "Okay, Goose, you win. Now beat it, I'm a busy man; I'll have those tickets in the hotel lobby tonight."

Ganzer went out, walked down the street, took a taxi and met the stranger he had paid last night. He gave him the five hundred dollar check and tore up the last of Munn's IOU's. Then he entered a phone booth, rang Munn's hotel room number and disguising his voice said,

"Cy Munn? I tore up your IOU's so forget 'em."

"You what?" said Munn startled.

"I got to thinking it over, Munn. Got a big bet on the Mohawks to win tomorrow. Figued if you was worried about those IOU's, you wouldn't be at your best, see?"

"Thanks, pal! I'll mow those Bruins down! I'll—"

Ganzer hung up smiling and stepped out of the phone booth. That ought to take the worries off the kid's mind. Munn would have to be at his absolute best to take those Bruins—

He almost bumped into Manager Ramsey before he saw him. Ramsey was stony faced. He said, "I got a tip one of my men was paying off a gambling debt in this store. I saw you slip that check to that man. You better start talking, Ganzer; the Commissioner might not be so broad-minded. What's it all about?"

Ganzer swallowed hard. "Er—nothing, Chief."

Ramsey's eyes glinted. "All right, it'll keep for another day until the

regular season is over. Then you can tell your story to the Commissioner when it won't do the team any harm."

The manager strode away and Ganzer followed him with bitter eyes. He couldn't tell Ramsey about Munn. The hard-bitten manager would bench Munn and blow the last of the Mohawk chances for the flag. The rookie didn't mean anything by it. The sudden fame had gone to his head. The big money he got burned holes in his pockets. What if he had fallen in with a fast crowd and gambled? Maybe it was bridge or pinochle. Munn didn't drink and kept himself in good shape. What he did in regular training hours for relaxation didn't hurt the club. But it *would* look suspicious to others and Munn would be benched until cleared by an investigation. It would be too late then. The Mohawks had no one else to pitch against the Bruins tomorrow. Rube Kenton had gone eight innings two days ago. Bill Savage had gone eight tough ones today; Jones had worked two days in a row in relief. He might have to do a relief stint tomorrow.

The rest of the staff didn't have what it took against the Bruins. No, Munn was the sole Mohawk hope.

THE FANS turned out en masse for the final game of the year and the one which would determine the league pennant winner. The big park overflowed with fans hungry for the first Mohawk championship in twenty years.

Ganzer was out in the bullpen with Rube Kenton and Bill Savage. One hundred kids from St. Joseph's Home for Orphans hailed Ganzer and shouted to him as if he was going to pitch the game. Ganzer waved to them and started warming up.

Kenton said, "I hope the young punk's on today."

Savage gritted, "Either he's got it or he ain't."

Munn warmed up alone before the Mohawk dugout. There was little use for anyone else to warm up. Ramsey was shooting the words in this game. Savage's arm was still stiff from bearing down yesterday. Kenton had

only one day's rest and might be able to go a few innings if he were desperately needed. But the big burden was on Munn.

"They've saved their Red Cassidy for the big one," said Ganzer.

"Yeah," said Kenton. "And the Mohawks usually can't get to him with a shovel."

Savage said, "Munn better have it today. It's just too bad the whole season hinges on that young punk's arm."

Cy Munn had it. For four innings he hooked up in a pitching duel with big Red Cassidy, Bruin ace. Ganzer forgot to keep warming up in the bullpen. He squatted on the grass and watched each pitch with glistening eyes. His heart was in his mouth and Munn kept blazing his fireball down the alley. The Bruin sluggers liked fast pitching, but they were just a shade slow for Munn's swift ones today.

The Bruins caught up with him in the fifth. Ganzer stared helplessly as Munn walked the first man. The next batter sacrificed. The Mohawk infield made its first error of the series on the next hitter and there were men on first and third with just one out. The crowd hushed. Would Munn pitch his way out of the hole?

"We'll see what he's got now," growled Kenton.

Jones snarled, "The punk better come through. Ramsey can't afford to wait too long this game."

Manager Ramsey ordered an intentional walk to load the sacks for a possible double play at any base. The hitter smashed a hard grounder to the left of the second baseman. The second baseman speared the ball, whirled, whipped it to the shortstop and the shortstop snapped it to first. Too late, the hitter beat the throw to first and a run scored.

Ganzer bit his lips. That run loomed larger than the center field flagpole the way Cassidy was pitching. Munn kicked at the dirt around the mound in anger, then flashed a baleful look at the second baseman.

"Look at that punk!" snapped Savage. "McNally robs the Bruin of a

hit and Munn glares at him as if it's his fault the double play wasn't in time."

Munn got on the rubber and tried to blast one past the hitter. Crack! the ball screamed low inside third base and hooked into the far left field corner. Runners tore around the bases. The batter pulled up at third after two more big runs crossed the plate. The crowd was silent. Ganzer's hands clenched and unclenched.

THAT WAS all for Cy Munn. Manager Ramsey flagged him in, then stood up in the dugout and eyed the bullpen. Ganzer recognized the tough spot Ramsey was in. Charley Jones was at his best for only one or two innings; Savage's arm was sore, and it would be straining Rube Kenton's arm to have him go in to pitch in the fifth inning. Especially with the Mokawk pitcher up second in the home half of the fifth. If Ramsey used Kenton now, he might have to lift him for a pinch hitter in the last of the fifth. Who would pitch for the Mohawks in the sixth?

The bullpen buzzer rasped. One—Jones. Ganzer held his breath. Two—Savage. Three—Kenton. Four? Jones blinked and turned around. Savage stared. Kenton looked straight at Ganzer.

Jones said, "He must want you in there, Goose."

Ganzer swallowed hard. "Me? I—"

He stuffed his glove into his hip pocket and hurried towards the mound. This was it, this was what he had been waiting for. A scream went up from the St. Joseph's section of the bleachers. "Give 'em the Goof Ball, Goose!"

Ganzer managed a wave to them and slowed down. Hell, no star pitcher took that long walk from the bullpen to the mound running, and those one hundred kids thought he was a star; they didn't know he was going in there to get one man out and be lifted for a pinch hitter in the Mohawk half. All they knew was that their hero, Goose Ganzer, was going in to save the day for the home team.

Ganzer stooped over, snatched up

a dandelion, and sniffed at it as he walked towards the mound. He had made that walk many times in years gone by. It was old stuff.



THE CROWD sat stunned as they recognized the burly figure and swaying walk of Goose Ganzer. Nobody poked fun at him now, the situation was desperate. The Bruins had shoved three catastrophic runs across and had a man on third with two out.

Ganzer took his warmup pitches, then stood back of the hill with his arms folded across his chest and squinted for the catcher's signal. He nodded, advanced to the rubber, eyed the runner on third and pulled his arm back. 'Scooter' Delaney, Bruin short-stop was the hitter. Ganzer's mind clicked as he catalogued all he knew about Delaney. A line drive hitter who hit with the pitch to any field. A tough man who liked them waist high and wide.

Ganzer's foot went up and his arm went down. Delaney swung on the first pitch, caught the sharp hook near the handle of his bat and tapped the ball back to Ganzer. Ganzer took it on the big hop and tossed to first for the out.

A sigh of relief swept over the crowd. "Yea, Goose!" yelled the fans. "One pitch and it's over, maybe Ramsey shoulda started you instead of Munn!"

Ganzer went into the dugout and Ramsey eyed him, but said nothing. The crowd pleaded with the Mohawk catcher to start a rally. He swung off balance on one of Cassidy's change of pace balls and popped to short. Ganzer stared moodily out on the field. Ramsey had finally put him in to pitch. One ball. All year long he had sweated in the bullpen readying himself for a chance to prove he was still useful to the Mohawk cause. And Ramsey had him in to pitch just one ball in the last game of the season!

Somebody slammed his back and jarred him out of his reverie. "Ganzer!" barked Ramsey. "Do your sleep-

ing in bed. Get out there and hit, you're holding up the game!"

Ganzer jumped to his feet, started towards the plate, then came back to pick up a bat and headed for the plate. He was all confused. Ramsey was supposed to use a pinch hitter in this spot. How come? He asked himself the question and the answer came to him. Why waste a good pinch hitter in the fifth inning with no one on? Ramsey was saving his dangerous pinch hitters for a big inning.

Cassidy grinned at him, then bent a hook over the outside. Ganzer let it go for a strike. Cassidy strutted around the mound and rubbed the ball in his hands. He took his time, toed the rubber and threw another hook over the outside corner. Ganzer started to swing, checked, and let it go for strike two.

He stepped out of the batter's box, tapped the dirt out of his spikes, and stepped back in. Cassidy blazed one letter high and wide trying to make him bite. Ganzer let it go for a ball. Cassidy's next pitch hooked wide of the outside and it was ball two. The crowd yelled for Ganzer to wait him out and walk. It irritated Cassidy, he had not passed a Mohawk so far. Cassidy got on the rubber and cut loose with a pitch straight at Ganzer.

Ganzer stood fast, waited for the ball to break, then swung. Crack! the ball lined between first and second into right field. The Bruin fielder sprinted in for the ball, tried a shoe-string catch and missed. The ball rolled past him and Ganzer went into second standing up before the ball was retrieved and shot back to the infield.

THE CROWD was on its feet shouting. It was the first Mohawk hit off the Bruin ace. Cassidy shot a dirty look at Ganzer, then faced the next Mohawk. The Mohawk leadoff man sliced the ball into left center. Ganzer raced for third, got the green signal from the coach and scored standing up.

He went into the dugout muttering thanks that he took his cuts in batting practice every chance he got.

That one run was all for the Mohawks.

The Mohawks left the dugout for the sixth inning and Ganzer got up with an eye on Ramsey.

Ramsey snapped, "What are you waiting for? An engraved invitation? Get out there and see if you can hold the Bruins down to three runs this inning."

"I thought Rube Kenton—"

"When I want Rube Kenton I'll tell you."

Ganzer went out to the hill with a hard object in his throat which made it hard for him to swallow. He faced the first hitter and the perspiration was cold on his forehead. The back of his neck felt as if a chilled breeze was blowing on it. It was one thing to go in there against the Bruins with two out; it was another thing to pitch a whole inning against those sluggers. The crowd was quiet, waiting to see if he had it. Out in right field one hundred kids set up a clamor for their hero. "Give 'em the Goof Ball, Goose! Strike 'em out! Yea, Goose!"

Ganzer gripped the ball and his face was tight. He had pitched games against the Bruins before the fast one had left his arm and had beaten them. So he did not have his fireball now; he didn't need it. He had his hook, good control, and a fair straight ball. Let the Bruins hit it and the Mohawks would do the rest.

Ganzer worked carefully on the first hitter. The batter singled to left. The next hitter aimed for the fence, swung at a slow ball, and popped to third. The next batter slammed a crossfire pitch straight at short. The short-stop turned it into a double play and the crowd cheered Ganzer for the first time during his tenure on the mound.

Ganzer shot a look at the scoreboard and ducked into the dugout. Bruins, 3, Mohawks 1, last of the sixth. They better be scoring some runs. Cassidy retired three Mohawks in a row for easy outs and it looked like Ganzer's run was the only counter he meant to allow in the game.

Ganzer went out for the seventh inning and forgot everything else as he

concentrated on the Bruins. He pitched for the corners and between himself and the Mohawk catcher they knew all there was to know about the Bruin batters. The catcher made a big target of his mitt and Ganzer hit it every time. He forgot the cold sweat on his forehead and he forgot the chill on the back of his neck. Once again he was Goose Ganzer, Mohawk pitcher, out there on the hill mowing the enemy down.

He got the first Bruin on a fly to center. The next man popped to the catcher. The third hitter grounded out to first. The crowd gave Ganzer a big hand as he came in, then stood up for the lucky seventh stretch and begged for a rally.

Ramsey said, "How's the arm holding up?"

"Huh? Okay." Ganzer fidgeted on the bench. He was not used to Ramsey worrying about him. It had been different when old Pop Cornell was manager and Ganzer was in his heyday. But Ganzer had hit the pitching skids when Ramsey took over as manager two years ago.

Sure, they would cut him loose at the end of the year. He would be through with baseball, no bush league stuff for him. He had been on top of the heap once, he would quit with his memories of the big time. Once he had dreamed of staying in the big leagues when his playing days were finished and coaching young pitchers, then maybe even managing a club. But that had been just a foolish pipe dream.

THE Mohawks shoved over another run, then Cassidy slammed the scoring gates in their faces and it was Bruins 3, Mohawks 2 in the first of the eighth.

Ganzer went out on the hill and the crowd yelled for him to hold those Bruins. The infield chattered behind him. Ganzer stood on the mound swallowing hard to keep the mist out of his eyes. It seemed only yesterday that he had stood out there winning game after game for the Mohawks. Winning them when they never had a chance for the flag. It seemed only yesterday when he had come up as a

strong armed rookie and become the Mohawks' star pitcher in his first year. But it had been fifteen years ago.

He stepped towards the rubber. And here he was again. For the last time. There would be no more big league parks for him after this. The cool, green grass—the white flagpole—and Old Glory fluttering in the slightest breeze—the roar of the crowd—the crack of the bat—the almost hysterical scream when he struck a man out in the clutch.

With two and two on the batter, he crossfired the ball for the plate. The batter swung viciously and missed and the crowd screamed. There it was again, that scream—it never hit that odd note unless it was the clutch. The eighth inning and the Bruins were ahead 3 to 2. It was the clutch. If he could hold them down, the Mohawks might scrap over another run and tie the score. He wouldn't have to pitch anymore after this inning; Charlie Jones could take over in the ninth. Or Rube Kenton. But he had to hold them down this inning.

He pitched with his heart and his head as well as his arm. He missed the corners with two pitches, then bent one over for a strike. He crossfired one over the opposite corner for a foul strike and the count was seven. He put everything he had behind a waste straight one, then gripped the ball for the telling pitch.

The batter crouched. Ganzer heaved the ball and it streaked for the plate head high. The batter relaxed, the ball broke sharply down and the startled batter swung at it and popped to second. The crowd roared. The catcher came halfway to the mound shaking the ball and slapped it into Ganzer's glove. Ganzer walked around the mound, his veteran eyes making sure every man was in position before he faced the batter. He went to work on him. It was ball one, strike one. Ball two, then the batter took a vicious cut and Ganzer held his breath. The ball swooped under the hitter's bat and Ganzer breathed a sigh of relief that

the pitch had been a sinker and not a slider.

He threw the next one down the slot, the batter swung as it broke and caught the ball at the handle of his bat to dribble a weak grounder down the first base line. Ganzer tore over, took the throw from the first baseman and it was three out.

THE CROWD gave him an ovation as he walked off the diamond. One hit in three and one-third innings; he had stopped the murderous bats of the Bruins cold. He ducked into the dugout feeling good at the noise from the stands. Okay, Ramsey could put Jones in there now. Kenton, Savage or anyone else. But no one could take the memory of his last relief stint away from him now.

"How's the arm?" asked Ramsey.

"It ain't the arm." Ganzer flexed his left leg and winced. "Strained the leg covering first on that last play."

The Mohawks grinned. Ramsey snapped, "All right, you bums, he held the Bruins for you. Now get out there and get some runs; the hop on Cassidy's fast one is just about gone!"

The Mohawk manager had a sharp eye. The crowd was on its feet yelling for a rally. The first Mohawk swung from the heels and chased the Bruin left fielder back against the wall for his fly. Cassidy looked worried. Another foot or so and that clout would have been in the stands for a home run. Feverish activity commenced in the Bruin bullpen.

The next batter slammed one into the hole between short and third for a single. The next hitter arched one over the right fielder's head, it banged off the wall and the tying run scored.

The crowd shrieked. The Mohawk dugout was on the steps. Ganzer was there with the rest of them yelling for the inning. The batter singled sharply to center to put the Mohawks ahead and that was all for Cassidy.

Ramsey banged his hands together. "We got 'em on the run with Cassidy out of there!"

The manager knew what he was talking about. The Bruin relief staff was strictly from hunger. Two walks, three hits, and an error scored four more runs before the Bruins could retire the side. A big white '6' went up on the Mohawk side of the scoreboard and the crowd was crazy. Everything not nailed down or held on to by someone sailed out on the field. Hats, programs, sandwiches, shoes, and even coats.

Ganzer stood out on the hill talking it over with the Mohawk infielders while attendants cleared the field. It was 8 to 3, Mohawks. All he had to do now was hold them down. The Bruins would be swinging for the fences with last minute desperation tries for long hits.

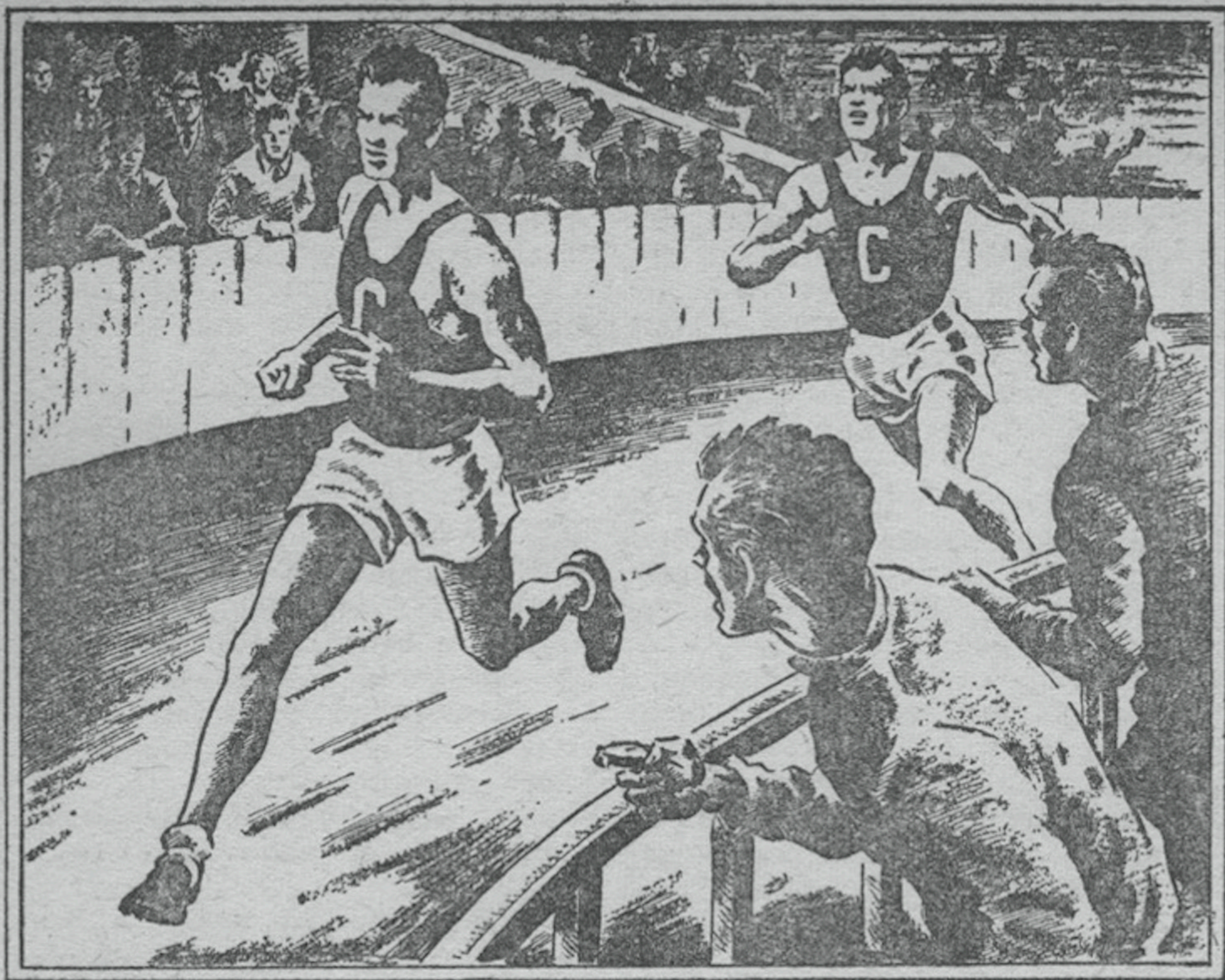
He went to work on them with his fifteen years of sage experience behind him. He hooked them and cross-fired them and gave them that change of pace. The first hitter skied a mile high back of second. The next hitter lined into the third baseman's glove. The roar of the crowd was a continuous din. Every pitch was hailed with a shout. The hitter was over-eager and slammed two pitches foul into the left field stands.

Ganzer toed the rubber with a taut face. There was a lull in the crowd noise and a shriek of voices from right field, "Strike him out! Give him the Goof Ball, Goose!"

His eyes flashed. He took the signal, his arm went into a short windup, his left foot shot up, and his arm swept down. The batter tensed. A white duck of a ball waddled towards the plate, hesitated, suddenly seemed exhausted and collapsed downward towards the catcher's glove. The batter took a savage cut at it and missed!

WITH A final roar of triumph the crowd tumbled out of the stands and surged on the field. The players hoisted Ganzer to their shoulders and carried him into the clubhouse. They yelled and shouted and the flash bulbs went off in Ganzer's face, but he did not seem to mind it.

(Continued On Page 94)



Anders and Casey were both trying to make themselves heard.

Heroes Get Hurt

by RICHARD BRISTER

(Author of "The High Mile")

It was more than a track meet — it was a coach's duel with no quarter to the loser

AFTER THE first lap the closely-grouped field of milers began to straggle out, and the pattern of this race became clearly apparent. It was going to be primarily a battle between Johnny Allison, the Springmont runner, and West Harley's Joe Cook.

Over by the starting position at the rim of the track, a tall, bony-cheeked man rubbed absently at the game leg he had brought back from a Normandy beachhead, and said half-audibly, "Go, Johnny. Take him."

"Talking to yourself, Anders?"

The tall man with the edges of gray nibbling at his dark hair swivelled

his glance from the track toward a stocky man with a ridiculous Hitler mustache who had materialized alongside him. "Hello, Casey," he said.

The stocky man grinned. "Judging from the look on your face, Anders, you still think your gang has a chance against mine."

"We're only twelve points behind," Steve Anders said. "There are plenty of events to be run off yet. I'm not conceding this thing, Casey, not by a long shot."

He heard the crowd yell, and swung his eyes back to the race. He saw that Casey's man, young Cook, had passed Johnny Allison midway

through the third quarter, and was now beginning to pile up a big lead on the youngster.

Beside him, Casey was laughing in that metallic way that could be so aggravating. "You spoke just too soon, pal. Let's see....five points for first place in the mile, plus a sure first in the broad jump. And another in the high. And a point or two in the quarter—"

"If I were you," Steve said, "I'd go a little easy before I counted my chickens." He was watching those kids, out there on the cinders. Casey's youngster looked strong, and had built up what looked to be a commanding lead, but Steve had a hunch his own Johnny Allison was pacing himself along nicely and would come up fast at the finish. "There's such a thing as letting your ambitious ideas run away with you, Casey."

The short man with the Hitler mustache said, "You don't worry me, pal. Not any more. You put up a pretty fair fight, but it's just about over." He was looking toward the stadium box where Central High's Mr. Glendanning sat starch-stiff, watching the race like a becalmed old eagle, without any outward sign of emotion. "I guess the old boy'll know pretty soon which one of us he wants for the job," Casey said. "I've got Glendanning's number. Results are the payoff with old Starchface. When he sees the way my gang mops yours up...."

"Like now, for instance?" Steve cut in pleasantly, and waved at the track. As he had expected, Johnny Allison had been shrewdly holding something back for the stretch drive. Now the game youngster with the long, pencil-thin legs was charging up, rapidly overhauling the fast-tiring West Harley runner.

The crowd screamed as the two kids chugged into the final ten yards, running neck and neck. For a moment it looked like a dead heat, something unheard of in mile competition. Then Johnny Allison forged ahead by a foot to take the blue ribbon away from Casey's man at the last possible moment.

"Let's see," Steve said. "What were you just saying, Casey? Something

about winning the mile?"

"Okay, okay, so you picked up a couple of lucky points on me. I'm still in the driver's seat, pal. I'll be coaching at Central next year and you'll still be stagnating in that dinky little school out at Springmont."

"Chickens," Steve said, and wagged a finger at Casey. "Don't you ever learn?"

HHE WALKED away from the little man with the rasping personality. He saw Johnny Allison sitting on a bench at the foot of the stadium parapet, and went over to congratulate the youngster.

"Nice going, Johnny. That's what I call running to win. The time wasn't much, but a college man couldn't have rated himself along better."

The kid's homely face crinkled in a self-conscious smile. He was a gangling sixteen-year-old, very much the eager beaver about his running. "I didn't want to waste anything, Coach. That half's going to be tough."

"You'll take 'em," Steve said. "For a kid your age you've got a lot of gas in the tank, Johnny. I think you're going places."

He left the kid to mull over that pleasant prospect. He hadn't gone ten steps when he heard somebody call his name, and turned to see old Mr. Glendanning beckoning to him. Steve went up into the grandstand and sat beside the man who was said to wield almost a dictator's power over the policies of the second largest high school in the district.

"You're losing," the old man said without preamble. He consulted a pad on his lap, upon which he had been computing team scores as the results came in. "Casey's got a ten-point advantage."

Steve nodded. "I haven't conceded," was all he said.

Glendanning's sharp black eyes probed at him. "I'm going to be frank with you, Anders."

"Yes, sir?"

"It's definitely between you and Casey. There's nobody else in the picture. I—uh—I'd like to consider your

war record, but I learned years ago that a man cannot be both sentimental and a good administrator. I'm interested only in obtaining the best coach to fill the vacancy we're anticipating at Central."

"I understand that, Mr. Glendanning."

The old man looked at him through narrowed lids. "Frankly, your age is against you, Anders. Here at Central we like to hire younger men, with the thought that they will settle permanently with us. Solidarity in that. You're—let's see—about forty?"

"Thirty-eight, sir."

"Hmmm. Odd, you haven't made an effort to get a bigger school before this. In a bit of a rut out there at Springmont, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," Steve said, "I am." He was making forty-a-week at the dinky suburban school, and the idea of being stuck there the rest of his life was a specter which constantly haunted him. The war had cost him five full years, two of which he'd spent in hospitals, getting his leg put back into working condition. He had tried to get better schools, so he and Marge would have enough money left over after necessities to indulge in a few pleasures, including the pleasure of having a family. But everybody, it seemed, preferred younger people. At least for the good jobs.

"Well," the old man was saying, "you'll have your fair chance here. My primary concern today is to decide which of you two is the better man for the job. And here's a tip for you, Anders."

"Yes, sir?"

"I haven't a whole lot to judge by. I'm discounting personalities, as I've never considered a man's personal charm, or lack of it, too important. I'm more interested in what a man can do than in what he is. I understand that you and Casey have had about the same kind of material to work with. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. I—I guess so."

"All right then. The man whose team outscores the other is going to tip my scales strongly in his favor. Not saying that's going to be the only basis for my decision. But it's

going to affect it. I'm only human."

Steve swallowed. "I see what you mean, Mr. Glendanning," he said, and excused himself, thinking he'd better get out there on the double and see what he could do to improve his gang's chances.

HE WALKED along, swiftly despite his sharp limp, toward the broad jump pit. The event was practically over. Steve's two entrants had already taken their three official trials, and were out of the running.

Casey approached Steve, brushing the dinky mustache with the tip of his finger. "My man's in first place, just like I predicted. So it didn't do you any good to suck around the old man. Why don't you fold up and admit you don't have a chance, pal?"

"It's a trick I was never much good at," Steve said.

He hung around, watching a lanky colored boy from Norrisville come down the runway like a shot, hit the takeoff board with a brittle thump, and go soaring out there. Excitement washed through the crowd. Steve heard somebody say, "He fouled his first two. But I knew he had it in him."

An official in the sawdust pit glanced up from the steel measuring tape and said, "Twenty-two feet, five and one-half inches."

The crowd applauded. The colored boy beamed, realizing he had nosed out Casey's man for the league title.

Steve looked at Casey. "Guess you'll have to be content with three points out of this."

"So what? Three points is three points. How many did you get?"

Steve didn't know any good answer to that. He watched the half milers lining up and told himself that here was his chance to get back in the running. Johnny Allison had had a good rest, and was out to add the half mile title to the one he'd already annexed in the mile.

Once again it was a two-man duel between Johnny and Casey's man, Joe Cook. Johnny ran a smart race, hugging the pole to make every step count, and holding an even, effortless pace. He came up in the final

forty yards to overtake Cook in almost a carbon copy of the stretch drive he had put on an hour ago in the mile.

Five for Springmont, three for Casey's West Harley youngsters. Well, at least that whittled Casey's lead back down to eleven points. Steve limped over to the shotput circle, where Tony Raymond was earnestly trying to hold his own against a couple of young behemoths from Central.

"How's it going, Tony?"

"Not bad and not good, Coach. I'm out there forty-four on my second. Third place."

"Now listen, Tony, try to relax on this last one. Your trouble is that you take this thing too seriously. You try too hard when you get inside that circle. Go in there this time and concentrate on form. Forget about distance. Will you do that?"

"Sure, Coach," the boy said.

SO THEN he stepped in the circle balanced the twelve-pound ball in his palm, and chucked one out there at forty-six, nine, a record for him, and good enough, in today's competition, to cop the big five points that Steve had silently prayed for.

That knocked friend Casey's lead down to six points, and he looked disgruntled.

"Talk about lucky flukes," he said to Steve.

"I've been drilling technique at this kid," Steve grinned, clapping the new district shotput champ on the back, "since his soph year at Springmont. He just happened to crack through today, that's all."

He limped over toward the high jump standards. Casey had a stringy youngster named Todd who had gotten up there around five-ten several times during the season. Steve's main hope here lay in Charley Finelli, a chunky youngster whose father had once been an acrobat with a small circus. Young Charley had inherited agility and bounce in his compact leg muscles. But he had not learned to lie out properly over the bar yet.

"How you doing?" Steve asked him.

The kid grinned that big, infectious grin. "I'm still in, Coach. They're movin' it up to five-ten next."

"Todd," Steve said. "Has he—"

"He's out of it, Coach."

"Out!" Steve felt a thrust of hope. "How come?"

Charley Finelli showed his buck teeth in another big grin. "Just one of those things, Coach. He tightened up and muffed out at five and a half. He was always erratic. And I don't think he warmed up much."

Steve could see Casey berating the hapless youngster at the other side of the sawdust pit.

"Charley," Steve said, "I'm going to have them build up a nice big mound in the sawdust where you generally land, when it's time for you to take your first crack at this next one. Know what I want you to do for me?"

"What, Coach?"

"Throw your head back, when you get up there. Your body follows your head. I guess I don't have to tell an acrobat's son about that. Close your eyes if it'll help any. You can clear this height. I'm certain of it. But you'll need a full layout to do it."

"Okay, Coach," the kid grinned. "Get 'em to make me a cushion up there and I'll try."

Steve went up and spoke to the official. When it was time for Charley Finelli to jump, the man with the rake built a small pyramid in the sawdust.

Casey pushed through the crowd, his eyes blazing. "What's this all about?" he snapped at the official.

The man lifted an eyebrow at him. "Do you want to enter a formal protest, Casey?"

"It isn't legal. It—"

"On the contrary. The purpose of the sawdust, if you remember, is to prevent injuries to the contestants. And I scarcely see why you're taking so much interest, inasmuch as your man has dropped out already."

"Okay, okay, I just wondered, that's all," said Casey, and melted back into the crowd.

Charley Finelli was ready to jump now. The kid ran toward the bar in

his bouncy way, slapped the ground hard with his left foot, and went flicking up there. Steve couldn't breathe until he saw the little fellow's head snap back as he reached the top of his upward flight. The layout was far from perfect, but there was considerably more of it than Charley generally managed.

Even so, he nudged the wood lightly as his body slid past it. He landed hard in the sawdust. The bar jiggled for several seconds, then hung firm on the supports.

STEVE WAITED until all the others missed their three trials, before he could drag himself away from the high jump competition. Casey came over and growled, "So you got lucky again. But don't jump to conclusions. We've got the quarter yet, remember?"

"I remember," Steve said.

"You made a pretty fair showing," Casey said in his metallic voice. "You surprised me, pal, and I don't surprise easy. But it wasn't enough. I've still got one point on you, see? And I've got a boy who runs a very sharp quarter.... Who've you got, pal, that can give Jerry Custer a run for his money?"

Steve looked at him and wondered what it was inside Casey that made him act this way. Why couldn't the guy be content with his victory, and forget about rubbing it in?

"Nobody," he said, and felt a hollow sense of defeat beginning to work in him now. "I've got nobody, Casey."

He limped away, a tall, brooding figure with a strange bitterness in his normally pleasant brown eyes and in the set line of his mouth. There were Brownie and Sachs, of course, but they were hopeless long shots in the four-forty. Just a couple of green sops he'd stuck in the race for seasoning today.

He was licked. He could picture Marge's face at dinner tonight, when he had to tell her it was going to be teaching at Springmont, at forty-a-week, for the indefinite future. Suddenly he was remembering that day on the beachhead, when he'd gone

through his private moments of hell. He thought of Casey who had stayed home tending to business during those years. There was a sour taste in his mouth and for an instant, until he thrust the feeling aside, he felt the beginnings of self pity.

"Can I talk to you, Coach?"

Steve looked up and saw Johnny Allison standing beside him. "Sure, kid, what is it?"

"Hey," said the kid, "you look awful down in the dumps, Coach. What's wrong? The team's doin' pretty good, aren't they?"

"Yeah, sure. I'm all right, kid. What's on your mind?"

"About this quarter mile, Coach. I been thinking."

"Yes?"

"I still feel pretty chipper, Coach. I mean—well, I didn't have to work too hard, copping the mile and the half. I could probably kick through with a pretty fair quarter. I've had a good rest, and...."

"Don't talk nonsense," Steve said. "You're no quarter miler. I know.... you've run some pretty good relay laps for us. But you're poohed out, Johnny. Even if you weren't, I wouldn't consider letting you run three races in one afternoon."

"Aw...."

"I know how you feel, Johnny. But it's out of the question. Why, if you tried to tack a quarter on to those two races you've already run, you'd burn out like a cinder."

"But I'm not tired, Coach. Honest. I could pick up a couple points for us.... What's wrong, Coach? Did I say something?" The kid was frowning up at him.

A couple of points. The kid was the kind who would pour it all out, once that gun banged, till the cup was empty. And he was hot today. *Why, Steve thought, this kid can take Jerry Custer. No matter how many races he's run.*

Custer had been in the two-twenty, Steve remembered, so he wasn't writing on a clean slate either.

"What do you think, Coach?"

"I think it's no good," Steve said. "Thanks anyway, Johnny. I sure could use those points you spoke of."

But I have to live with myself. I wouldn't want you on my conscience."

"I wouldn't have to be, Coach. After all, I'm volunterring...."

STEVE remembered that day on the beachhead and, unconsciously, his hand wandered down to his bad leg. "Don't make like a hero, kid," he snapped. "Heroes get hurt."

He saw the wounded look in the kid's eyes and said, "I didn't mean to sound tough, Johnny. But I know what I'm talking about. I once volunteered for some special duty myself."

"I—I guess I can see what you mean, Coach," the kid said awkwardly.

Steve grinned at him and limped away. They were getting the quarter milers lined up at the starting position, he saw. He stood along the rim of the track, looking at Brownie and Sachs, and trying to quiet the insistent small voices of hope within him. Casey spotted him and came over to gloat.

"If I were in your shoes, pal," he said, "I wouldn't even want to watch this one."

"Yakkity-yak," Steve said. "You never quit, do you, Casey?"

"And I never quit winning, pal. I never quit winning."

As if on signal, the starter's gun banged. Jerry Custer got out of his holes like a flushed rabbit, and scooted five yards ahead of the field on the way around the first turn. Steve looked for his pair of young hopefuls and picked them out struggling in the ruck, fighting elbows, flying cinders, and their own almost pitiable lack of experience.

Beside him Casey was beginning to chortle. "Look at that Custer go. He'll romp home in a breeze. Nobody near him."

It was getting Steve's goat. This had been a hard day. His nerves were near the snapping point now, and friend Casey was about to put that fatal straw on the camel's back. Steve watched his kids falling hopelessly into the ruck, watched Casey's man, Custer, swinging farther and farther ahead of the pack, and it came to him

that this was the pattern of their two futures. Casey was on the way up now, riding high, wide and handsome, and Steve's star was receding.

The crowd yelled louder and still louder. Jerry Custer romped in, winner by eight yards. Casey grinned at Steve and pushed his hand out. "Too bad, pal. When you don't have it, you just don't have it. No hard feelings?"

Steve was unprepared for the gesture. He forced a grin to his face. "No hard feelings," he said, and limped away through the crowd, head hanging down his shoulders sagging.

"Anders."

The voice was familiar. It was friend Glendanning. Surprisingly, the old gentleman had Johnny Allison with him. "I saw you talking with this young man before that last race, Anders," the old man said. "I took the liberty of asking him what it was all about."

"Y-yes, sir?"

"You're the man," Glendanning said. "You're hired."

"B-but I thought you said you were only interested in what a man could do."

The wise old eyes in the seamed face twinkled at him. "One thing you can do, Anders, as you just now proved, is think straight under pressure. That was a fine decision you made before the last race. I think you'll fit in very nicely on our staff here at Central."

Steve grinned at him for an uncertain moment, then grabbed his bony hand and almost shook it off him. "Thank you, sir," he said. "Thank you."

He limped along toward the dressing room then. The sour taste in his mouth was gone. There was no more bitterness in him. He touched his game leg, recalling how it had helped him decide against letting Johnny run in the quarter, and he found himself smiling.

He hadn't thought anything this good would come of that day on the beachhead.

THE END



At the last Columbia-Pennsylvania football game at Baker Field, we eavesdropped on a peculiar conversation.

A fellow sitting in front of us turned to his pal and said, "Lend me ten bucks for a minute, will ya?"

The pal replied, "Wait a minute—maybe you won't need the ten bucks!"

HOW TRUE

The telephone in the office of the American League Service Bureau tingled merrily the other morning. Within fifteen minutes, no fewer than six persons called, each asking the same question, to wit—how many players ever have hit a home run into the centerfield bleachers at Comiskey Park, home of the Chicago White Sox?

To each, this department patiently gave the same answer: Jimmy Foxx and Hank Greenberg are the only two players ever to homer into that far-distant spot, where the base of the wall measures 440 feet from the plate and the wall itself is some 35 to 40 feet high.

DOPE

from the

DUGOUT

Kicking around facts
and fun in the world
of sports.

by Wilcey Earle

Finally, the phone quieted down. Then it rang again.

"Mister," said a voice which sounded suspiciously as though its owner was in the process of losing a bet. "I'm almost certain I saw Murray Franklin once hit a homer into the centerfield bleachers at Comiskey Park. How about it?"

To which this department replied, "Mister, if Murray Franklin ever had hit a ball that far *anywhere*, he'd never have to jump to the Mexican League!"

"Hmmm," came the reply, "sounds logical, doesn't it? 'G'bye."

HE KEPT HIS TEMPER—NO ONE WANTED IT

The officials who preside at sports events are in the main even-tempered gentlemen. They've got to be, or they won't last very long in the sport in which they have chosen to act as judge and jury in the conduct of the game.

Of course there are exceptions to this rule, just as there are exceptions to any generalization. Today, you're going to hear the story of a soccer official who couldn't take the taunts of the crowd. The official's name was Paul McSweeney.

Many years ago, he was as well-known to soccer fans throughout America, yeah, even throughout Europe, as Bill Klem was known to baseball fans.

One hot Sunday afternoon, McSweeney refereed a game between two St. Louis teams. The rivalry between these teams was intense. The adherents of each outfit hated each other as much as the squads hated each other. This particular tilt was very tight. All the decisions were close.

McSweeney was scrupulously honest, but no matter how he called 'em, he received boos. Boos from the players he had ruled against and boos from their fans. As a matter of fact, he received more boos that afternoon than you would find in a large liquor distillery.

McSweeney was getting madder and madder at the taunts coming to him from all sides. His face, from a pale pink, gradually assumed the hue of a tomato suffering from high blood pressure.

He was just about ready to burst, and he finally did, when a leather-lunged fan, after a decision adverse to his team, stood up and bellowed, "Hey, McSweeney, you're blinder than the three blind mice put together. Why don't you throw your whistle over the fence?"

McSweeney ran over to this tormentor, shook his fist at him and growled, "That I'll do!"

He followed up his action with words and chucked the pesky piece of metal over the fence.

With that done, he again turned to the gent giving him the razzing and further snarled; "Now you can whistle for me the rest of your life, you ornery spalpeen, but you'll never see me referee another game around here as long as I live!"

(P. S.: McSweeney lived. On the following Sunday, in the same park, he again tooted his whistle; he had learned something during the intervening week.

Whenever a player or fans objected to his whistle blows thereafter, McSweeney quieted them with a twinkle in his smiling Irish eyes when he said— "Now, be off with ya! Don't be a crab! Never be angry at a happy man like meself who likes to whistle while he works!")

GUESS WHO

Know your sports? You do? Well, see how many of the following questions you can answer:

- (1) How many balls did Hugh Casey pitch to become the winning pitcher in the fourth game of the Yankee-Dodgers 1947 World Series in which Cookie Lavagetto beat Bill Bevens, robbing him of a no-hitter, with the only hit of the game for the Brooks?
- (2) What heavyweight broke two of Jack Dempsey's ribs with a whizzing right-hand punch to the chest?
- (3) Who was the famous six-day bike rider who had no less than 26 bones in his body broken during his long career as a cyclist?
- (4) What top-notch light heavyweight fought with a glass eye for years, the fact not becoming known until after his death?
- (5) Who was the former star big league pitcher who was also a cracker—jack football player for the University of Georgia?

In case you flivvered on any or all of the questions, here are the answers:

- (1) One pitch. Casey came in with the hassocks jammed and one out. He threw one ball to Tommy Henrich, who promptly hit it into a double play.
- (2) John Lester Johnson.
- (3) Reggie MacNamara, the Canadian.
- (4) Harry Greb.
- (5) Spud Chandler.

HE WASN'T FAR WRONG

Good for a laugh is a certain fighter's alibi for a recent defeat, "My opponent hit me with so many rabbit punches I'm going to lead the Easter Parade!"

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Milton Berle claims that his 300-pound aunt suffered a rather embarrassing moment at the Jamaica Race Track recently. She bent down to tie her shoe-lace, and someone threw a saddle over her!

THE CROWD IS LOUD

Very often, the enjoyment in going to prize fights comes, not from the fistic warriors themselves, but from the crowd, which shouts exceedingly humorous remarks due to the actions of the participants, or from the type of fight which presents itself.

In Detroit, Michigan, not so long

ago, a boxer held his right hand cocked for two and a half solid rounds, without throwing it once, while his opponent peppered him with every blow in the book.

Finally, a fan brought the house down when he yelled, "Let it go, Joe! The war is over. There is no more rationing!"

Upon another occasion, in a Brooklyn fight arena, two supposed scrapers were clinching and waltzing throughout a dreary affair. A loud-mouthed galleryite panicked the throng with this gem, "I'm a talent scout for Arthur Murray, see me after the dance and I'll sign you bums up!"

In St. Louis, Missouri, one boxer repeatedly struck his foe beneath the belt. The boos of the fans and the admonitions of the referee had no effect on him, but something else did, and he stopped.

Four fans arose and started to harmonize, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!"

THE END



3 CHAMPION NOVELETS

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Somebody Always Loses

The way Jerry Lassiter saw it, there was no sport in a golf tournament. He had beaten everyone on the club on his own terms, going around the course in a nonchalant, easy way. And what was the point of taking it all so grimly — make a dog-fight out of an enjoyable game?

JERRY LASSITER strode from the clubhouse on hard, angry heels. He snatched up his pig-skin bag of clubs and stamped toward the first tee. On the highway, twenty-feet away, a pair of state troopers, goggled and grim, swept by on roaring motorcycles, sirens wailing ferociously; they were followed by a second pair. Jerry glowered after them. That had been going on for two hours now. How did they expect anyone to play golf with that kind of racket?

Normally, however, he would not have noticed them, for he played with rapt concentration. It was this other business that had whetted his temper to a raw edge—this business of Grayson trying to trap him into a match. Jerry never played matches; he hated them. He never played in tournaments; Lassiter had even refused the position of number-one man on the Fairmont Club team that was playing Brook View that afternoon. He had beaten everybody in the club—in a friendly way, going around the course in an easy, relaxed, conversational manner.

But tournaments! Your opponent watched your every stroke with hard, hostile eyes, and every word exchanged was an implied snarl. That wasn't golf; that was a dog-fight.

Mr. Grayson knew how Jerry felt about tournaments and matches; Mr. Grayson was his boss—he was *the* Grayson of the Grayson Advertising Agency. Mr. Grayson liked him, Jerry knew, and better than that, Shirley Grayson liked him, too. Yet after two years, Jerry was still just a copy writer in the Agency, while men who had come after him had risen to the more important posts of Account Ex-

ecutives. It was hard to understand.

And it was Mr. Grayson who had tried to trap him into a match with Hal Barnes, an executive from the Chicago Branch of the Grayson Agency. The name had rung a small bell in Jerry's mind when Mr. Grayson casually asked him to play a round with Hal Barnes. Sure, Jerry had said, sure he'd be glad to play a round with Mr. Barnes.

Then, when he'd arrived at the clubhouse with Shirley and Mr. Grayson, he'd remembered. Hal Barnes was the Illinois State Open Champion!

"You knew that, Mr. Grayson," Lassiter accused. His hands went clammy. "You know how I feel about matches. You tried to trap me!" He could feel the prickle of starting perspiration.

"Yes, I did, Jerry," Mr. Grayson admitted, smiling; "I wanted to see how you'd act under fire."

"I won't play him, Mr. Grayson."

"Now, now, Jerry..."

"No, I won't; I don't play matches," he was talking too fast, too loudly, but he'd almost been trapped and the little spark of panic was beginning to flame. "I won't play him!" he said even more loudly.

MR. GRAYSON looked at him sadly. "Tournament nerves, Jerry?" he suggested mildly.

"That's unfair, Dad!" Shirley interrupted loyally; "some people just don't like competition, and Jerry's one of them." But there was something like pity in her eyes. "He likes the game for its own sake. Isn't that right, Jerry?"

He said weakly, "I...I...guess so."

A state trooper roared by on his



"We'll play a round, and the winner shoots the loser."

by LARRY HOLDEN



snarling, screaming cycle and Mr. Grayson, with a fretful jerk of his chin, snapped; "Hasn't that idiot anything better to do?"

"There's an insane man loose, Dad," said Shirley. "The governor...excuse me, there's Penelope Webster. I want to ask her about the party tonight—the Victory party if the Fairmont team beats Brook View this afternoon." She ran off calling, "Penelope! Pen-el-o-pe..."

"We'd win," Mr. Grayson grumbled, "if Jerry would play on the team."

Jerry said tonelessly, "I don't play in tournaments." He felt suddenly as if he were sinking in a mire of hopelessness.

The way Mr. Grayson looked at him had something to do with that, although Mr. Grayson's voice was kind when he said, "There's no fight in you, Jerry; you just like to drift along," he shook his head. "No fight in you," he repeated.

He turned abruptly away. A tall, saturnine stranger came through the doorway, smiled, then walked toward Mr. Grayson with his hand outstretched. "Hel-lo," he said, "I'm a little late, but..."

Jerry strode out of the clubhouse. He did not want even to *meet* Mr. Hal Barnes Illinois State Open Champion. He snatched up his bag and stamped blindly toward the first tee.

It wasn't fair. They didn't know what matches or tournaments did to him. Lassiter had played in them, all right, and the strain had been terrific, especially when the others came in with nightmare 65's or 66's. He'd done the eighteen holes in 65—but never when his hands were so clammy and nervous that the club turned when he swung, never when the sweat trickled from his forehead and blurred his eyes.

There was a golfer already teed up when he reached the first tee, and only tardily did he recognize who it was after the man cheerfully said, "Nice morning for golf, eh, Jerry." It was Alex Murdock, the chief of police—a fat man of tremendous strength.

Jerry mumbled, "Swell day," and backed against the thicket of rhododendrons to wait until the Chief had made his drive.

The Chief waggled his driver, waggled and waggled and waggled and finally made the murderous lunge of the born duffer. The ball screamed down the fairway, then hooked sharply into the grove of birches to the left of the hole. For minutes you could hear it bouncing from tree trunk to tree trunk. The Chief said mournfully, "I did something wrong." He picked up his bag and trudged unhappily down the fairway.

As Jerry stooped for his driver, something hard was thrust into the small of his back and a voice said, "Just stand here for a minute, Champ; and in case you're wondering, this is a gun."

Jerry froze. A state trooper roared by and disappeared down the road.

THE PRESSURE against Lassiter's back was released; there was a rustle of leaves and the man stepped out of the bushes. He was young, no older than Jerry, red-headed, with a lopsided grin and a wicked dancing gleam in his blue eyes. He had on a pair of baggy gray slacks and an ordinary white shirt with the sleeves rolled just above the elbows. Jerry caught a glimpse of the gun—a flat, black automatic—as the redhead slipped it into his pocket. He looked at Jerry and grinned. "We're going around together, Champ," he said, "You're going to be my camouflage. Get it?"

Jerry stammered, "Gu-gu-get what?"

The redhead winked. "They'll never look for me in here," he whispered; "I'll fool them. Know where I'm from? Graystone. Yeah. They think I'm crazy, but I'm not; I'm a genius. Geniuses are always misunderstood. I'm a golf genius. Whose bag is this?"

He took a bag from the rack at the side of the tee. Jerry's heart was thudding and he looked back toward the clubhouse, but it was screened from the tee by another hedge of rhododendrons. The duffers had in-

sisted on that. Red rattled his borrowed bag.

"What a lousy bunch of clubs," he grumbled; "but I'll play you anyway. I don't even need clubs to play my kind of golf. I could bat the ball around with an old zither and still beat you. It should take us about three hours to go around, and by that time those stupid state troopers will be in Philadelphia. They think I'm going to Philadelphia. We'll make this an interesting match, Champ; we'll have stakes and everything. What d'you say?"

Jerry couldn't say anything, for Red had taken the gun from his pocket and had pushed it prominently and handily into his belt.

"Wh-what stakes?" he finally managed.

"Oh, the usual stakes," Red said casually, "If I win, I shoot you; if you win, you shoot me. I like to play for stakes. It keeps things interesting."

The casual way he said it—no threats, no menace—convinced Jerry immediately that the man was in earnest—and quite mad. He licked the perspiration from his upper lip and looked yearningly at the heavy figure of the Chief just disappearing into the grove of birches to hunt for his ball. Hope suddenly flamed within him. If he could reach the first hole alive, Jerry and the Chief would surely be able to handle this homicidal maniac.

"I'll let you drive first, Champ," Red said in a friendly voice, "You can drive first all the time. I don't want to discourage you when I make the hole in one—and I always make the hole in one."

Jerry's fingers were shaking as he teed up his ball. He dried his palms on the sides of his thighs. To his blurred vision, the ball looked like a pea and the head of his driver the size of a pumpkin. He swung jerkily. To his horror, the ball left the tee in a wide and beautiful arc and came to rest in the middle of the adjoining fairway—the worst slice he had ever made.

"We-ll, we-ll," said Red thoughtfully, "the boomerang ball. But I've

done better; I've hit one that made a complete circle. Stand over there where I can see you when I drive, and don't try to wrap your club around my neck; that would be cheating. You have to wait until the eighteenth hole." Then he added significantly, "If you win."

He took a careless stance, a seemingly casual swing, but the ball flew straight down the middle of the fairway for a good 240 yards. Red shook his head. "These are women's clubs," he complained. "Now I'll have to take two strokes for this hole. We'll play your ball first, Champ."

THE STRANGER stayed right at Jerry's heels while he plodded over to the other fairway. The ball was in a good lie and Jerry took his brassie. His palms were wet again and he dried them down the sides of his slacks. He had to make this one good, had to catch the Chief on the first green. Somehow, the thought of the Chief steadied him; Lassiter took a long easy swing. The ball cleared the border of hedge, rose into the sky and suddenly became a little white dot bouncing on the smooth green, coming to a rest a few yards from the hole. The breath he had been holding fairly exploded from him.

But as he watched, there was another little white dot rolling on the green and the Chief burst triumphantly from the grove of birches, brandishing a club that flashed in the sun. Never before had the Chief taken less than ten minutes and a dozen strokes to get out of that grove. In despair, Jerry watched him hole out after only four putts. The Chief marched proudly toward the second tee.

"Friend of your's?" suggested Red.

"Him? Oh, no. Never saw him before in my life."

Red said petulantly, "I don't want to shoot *anybody* before this match is over, even you. Now don't you go forcing me to." The threat was unmistakable this time; Red had sharp eyes.

He was in better spirits, however, when they came to his ball. Red re-

garded it critically and glanced at the hole fifty yards away. "Kind of a long putt," he said.

"Not too long," Jerry said hopefully.

But the hope died as Red took a number seven iron from his bag and laid the ball two feet from the pin. Jerry took three strokes to sink his ball and Red tapped his in with a casual one handed swing. "My hole," he said; "we're playing hole-for-hole. I don't feel like going the whole eighteen. I'll take ten holes and knock you off on the eleventh tee. Eleven's a lucky number, like seven."

The Chief was nowhere to be seen as Jerry teed up, but the surf of flying sand from the deep trap at the two hundred yard mark showed exactly where he was. Hope buoyed Jerry again and he drove his ball straight and true for 220 yards. Red's drive matched it almost exactly. 220 yards is a short run, but a long walk. The Chief was miraculously on the green before they had covered half the distance. He diddled with his putter then did a little triumphal dance around the hole.

"Nine," he called back joyfully to Jerry, "Only nine. That's two under par. My par, that is." He hurried toward the third tee before the magic touch deserted him.

Jerry quickened his own pace, drawing Red along with him, but he had to stop when they came to Red's ball. His jaw dropping, he watched the Chief line out a beautiful drive, caper triumphantly again and rush down the fairway. When he looked around, Lassiter saw Red's ball take three little hops on the green and stop within inches of the cup. Controlling himself with almost visible effort, Jerry took his number nine iron but he had tightened up and he topped the ball. It took a short, startled leap and trickled out, ten feet short of the green. His next shot was better, but it was still fifteen feet away from the hole. That took three more putts. Red looked disgusted when he picked up his ball.

"My hole," he said nastily. "See here, Champ, if you don't give me

some competition, I'm going to get rid of you and find someone who will." He fingered the butt of the gun, then, changing his mind, pointed his chin at the third tee and said shortly, "Let's go."

Jerry muttered, "Don't push me."

"What was that, Champ?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Better not be. But you better snap out of it; I'm two holes up on you."

JERRY lost the third hole by one stroke, and went to pieces again on the fourth as he tried to hurry his strokes to catch up with the Chief of Police, who unbelievably was still ahead of them. Ordinarily, even a foursome had been known to play through Chief Murdock, but today the Chief was inspired. He was taking only seven or eight strokes to a hole—par 3's and 4's—but for the Chief, that was championship golf.

Jerry played the fifth hole in an icy trance. Desperation must have been riding on his ball, for it flew like a swallow for a full 275 yards. Even Red whistled and cheered up, though his own drive was seventy-five yards shorter. He was on the green in three, but on the far side of the green with a twenty foot putt to make. Jerry clenched his teeth and chipped to within a foot of the pin.

"Well, look at that, will you!" Red said in a wondering voice; "That's one for you. We stand one to four."

Jerry made another tremendous drive on the sixth hole, driving past the Chief, who seemed to be wading in the crooked little brook at the side of the fairway. The Chief looked back in surprise, then raised his arm and beckoned them on. He was used to having twosomes play through him. He was in the sand trap, twenty yards beyond when Jerry and Red came abreast of him. He looked up, grinned ruefully and wiped the perspiration from his red face with his muscular hand.

"Just when I was going great guns," he complained, "this had to happen. I lie fifteen up to here."

Jerry's heart was going like a frenzied trip hammer. Red was right at his elbow, his hand concealing the

gun in his belt. Jerry licked his lips and stammered:

"Gu-gu-got a bad lie?"

"A bad lie! For the love of Pete, man, I'm practically below sea level down here."

Before Red could stop him, Jerry jumped down into the trap beside the portly Chief. Red walked to the lip of the trap and stood there, grinning toothily down at them. Jerry could have dodged behind the fat bulwark of the Chief—but Murdock would have taken the bullet. As frightened as he was, Jerry could not bring himself to that. In fact, he took a step and shielded the Chief with his own body.

"If you don't mind a little advice, Chief Murdock," he said almost calmly, "maybe I can help you a little."

"Son," said the Chief, "even the Almighty can't help a golfer like me."

"Uh, well, maybe if you didn't lunge at the ball and if you kept your head down and didn't move your left foot when you swung, you'd make out better. Try it."

Doubtfully, the Chief took his stance, drew back his club and swung. The ball rose gracefully from the pit, bounced once on the fairway and rolled on the green. The Chief scrambled up the bank and stared at his ball with amazement. He turned and grabbed Jerry's hand, pumping it enthusiastically. "Son," he said fervently, "if there's ever anything I can do for you—anything!—you just name it, that's all. Just name it!"

Red stood ten feet away, smiling quietly. Jerry was carrying his own number five iron. He could throw it and at ten feet it would be hard to miss that diabolically smiling face, but...there was more than an even chance that the unsuspecting Chief Murdock would take the lunatic's bullet; he made a target that was impossible to miss.

In a strained voice, Jerry said. "I'll take you up on that, Chief Murdock...sometime."

"Anytime, Jerry, anytime. Now you boys go right ahead and play through me. I'm going back in that trap and practice that new stance

you just showed me. Go right ahead and don't let me hold you up."

He plunged down the side of the pit. Jerry picked up his bag and walked tight-lipped toward his own ball.

"Heh, heh, heh, chuckled Red at his elbow, "Thought I didn't recognize him, didn't you? He's Charles Laughton disguised as Sidney Greenstreet. Wouldn't he have been surprised to get a bullet hole in his belt buckle?"

Jerry said tersely, "Shut up!"

"Don't get nasty, Champ. This is a friendly game." His voice hardened, "And you better take this hole if you know what's good for you."

WITH THE Chief behind them and all hope of help gone from that direction, Jerry's wrists turned to wood and his chip shot cleared the green and plunked into the trap at the far side. Red was on in three, ten feet from the pin. He stood at the peak of the trap and jeered at Jerry down in the sand. Jerry set his jaw and lofted out with his niblick. The ball struck beyond the hole and stuck as if it had brakes, held close by the backspin, seven feet closer to the hole than Red. Red scowled. He crouched behind his ball, lined it with the hole—and missed the putt by a fraction. Jerry prayed over his ball and sank it.

Red's scowl deepened. "Don't get to thinking you're so good," he said blackly. "I'm still two holes up on you." He took the gun from his belt, blew into the muzzle and sneered over it at Jerry.

Jerry said stolidly, "Let's go. We still have twelve holes to play."

He had no hope of beating this inspired lunatic. His frayed nerves were screaming. But Jerry wanted to get him off the course before the nut shot some innocent bystander who might bungle into them.

Red took the seventh with a three. Jerry's drive reached the green on the short eighth, taking the hole as Red over-drove, but he dropped the ninth, giving Red six holes to his three. He trudged grimly toward the

tenth tee. Red's capricious spirits were soaring again.

"Don't feel bad if you lose, Champ," he said pleasantly, "I'm a genius and I've beaten them all. Y'know, I was only five when I beat Bobby Jones at St. Andrews in Scotland. I sure was a cute baby. Bobby conceded the match on the twelfth and I shot him on the thirteenth. Thirteen's my lucky number. I always shoot them on the thirteenth. I was hit on the head by a ball on the thirteenth once. That's what made me a genius; they thought I was crazy when I told them."

Jerry paid no attention to this disjointed, lethal chatter. As they rounded the turn in the path, his heart lurched, stopped. The tenth tee was quite close to the clubhouse and there, strolling across the lawn, were Shirley, Mr. Grayson and Hal Barnes.

Red snarled, "Who's that?"

"Nobody you'd be interested in," Jerry said desperately; "they don't play golf."

"They're spies for the state trooper!"

"No. They're just friends, that's all. They're harmless."

"They'd better be, Champ. They'd better be."

Mr. Grayson came up smiling and said pleasantly, "Having a good game, Jerry?"

Jerry glanced quickly at Red, who had retreated to the far corner of the tee and was standing there with one hand at his belt. Jerry moistened his dry lips.

"Fine," he said harshly, "I'll see you later in the clubhouse."

Mr. Grayson's eyebrows arched. "I thought we'd stroll around the last nine with you."

"We don't want to be interrupted. Go back to the clubhouse; I'll see you later."

MR. GRAYSON glanced at Hal Barnes' dark face and his shoulders lifted in a faint gesture of resignation. He said drily, "Tournament nerves; can't take it." He turned on his heel and strode angrily toward the clubhouse, followed by Barnes, whose lips were pursed.

Shirley looked whitely at Jerry.

"You, too," he said, keeping his voice harsh, "I've got to make up three holes, and I can't do it with people staring at me. Go back to the clubhouse with your father," he pleaded.

She glanced at Red, and Red gave her the bare bones of a grin. "All right, Jerry," she said in a very small voice, "I'll see you later." She slowly followed the two men across the lawn.

"Now," snapped Jerry at Red, "let's finish this up."

"You gave them a signal," Red said ominously. "They're going to get the state troopers."

"Believe me, Red, they're not; they don't even know who you are."

"I'll have to shoot them, too."

"Huh?"

"If you beat me, I said. If I beat you, I get the gun and it won't make any difference who knows who you are."

Red looked puzzled, as if this reasoning were too involved for his sick personality. "That's right," he said finally, "If you beat me, you get the gun. Tee up, Champ; I'll take the next four, and that'll be the end."

Blood pounded in Jerry temples and his fingers tightened around the leather grip of the driver in his hands. Red took a hasty leap backward.

"Take it easy, Champ," he warned.

The red mist washed back from Jerry's eyes, leaving him frigidly calm. "I'll take it easy," he said heavily, "I'll take it easy, all right." He plunged his wooden tee into the ground, mounted his ball on it, then stood and addressed it with the limber club. He felt loose and calm. It wasn't just golf he was playing now. It was another game, a more dangerous game. And it wasn't just his own nerves he had to think about; he felt as steady as a rock. Or was he just numb? He brushed the question aside and made his swing. The ball travelled low, then rose and soared, straight down the fairway for 250 yards.

"Beat that," he said grimly to Red.

Red's drive was shorter by ten yards, but his approach was flawless. He lofted to the green, six feet from the flag, and looked good for a three. Jerry's second shot was inches closer. Red poised over his putt, measured the distance and stroked the ball. It rimmed the cup, then plunked in. Jerry waited only long enough to balance and dropped his ball on top of it, halving the hole.

Red sensed the change in Jerry for he offered no chatter as they teed up for the eleventh. Jerry out-drove him again, matched him on the approach, then sank a twelve foot putt to take the hole.

"Four to six," he said woodenly, "Five more like that and I take the gun."

"Three more," giped Red, "and I keep the gun."

Jerry ignored him.

THE TWELFTH was the water hole, short but nasty. The tee was on a high hillock, fifty feet above the green. The slope down to the lake was covered with underbrush and scrub birch. A ball dropped into that mess was unplayable and meant a lost stroke. The little lake was forty feet wide—another lost stroke if it were not cleared. At the opposite side, the green was the cap of another rise. From the tee it looked the size of a pocket handkerchief. Most duffers skipped that hole, having learned from experience that lost balls cost not only strokes but a dollar apiece. The stroke had to be pretty perfect to be playable.

Despite the fact that it was a club he had been having trouble with, Jerry took his number four wood... the cleek because he needed loft and enough distance to clear the far bank of the lake. As he stared down at the menacing little patch of water, he could almost see the little spurt of splash as the ball plopped into it. He had seen it often enough in the past. This was a wicked hole. He paused to wipe his hands down his thighs, then addressed the ball again. As his clubhead was coming down, his eyes jumped involuntarily at the shining patch of waiting water. He

couldn't have stopped the swing then—it was too late. He caught the ball too low, taking a little turf with it. It rose high in the air, too high, then, dropped like a plummet into the lake. The water spurted just as he had seen it spurt in his mind's eye.

Red chuckled, Heh, heh, heh. That's a nasty pitch from this bank to the green, Champ."

"I'll drive another," Jerry rammed another tee into the turf.

"Drive another," Red gaped at him; "that's taking a worse chance."

Shut up. I'm taking the chance, not you."

Red shrugged and chuckled softly. The second drive rose high, but this time it was long and true. It struck the green, took a series of eager little hops ran straight for the hole... and stopped on the brim. Red was not quite so casual when he stepped to the tee—but his drive was as true as Jerry's, though not as close to the flag. Still it was close enough, and he sank the putt, taking the hole.

"That gives me seven, Champ," he said significantly. "Two to go."

"You haven't won them yet," Jerry said shortly. The knot inside him had been tied as tightly as it would go. He did not want to waste any of his enforced calm bandying words with this chatty lunatic.

He took the thirteenth hole with a birdie, he took the fourteenth; and the fifteenth. Red took the sixteenth with a birdie, of his own, but Jerry fiercely attacked the seventeenth with tremendous drive that went 280 yards to roll on the green within a long putt of the hole. He sank the putt. They had eight holes apiece.

Red's actions had become worse and worse. He had not uttered a word for three holes and his blue eyes stabbed at Jerry at every step. Jerry was holding together by thinking of nothing but the stroke he was playing.

The eighteenth hole was a bad one. It looked almost as if the original planning committee had saved the worst until last. It was a dogleg with a high mass of leafy trees jutting out into it. Opposite the trees was a series of deep, sandy bunkers

leaving only a narrow opening through which the ball could be driven. Just beyond that, protecting the curve, was a swollen, artificial water hazard—a trap for a long, ambitious driver.

The hole lay hidden behind the trees.

The safe, conservative way was to play a short drive.

As if just to needle Jerry, Red said with a grin, "I'll drive first this time, Champ. Keep your eye on this one."

RED SELECTED his midiron and sent the ball just to the mouth of the opening between the trees and the bunkers—a daring shot, but just right. An easy approach would reach the green.

His heart thudding just a little faster, Jerry teed his ball and stared down the fairway. A slice would end his ball into the wall of trees, a hook would dump it into the sand pits to the left. He reached into his bag and slowly took out his number three wood—the spoon, the only club that would give him the necessary distance and loft. He needed the loft. He placed the head of the club on the turf behind the ball and waited until his breath came evenly. Red stood with his mouth open, realizing what Jerry was going to try to do. Jerry was going to attempt to drive over that towering mass of trees. It needed power, perfect control and—luck!

Jerry slowly drew back the club, poised at the height of the swing, then whipped down the club. There was a sharp *click* and the ball rose and rose and with agonizing slowness began to descend, a tiny speck in the sky. Abruptly, it disappeared into the silhouette of the trees. Both stood there, holding their breaths, waiting for that slap-slap-slap as the ball crashed through the leaves and dropped into the rough. There was no sound whatever.

Red gasped, "Holy hat!" Then in awe, "and with a spoon!"

It had been a tremendous and daring drive with one chance in a hundred of making it perfectly. Seeming-

ly dazed. Jerry picked up his bag and plodded up the fairway ahead of Red.

When they reached Red's ball, they both stood and craned their necks at the green. On that flawless carpet of green, the white dot was unmistakable.

Red said, "Brother!" and picked up his ball. With a grin, he took the gun from his belt, opened it at the butt and held it out. "Cigarette?" he said.

Jerry's fist came up in a short, swift arc and crashed against the side of Red's jaw. Red reeled back six paces on his heels and Jerry lunged after him.

Red cried, "Wait a minute, Jerry, wait a minute." He clutched at Jerry's arms. They stood swaying for a moment, then rolled on the grass.

A stentorian voice roared furiously, "Jerry!" Mr. Grayson pounded from the mass of trees, and behind him came the dark man and Shirley.

"Well," said Grayson contemptuously, "this is just about the worst exhibition of poor sportsmanship I have ever seen, Jerry! You can't take a licking without..."

Red was flat on his back, but he called over Jerry's shoulder, "But he didn't take a licking, Mr. Grayson. He beat me."

"Then for the love of pete, what's going on?"

"He thinks I'm crazy; will you tell him I'm not."

"I'm not so sure. Jerry, that happens to be Hal Barnes, our Chicago Branch manager and the Illinois State Champion. You should be more respectful. Punching him in the nose is no way to treat a co-worker. Suppose somebody tells me what this is about."

Bewildered, Jerry climbed to his feet. Red sprang up and flashed him a quick grin.

"I pretended to be an escaped lunatic, Mr. Grayson," he said, "That fellow the state troopers were after gave me the idea, the one that threatened to assassinate the governor at the tournament this afternoon. I heard that Jerry didn't like to play matches and I—well, I wanted to see

what he could do under pressure. He did it all right."

Mr. Grayson stared at Jerry's face, then turned his eyes back to Red. "Barnes," he said slowly, "that strikes me as a pretty cruel trick."

"It's my fault, Dad," Shirley said swiftly, "I put him up to it. I—I wanted to see what Jerry could really do."

Red cut in. The lunatic idea was all mine, Mr Grayson," he said. "Shirley just asked me to coax him into a match." He turned to Jerry, "I apologize, Jerry, and if you want to give me another poke in the snoot, all I can say is, I earned it." But he held out his hand with a grin.

Jerry took the offered hand. "Id rather thank you, if you don't mind."

He didn't offer to explain that remark.

Mr Grayson said gruffly, "Oh for the love of Pete. What's Mr Snyder here going to think of our organization with these shenanigans going on? Mr. Snyder owns Snyder's Sudsy Soaps, and he's giving us his advertising contract. Now, Jerry, if you'll come up to the house with us....."

"This evening, Mr. Grayson," Jerry said.

"This evening! Have you gone crazy?"

"No. I just want to see if I can help Fairmont beat Brook View in that tournament this afternoon, that's all"

Mr. Snyder broke into a wide, well-washed grin.

THE END

They Shall Not Pass

THE All-America Conference's outstanding defensive end, 6-foot 2-inch, 225-pound Vince Mazza of the Buffalo Bills, whose specialty is throwing forward passers for large losses, recently revealed his system to 6-foot 4-inch Long Glenn Dobbs, Tulsa University's great All-American back and now the Los Angeles Dons' fine passing back. Here's how!

In a recent Buffalo Bills-Los Angeles Dons game at Los Angeles, Mazza, Niagara University's great gift to professional football, threw Dobbs for a 29-yard loss. A little later he threw Long Glenn for a 19-yard loss; then for a 14-yard loss. In all, Mazza threw Dobbs for a total loss of 90 yards, and at a time when Dobbs was leading the All-America

Conference in total offense. Dobbs, after being thrown for still another loss, could stand it no longer. He got up from the turf and asked Mazza:

"Hey, who's supposed to block you out?"

"Oh, some guy back there," Mazza answered, waving his hand at a flock of Dons. "I give him a cigar every time he lets me through at you."

Off the gridiron Mazza has an even simpler explanation for his pass foiling ability. The great end who has thrown more passers for more losses than the rest of his team put together, says simply:

"It just comes natural. I don't like people to throw things over my head. Makes me jumpy."

JOHN WINTERS FLEMING



Yes — we all hated the Major, and we aren't a bit sorry that he's dead!

But we've got to find out who killed him, and turn the killer over to the law — no matter how much sympathy we may feel for him.

Here is a powerful, complete book-length murder mystery, located in the U. S. Occupation Army in Germany.

The C. O. was a rat, but his killing was a

MAJOR CRIME

Look For This Crack Detective Novel

by **OLIVER KEYSTONE**

In The May Issue of

CRACK **DETECTIVE** **STORIES**

Dark Entry



by
DAVID C.
COOKE

What Harry Collins wanted to know was: had he been given a new chance in spite of his dubious past or because of it?

HARRY COLLINS rubbed the soft silks between his hands and smiled. It had been so many months since he had last worn stable colors that even now, with the smell of hay and horses permeating the air about him, he still found it

hard to believe. It was especially hard to believe that the colors were those of the Bradcliffe stables. But it didn't seem conceivable that he had been put on the payroll, and at a very attractive figure, merely because Norman Bradcliffe wanted an ex-

perienced jockey for an inexperienced filly. Harry felt that there was a great deal more to it than that, but neither Bradcliffe nor Joe Finch, his stable manager, had dropped a single suggestive hint. Not so far, anyway.

Bradcliffe was generally considered pretty much of a square-shooter in all his dealings; that is to say, he had never been caught attempting anything shady. Harry wanted to believe that this was the rule for which there was no exception, but deep within him there was still that shadow of doubt. After all, Harry had been accused of throwing his last race at Belmont more than a year ago, and had been as good as blackballed from the tracks. It didn't seem that Bradcliffe could stand to gain anything but suspicion by having a jockey with a past open to question wearing his colors and up on one of his prize mounts.

During these past three weeks of training and dieting to get down to riding weight, Harry had tried so many times to pass off his doubts with a shrug. He had told himself that it didn't really matter what might be going through Bradcliffe's mind; he would run his best race, and that would be that. But at the same time, he realized that this might not be expedient. At twenty-eight, and with a knowledge and background of nothing but horses, he was no longer in a position to call his shots and tell stable owners what they could do with their crooked deals.

Joe Finch came around behind the shed and broke in on his thoughts. "Hey, Harry," he said, "I been looking all over for you. The boss is up at the house, and he wants to talk to you."

Harry said, "Mr. Bradcliffe?"

"Sure," Joe said. "He's the boss, ain't he?"

"I was just going out with Sue again," Harry said.

"She'll be here when you get back," Joe said irritably. "When the boss is waiting, you drop everything and see what he wants. I got a car out in front."

NORMAN Bradcliffe was as big and heavy as Harry was small and thin. A giant of a man in influence as well as stature, he could put a jockey on top of the heap or make him slide into oblivion. The former had happened many times, though, to the best of Harry's knowledge, never the latter. But he thought ruefully as he left the car and walked toward the white clapboard house, there is always a first time for everything.

Bradcliffe was in the living room, and he said without preliminaries: "Joe tells me he gave you your riding colors today, Harry; that makes you one of us formally." He held out a heavy hand, and smiled. "Best of luck!"

"Thanks," Harry said. "I'll try to live up to what those silks stand for."

Bradcliffe offered cigars, which both Joe Finch and Harry refused. "All I ask is that you do your best," he said. "No man can do more than that, and if he's got a horse under him that's worth its salt, it will do the rest." He lighted a cigar, flicked out the match. "What," he asked, "do you think of Lady Sue's chances this Saturday, Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "We'll make out all right, Sue and me. She'll be nervous at the start, but her heart's good and she loves to run."

"Yes, she's a sweet filly," Bradcliffe said with pride. "She's got so much spirit you'll have to hold her back at the break. I'm expecting great things from Lady Sue, Harry, great things."

Harry said bluntly, "What place do you want with her?"

The stable owner arched his brows. "What place? Why, win with her, of course; what do you think?"

"I didn't know," Harry said. "I've never carried your colors before. Sometimes owners only want their horses to pick up track savvy the first time out."

Bradcliffe said: "Sue's got it in her to win, young man, and that's what I want. I'm going to back her—and you, too—right up to the hilt. Understand?"

Harry said that he understood, but he didn't wholeheartedly believe it. He wanted to, heaven knows—but that small doubt still remained. He could have understood it if Bradcliffe had given him a second-rate horse for his first ride—just so he could get the feel of the track again and prove himself—but somehow it seemed at least peculiar that he was being given a filly of Lady Sue's calibre. He wanted to know why, to relieve his mind, and thought that this would be a good time to thrash it out.

"Mr. Bradcliffe," he said, "I'll bat your horses in to first place every time I'm up on them, if they've got it in them. That's the only way I want it to be. But I still don't get why you had Joe sign me up. I mean—"

"You're a good jockey," Bradcliffe broke in quickly. "That's all."

HARRY looked at him and lowering his voice said: "That's not the reason. There are a lot of good jocks—better than me, maybe—that don't have any strikes against them. You could have had any of them, but you pick me instead. You had a reason, and it's not because you felt sorry for me; I want to know what that reason is."

Bradcliffe stared at the end of his cigar, then said thoughtfully: "I was afraid this might come up, but hoped that it wouldn't. You're a good jockey, Harry, and you know how to nurse Sue around the track, according to what Joe tells me. I don't want to loose you."

"Yeah," Joe Finch put in. "Forget about it, pal. What you don't know won't hurt you none."

That had been the wrong thing to say, and Bradcliffe shot a quick look at his stable manager. "You make it sound like something nefarious," he said. Then, to Harry: "Why don't you just trust me, fellow? You won't be sorry, I promise."

Harry shook his head. "I need the money bad," he confessed, "and I need the chance to get back in the game. Maybe I'm a fool; I want to keep your colors, but unless you give

me the straight of it, I'm turning them in."

Bradcliffe sighed deeply as only heavy men can sigh. "All right, Harry." He carefully ground out his cigar, then explained: "I had Joe look you up because of that incident at Belmont, not in spite of it. I wanted a jockey with a record that looked bad, but at the same time he had to be a good jockey and one that I could trust. I didn't think that business at Belmont was true, so I picked you for the job."

Harry's head was swimming. "Job!" he cried. "What's this all about, anyway?"

Bradcliffe coughed politely, embarrassed. "I'm a business man," he said. "I've got good horses and I've got good jockeys for them, and together they win a lot of races for me. But I want a lot more out of it than just the purse and the glory and the honor. When my horses and jockeys boot it out in front I want to collect from the betting windows. That's only good business."

"I figured," he said, "that with you, Harry—and I don't want you to get sore, because it's strictly on the square all right, it seemed to him, up on a dark horse on her first start, the odds would be long—long enough to make a real killing. And that," he said, "is the reason I had Joe find you and sign you up. From the business standpoint, it impressed me as being a good proposition."

Bradcliffe then fell silent, waiting for Harry's reaction, and Harry thought about it. Bradcliffe was on the square all right, it seemed to him, even though the corners might be rounded just a shade. He figured that an untried horse carrying a black-balled jockey would scare the customers away from the betting windows and cause the odds to skyrocket. Harry could see that it was a perfect setup, even though Bradcliffe was taking unfair advantage of that affair at Belmont, and he smiled.

"When," he asked, "do we take Sue down to the track stables?"

The stable owner sighed again. "Not till Saturday morning, before the race. Then nobody will have a

chance to look her over and get any smart ideas."

Harry nodded. "But what if it rains, Mr. Bradcliffe? That would mess up everything, since we don't know for sure how Sue is in mud."

"We'll just have to take our chances on that. If the weather holds up like this for three more days, it will be in the bag. We'll just have to hope for all we're worth!"

SO HARRY hoped. And when he awakened the following morning the sun was shining brightly. He spent a good part of the day putting Lady Sue through her paces, this time with a definite objective in mind. She was frightened by the starting gate, but the bell was even worse. It was something of a job getting her into the gate in the first place, and then when the bell sounded she balked and displayed her high-strung temperament. But once out in the open, in competition with stock pace horses, she took her head quickly and had to be held back.

Lunch for Harry that day consisted of black coffee and green vegetables. Now that his fears of Bradcliffe's motives had been alleviated, he wanted to take off as much weight as possible to give Sue an even better chance. During the afternoon he spent about an hour in road work, wrapped to the neck in heavy clothing, to sweat off even more precious ounces.

* * *

Friday morning was a repetition of Thursday, though the sun had lost some of its brilliance and wore a dull halo. The forecast was possible showers for the evening, clearing before morning. A low-pressure area was moving in, but the weather man predicted that fresh winds coming down from the north would dissipate it.

In the afternoon Harry once again concentrated on road work and let Sue rest. As he returned from his run over the dust-heavy roads he noticed a familiar car parked in front of Bradcliffe's house. There was only one person in the world, to the best

of his creation. That person was Paul Grombecker, the bookie.

Harry's enthusiasm of the past two days was suddenly gone. It seemed that after all the fine words and exultations to the contrary, Bradcliffe still had plans he was keeping to himself. Harry couldn't visualize what they might possibly be, but certainly no bookmaker ever paid a visit to a training farm for social reasons alone. That was out of the question!

He quickly decided that whatever they were talking about, he wouldn't let it have anything to do with him. That affair at Belmont, when he and Rocket Boy had been boxed in so neatly, had caused enough trouble without becoming involved in anything else. Another such occurrence, planned or otherwise, would be enough to ruin even the shaky track future he now held.

In his room, Harry took the suitcase from beneath the bed and bunched his clothes into it. He felt like crying, or cursing, or smashing a fist against the wall. Anything to relieve the tension. But at the same time he realized that even the slightest slip would make him lose all control, and he would probably do or say things he wouldn't want to do or say.

The best way out, he decided, was the silent way. To hell with any contract-hold Bradcliffe might have over him! To hell with trying to offer explanations, or having any offered him!

He would go in to town and get drunk. Stinking drunk. Then he'd get as far away from the farm as he could. He would forget about Bradcliffe and Grombecker and Joe Finch and Lady Sue and...

Lady Sue? His mind suddenly began to slow down and he tried to reason rationally:

He couldn't forget about Lady Sue. He had grown to love the little filly too much. She was, he felt, as much a part of him and as close to him as anything or anyone could ever be. She deserved more of a break than her owner and the bookie were planning. She could become something

really big in the racing game, but she had to be handled properly. She was highstrung and tempermental, and she had to be understood.

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Slowly, thoughtfully, he took the things from the suitcase, dropped them back into the bureau drawers. And then he nodded, his mind made up.

Bradcliffe and Grombecker could dream up any kind of plans they wished; he didn't care. Whatever the instructions might be, he would agree to follow them... But when they got out there on the track together, he and Lady Sue, they would forget about everything except winning. They would run the heels off those other horses. And then, when it was all over and in the bag, Bradcliffe could rant his head off. A lot of good it would do him!

But there was one thing that still bothered Harry; the prediction of rain. Clouds were beginning to pile high in the sky. Dirty, sluggish clouds, heavy with moisture near the precipitation point. It was dark to the horizon in all directions, and still

no signs of those expected fresh winds from the north.

And then, suddenly, there was a rumbling, rolling sound of distant thunder. Any minute, now, and the clouds would burst open and turn the race track into an ocean of mud!

IT WAS still raining the following morning. Hard. And though the sky was beginning to clear when Joe Finch and Harry drove up to the race track grounds with Lady Sue, it was impossible that the turf would dry more than slightly before race time.

"Looks bad, don't it?" Joe said. "After the first couple races the track will be chewed up and tricky. Wish we could tell how Sue's gonna take it."

"Yeah," Harry said. "Wish we could."

Joe looked at the little jockey and frowned. "Say, what's wrong with you?" he wanted to know. "All morning you been acting sort of strange, like you're mad or something. You nervous about the race?"

Harry forced a small smile. "Yeah, I guess that's it. I'm a little nervous. It'll pass over, though."

The crowds came later in the morning and the races started, accompanied by the grating voice of the announcer over the public address system. But Harry paid little attention to the racing; he had other things to worry about. First and foremost was Lady Sue and how she would take to the slippery, dangerous mud track. It was bad enough with an experienced horse that knew its way around and was accustomed to track noises. But Sue was an unknown and untried quantity, and there was no way to anticipate her possible reaction.

The other matter was Bradcliffe. The stable owner had so far kept his distance, but he would show up sooner or later before the race, and Harry hoped that when the time came he would be able to control himself.

And then it was time to go to the jockeys' room and change to his riding colors. He didn't like the idea of leaving Sue, not for a minute, but it had to be done. But if he found out

that Joe Finch or anyone else had done anything to her he would raise a howl to be heard clear around the sporting world.

Harry recognized some of the jockeys from the old days, and though they shook his hand and said they were glad to see him back, it was obvious that they were not. One or two of the boys, Harry knew from experience, had been in on shady deals in the past. But there was a big difference; they had never even been suspected of anything wrong, and that made them rosy-cheeked children by comparison.

SUE WAS ready and waiting by the time Harry finished changing and weighing-in. Joe Finch was with her, and he took the saddle from Harry and threw it over her back. And Bradcliffe was waiting nearby, over on the gravel where his shoes would not be soiled in the mud.

Harry thought grimly that this was the pay-off. Bradcliffe would lay it on the line, and tell him what had been planned during Grombecker's visit to the farm.

But the stable owner surprised him. He slapped him on the back and smiled. "Give 'em hell out there, boy," he said. "The mud's like soup, but it'll be just as bad for the other mounts."

Harry said, "Yes, sir" dully, and turned back to Sue. He couldn't understand what was happening. Or, he couldn't understand what was *not* happening. He waited for Bradcliffe to call him back.

And he did. He had an envelope in his hand, and he said: "Almost forgot this, Harry. Stick it in your boot. It's for luck."

"Yes, sir," Harry said again. He laughed inwardly, fingering the envelope, and thought: *Luck? Sure—but what kind? The kind I want, or the kind he wants?*

Bradcliffe went back to the stands and Harry raised himself to Sue's back. He couldn't figure it out. Nothing was going according to expectations...unless the answer was in the envelope Bradcliffe had handed him. But rather than look and get

himself upset even more, he stuffed it into one of his boots. Unopened, he thought, it would be good evidence against Bradcliffe if anything unscheduled happened during the race.

When Harry rode slowly past the stands on the way to the starting gate, he searched the boxes for Bradcliffe. And then he saw him—and he had the oily and smooth-looking Paul Grombecker as a guest. A perfect pair!

Lady Sue was frightened by the stall, and the loud noises from the stands and the presence of the strange horses and the soft mud underfoot combined to make her more nervous than usual. She reared up and plunged and fidgeted, and Harry tried to soothe her with soft words.

"Whoa, baby," he whispered into her ear. "It's all right. Take it easy, and we'll show 'em!"

The assistant starters were having trouble with some of the more uncontrollable horses, and they were yanking and pushing and cursing and getting themselves covered with mud. Milk Baby, the three-year-old who had won two out of his last four starts, belied his name and was kicking like a wild stallion. He succeeded in throwing Bill Gates, his rider, who climbed back into the saddle boiling mad and dripping with mud.

In the midst of the turmoil the head starter somehow decided that it was time, and he yelled, "Come on!" and clanged the bell.

HORSES bolted from the stalls, trying to start off too fast in the mud, and they slithered and bumped together and milled around in a crazy free-for-all. Excited, nervous, and unsure of her footing, Lady Sue was as bad as the others. Harry held her back till the reins cut white into his hands, but in her eagerness to show the other horses her heels, she slipped and almost went down.

The melee somehow straightened out and Chuck Williams piloted Alabama into the lead; Milk Baby was hot on her heels, and Bill Gates was already laying the whip across her rump. Steve Olson, on Starlight, was third. There was a gap behind the

three lead horses, and the others, including Lady Sue, who had suffered loss of place from the near-fall, followed in a jumble.

Mud was flying solidly into Harry's face from the hoofs of the other horses, but he didn't want to take the chance and give Lady Sue her head. She was still shaky on the soft mud, and though better than he had expected, he still wanted to let her feel her way for a while.

As they came around the first turn a few of the outsiders fell back, and Sue was on the inside in fifth position, running just a nose behind Daybreak, Phil Johnson up. That was good enough for Harry, for he knew that the filly would sprint the moment he gave her the word.

He thought of Bradcliffe and Grombecker and smiled a mud-heavy smile. They were probably secure in the thought that he had read the instructions in the letter and was following them.

"Brother," he muttered, "will we show those monkeys! Will we show 'em!"

Still pacing smoothly with Daybreak in the backstretch, though with the other horse a bit too close for comfort, Harry let Sue out a bit. But Phil Johnson gave his mount the whip and stayed in position, at the same time moving over so close that the charging horses were separated only by inches.

So this is it! Harry thought, alarmed. Bradcliffe and Grombecker had anticipated that he might not follow instructions, and had bought Johnson to run him into the rails! If anything like that happened, he knew, it would result in pretty serious injury to both himself and Sue.

THERE WAS only one thing to do, and he quickly drew back on the reins again, holding with all his might. Daybreak lunged ahead from the sudden change of pace, and Harry pulled on the outside and let Sue go all-out to pass the other horse.

Now in fourth position as they went into the far turn, Harry grinned again. He had had a bad time there

for a few seconds, but from here on in it would be different. He laughed in triumph, thinking of how he was beating Norman Bradcliffe at his own game!

Sue narrowed the gap between the lead horses before they finished the turn, and as they approached the stretch Harry yelled into her ear: "Let's go, Lady! Give 'em hell! Give 'em hell!"

The command was electrifying to the filly, and a little quiver ran along her spine as she loosened up and let her legs drive with liquid power. She seemed to know that this was the moment she had been training for during those long months at the farm, and there were still three horses to pass.

The full fury of the roaring crowds in the stands now came to Harry, and it was like forgotten but sweet music. They were cheering him in... just as they had in the old days!

Steve Olson heard Sue thundering up, and he laid the whip on Starlight's rump at a faster rate. But the horse was spent, without enough finishing kick to retain her lead; Olson had pushed her too much, too soon. Lady Sue passed on the outside, her hoofs flying and spraying mud.

Just another hundred and fifty yards to go, and only Milk Baby and Alabam' to overtake. It was a cinch, for a natural like Sue!

Milk Baby was only a half length behind the pace-setting Alabam', and Bill Gates was making a bid for it, laying on the whip and screaming at his mount. He was working so hard for first place, that he didn't realize Sue was coming up fast on the outside.

And then it was all over in a rush. Lady Sue won by a good length and a half, and Bill Gates and Chuck Williams were cursing their luck. They couldn't understand it, a rank outsider romping home ahead of horses that were short money every time they ran.

"It's a fake!" Bill Gates called to Harry, forcing a grin. "You pulled a sleeper on us."

Chuck Williams sighed tiredly.

"That's what a guy gets for being too sure," he said.

HARRY felt like a returning hero during the ceremonies, and though Norman Bradcliffe was there, beaming over the officials, the little jockey decided it would be better to hold his anger for a few minutes.

Then, when they were free of the crowd and Joe Finch had taken Lady Sue away from a limbering walk, he said heatedly: "Maybe that will teach you a couple of things now, and you know what you can do with them!"

Bradcliffe frowned and said: "What are you talking about, Harry? I want you to stay in my stable, and I want you to ride Sue on every start. You make a wonderful team!"

This was something Harry had not expected. He had thought that Bradcliffe would be angry, when it was so obvious he had wanted Sue out of the money.

"Yeah?" he said sharply. "Then how come you wanted us to lose so bad? Having Grombecker out at the farm and here in your....that dirty business Phil Johnson tried to pull...that letter you gave me before the race. It don't add up, Bradcliffe. You better think up another story and pull it on somebody else."

The stable owner's frown deepened. "My Gawd, Harry!" he said. "You think everybody's against you, and you're just building up a circumstantial case! I was watching Johnson through my glasses, and what happened out there wasn't his fault. Daybreak veered over like that by herself, and I certainly didn't have anything to do with it!"

"And about Grombecker"—he smiled ruefully—"well, I told you I was a business man. I wanted to keep the odds high, and I knew that if Grombecker was in my box a lot of people would think something was up and not buy tickets on Sue. Grombecker still doesn't know why I invited him to sit with me!"

Harry thought about it. It stacked up all right, but he was still doubtful. The only question remaining was that of the envelope in his boots, and Bradcliffe answered it immediately.

"You should have opened that little token I gave you for luck," he said. "Then you wouldn't have had any doubts at all. There are two twenty-dollar win tickets on Sue in the envelope." He thumped the bewildered jockey on the back and laughed. "Better go cash them in," he advised, "before the window closes."

THE END

COBRA MAN HAS A HEART

THE GRUNT-and-groan game probably never "built up" a more terrifying "villain" than Manjo Singh with his cobra hold, far-off India's gift to professional wrestling. He is hated by wrestling show audiences—which, of course, is just what is expected of him—and is excellent box office. He was also hated by his fellow grapplers, and that didn't hurt the box office any either, until about five years ago.

"Hardly a wrestler would speak to him when he first came to this country from India. They didn't like the hold he was using either. A lot of us thought it was a phoney, until he put us to sleep. But what sold Singh as a high-class fellow was something that happened in Toronto

about five years ago. One of the main-event wrestlers was injured in an automobile accident. There had to be a substitution.

"Singh volunteered and put on a terrific show. That night he went to the hospital to visit the wrestler hurt in the accident. 'Here,' he said, 'is your purse from the main event.' It was \$975. How do I happen to know the story?"

"I was the wrestler in the hospital. And about that time I needed the money. Singh wouldn't take a cent; he asked me to keep quiet and tell no one about what he did. But how can you keep quiet and let everyone think he's strictly a heel outside the ring as well as inside?"

John Winters Fleming



If At First



by ROBERT SYDNEY BOWEN



Benny Holden knew that his players were off — something held them back, kept them from giving that little extra which wins the tough ones. But there wouldn't be any excuse for him if the Owls flopped this year. And he had to gamble with stakes that would ruin the team completely if he lost.

IT WAS a grass cutter toward the hole between third and short. The Bison runner leading off second guessed that it would go through and lighted out for the corner sack. But the ball did not go through short-stop Red Fallon; he lunged over for it, juggled it a moment before he found the handle, then pivoted and rifled toward first. The throw was wide, however, and the Owl first baseman had to lean toward the runner. As a result the ball, base runner, and first

sacker all met at the same time; each bounced in a different direction.

The Bison runner rounding third went on to score and even up the game at three apiece. And then players on the field, and from both benches, went rushing over to first. The ball lay dead two feet from the bag, and the two players lay as though dead, too. But presently Parker, the runner, got slowly to his feet and began to walk around. Harris, the Owl first baseman, did not get up; he couldn't because his right leg was broken between the ankle and the knee.

When play was resumed there was a pinch-runner for Parker, and a utility infielder at Harris' place at first. The score was still three all, there were still two down, and it was still the last of the ninth. But when the Bison hitter swung at the very first pitch and belted it to deep left and off the wall, it was all changed, and also all finished. The Bison runner scored from first, and that made it the fifth loss out of the last five for the Owls.

With something akin to murder in his heart Benny Holden, manager of the Owls, stood by the dugout steps and watched his players come shuffling off the field. When Red Fallon came abreast Holden reached out and stopped him.

"Ever hear about going for the front man?" he snapped.

Fallon's eyes crackled as he nodded. "Yeah!" he bit off. "But with Lacey a mile from the bag you wanted I should throw it into their dugout?"

The Owl third baseman was right behind, and he heard. He grabbed Fallon and swung him around. "What do you mean, a mile?" he shouted. "I was standing on it, you blind bum!"

Fallon bristled, and then somebody in the dugout snarled. "Aw pipe down, you lunkheads! You can't win 'em after the umps have left!"

Fallon and Lacey glared at the speaker, glared at each other, and then shuffled muttering down the dugout steps. Benny Holden sighed, gave a weary shake of his head, and followed them down.

THAT NIGHT the Owls entrained for Newton and their home

park. And at ten o'clock the next morning Benny Holden entered the downtown office of Mark Pratt, president and sole owner of the Owl Baseball Club. Pratt greeted him with a curt nod, an unintelligible grunt, and a half wave toward one of several deep leather chairs. Benny sank into it, and gestured.

"Go ahead, say it!" he grunted. "The worst road trip this year; I'm admitting it."

"How about admitting what's wrong with that bunch of numbskulls, supposed to be ball players?" Pratt snapped.

"I wish I could!" Holden sighed. "Can't even guess what's eating them, lately. They're a bunch of spoiled brats; each one blaming somebody else for his boner. It's got me."

"Speaking of bones," the Club owner said, "how long will Harris be out?"

"Rest of the season," Benny said sadly. "The reason I'm here. We either get a good first baseman quick, or we finish out of the first division."

Mark Pratt nodded absently, and scowled at the big black cigar he held unlighted in his hand. "Anybody in mind?" he asked suddenly.

Benny hesitated and then sort of squared his shoulders. "I saw a kid in Salt Lake, when we were held over there by that train wreck," he said. "playing for the Beavers. Old Chick Haines manages them now. The kid was good. Chick told me he got him for peanuts, right out of one of those small town colleges."

"So?" Pratt echoed. "And how many peanuts would he cost us?"

"Fifty thousand," Benny said quietly.

Mark Pratt started violently, and unconsciously snapped the big black cigar in two.

"Fifty thousand?" he yelled. "You're nuts!"

"No," Benny shook his head. "In a couple of years some club will have to pay Chick a hundred grand; right now we can get him for half."

"Isn't that nice?" the Club owner snarled. "Who is he? Frank Chance? Or maybe Bill Terry?"

"William Clarke Jefferson, to give you all of it," Benny replied. "Twen-

ty last month. Stands six-two, and built. Throws and hits left. He got four for four the day I watched. So he's a kid, and kids get better."

Pratt didn't appear to be listening. He was scowling down at the two broken halves of his big black cigar. Benny Holden moved a little nervously in his chair.

"He's good, and we could certainly use him," he said.

"Sure, for *only* fifty grand!" Pratt snapped, looking up. "You think we're the Yankees? Or maybe I'm Tom Yawkey of the Red Sox?"

Holden shrugged, sighed, and got to his feet. "Okay," he grunted. "I'll wire around and see if..."

"Sit down!" the Club Owner barked. And as Benny did, "Until this last trip we were going nice for the pennant. I still want it. You honestly believe this kid will help us get the flag, Benny?"

The Owls' manager grinned a little crookedly, and gestured. "If he doesn't then I don't know the answer," he said simply. "But it's up to you."

"I don't know that?" Pratt cracked. Then seeming to sag, "Okay, Benny, make the deal. But you better pray every night he'll be worth the dough!"

A few minutes later out in the hall Benny Holden leaned against the wall, and drew a hand across his moist brow.

"Brother, you don't know the half of what *I'll* be praying for every night!" he whispered hoarsely.

WILLIAM Clarke Jefferson was a nice enough kid to meet. He had good looks, poise, pep, and a lot of moxie. If he had one bad fault it was his rather high opinion of Bill Jefferson as a ball player. He had left the Beavers with a point-nine-two-six fielding average, and point-three-two-one for hitting. Both percentages were close to the top in the Rocky Mountain League. Also, players were not purchased for fifty thousand from that circuit every day in the week.

So perhaps its understandable why Jefferson's hat was fitting him just a little tight when he reported to the Owls three days after Harris' accident. And what made his hat even

tighter were a couple of columns written about him by ball scribes in the local papers. If you believed what they wrote, Jefferson was just about the greatest find since Babe Ruth. And his signing of an Owl contract just about assured the pennant for Mark Pratt's club.

When he appeared in uniform at the park Benny Holden talked with him a few minutes, then introduced him to the rest of the team, and then left him to be on his own. He was, just that. The Owl regulars had not liked what they'd read in the morning papers, and they seemed to like less what they saw. All of which didn't bother Bill Jefferson in the slightest. After loosening up a bit he selected a bat and went out to join the others at the batting cage. When it came his turn to take his five cuts, a pronounced silence settled over the group to be broken almost immediately by Red Fallon's mocking voice. "Oh, gee! Our fifty-grand wonder. I sure don't want to miss this!"

Ears closed to the snickers and chucklers, the youngster stepped in and belted four straight pitches to the deep, deep outfield, and the fifth clean out of the park. Backing away from the plate he grinned at Fallon, and made a little gesture. "Your turn, old timer," he said pleasantly, but with just the right amount of emphasis.

The veteran short-stop glared at him for a moment, and then stepped up to the plate. And without any apparent effort he promptly whaled all five pitches out of the park. Right after him Tip Lacey clouted four for the distance, and one that would be good for three bases in any park. And right after Lacey, Lou Levine, the Owls second baseman, did exactly the same thing. By then the grin had faded from Bill Jefferson's face. He seemed to be occupied with counting the house that had come to watch the first of three between the fourth placed Owls and the second placed Lions.

Half an hour later the game got underway and, as though feeling a little sorry for the rookie, Lady Luck smiled upon Jefferson right after the

grand. Your wonder boy has only to make good for forty nine thousand, now."

"He will!" Holden snapped as anger shot through him.

"Fine!" Pratt murmured, giving him a keen look. "But we're still six out of first place. The Eagles won today, too."

Benny tried to check his words, but his worries and his anger were too much for him. "So what?" he cracked. "By the first of the month we'll be where the Eagles are!"

Mark Pratt's eyes went slightly wide, and he gave his manager a long, hard look. "You're keeping secrets from me, Benny?" he presently asked softly.

"Secrets, nuts!" the manager bit off and walked toward his private shower. "Anybody with a couple of good eyes can get the picture!"

And as though for emphasis he slammed the shower door shut on the last.

THE NEXT day the animosity of the Owl regulars toward the new rookie was more pronounced than ever. And the reason was not exactly the kid's fault. It was because of what the ball scribes had written of his first appearance in an Owl uniform. The headline of one story summed it all up. It read... "*Rookie Owl Shows up Regular in Debut.*" It didn't make nice reading for Fallon, and Lacey, and Levine, and some of the others. But it did make nice reading for Bill Jefferson, and helped considerably to make him forget the muscle aches and pains that still lingered twenty four hours later.

But not for very long was he able to forget them. Right with the first pitch of the game Fallon, and company, went to work on him. And more so than they had done the day before. But once again the kid took it, and fought back in the only way he knew how. And that was with his bat. Whenever he stepped into the batter's box he let loose with his pent up anger toward the injustices being committed against him. And that was very fine for the Owl team. His four straight hits for the day accounted

for three of the Owls four runs. And that was just two more runs than the scrappy Lions had been able to collect by the time the last out in the ninth had been made.

Two straight for the Owls, and the very next day they swept the series to make it three straight. A day of rest, muchly welcomed by Bill Jefferson, and then the fifth placed Hawks came to town for four. A couple of ball scribes put it in their morning columns that now that the Owls had Bill Jefferson at first, the Hawks would be bumping into a ball team such as they had not bumped into all season. Perhaps the Hawk players read that and got sore. Anyway, they played their heads off in the series opener, but it wasn't good enough. Led by Jefferson's booming bat, and almost flawless work afield, the Owls knocked them down with a five to one score.

They did it again the next day six to two. And with that win the Owls climbed over the backs of the Lions to take second place, and only two games out of first place. Benny Holden was a very pleased guy, but he was also worried; the silent, undercover feud between Jefferson and Fallon and company was beginning to tell on the rookie. He began to look dog tired even the first thing in the morning. He also began to look like a kid who was eating his heart out with loneliness. And he had good cause to be lonely, too. Out of the entire Owl squad there were no more than a couple of players who bothered to speak to him, unless it was absolutely necessary. Not even the daily raves he got in the local sports pages could ease up his fatigue, and his loneliness any more.

In short, the kid was fast approaching the point where he would crack wide open under the constant strain and pressure caused by Fallon and company. Not being blind Holden noticed the tell tale signs, and they caused him much worry and wonder. He had made a long shot gamble with fifty thousand dollars of Pratt's money. If he lost, he knew perfectly well that come Fall when his two year contract expired he would have to go

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looking for another job. Pratt was that kind of a club owner. He gave his manager a complete free hand, but that manager made good...or else.

BENNY HOLDEN worried, and wondered, and, also, he hesitated; then after the third game that the Owls took from the Hawks, and drew up to within a full game of the seemingly slipping Eagles, Holden suddenly found the young rookie waiting for him as he came out of his dressingroom office. The other players, trainers, and rubbers, had gone. Only the kid remained. He got up slowly from his locker bench when Holden came out of his office. "Can I have a few words with you, Mr. Holden?" he asked.

The manager gave him a sharp, and slightly alarmed look, and gestured for the two of them to sit down on the bench.

"Sure thing, son" he said gently. "What's on your mind?"

For a moment Bill Jefferson didn't speak. He frowned down at the cement floor as though he would find there the words he wanted to use.

"I want to be sold back to the Beavers," he suddenly blurted out.

"Sold back?" Holden echoed sharply. "Why you're doing fine with us, Jefferson. Just fine!"

"Sure, and slowly getting my brains knocked out!" the youngster retorted harshly. "Practically every player on the squad hates my guts. And they've been giving me the works ever since I joined. Well, I've had enough! What *does* a guy have to do on this team anyway, to make friends? Get a homer every time up?"

A whole lot of words suddenly rushed to Holden's lips, but he held them back. He had been half hoping for a meeting such as this, and he had to be very careful if he wanted it to come out his way. "Ever hear that eye-for-an-eye line, son?" he asked quietly.

The youngster stared at him, blinked, and then nodded. "Sure I have! So what?"

"So just that," Holden replied with

a gesture. "When somebody gives you the works, give it right back with some to spare."

"You think I've been trying to strike out, every time I went to the plate?" the kid bit off. "You think I haven't been busting a gut to hang on to their lousey throws?"

"You've been playing as good ball as anybody on the team." Holden said sincerely. Then after a moment's pause, "But that isn't what I mean. When one of them gives you the works, the very next chance you get give *him* some of the same. See what I mean?"

Young Bill Jefferson was silent for so long Holden thought he hadn't even heard. Then a knowing light slowly crawled into the kid's eyes, and his broad shoulders went back a little.

"Yeah, that is an angle I hadn't thought of," he murmured as though to himself. "Give them some of the same. That I will love to do!"

"There's just one thing," Benny said with a note of caution. "Do anything that costs us the game, and you'll have me on your neck, too. But hard! Just let them know that you can dish it out as well as take it. Maybe that, and a couple of other things, will make difference."

The knowing light glowing even brighter in his eyes, Jefferson got to his feet and slapped his snap brim on his head.

"Yeah, maybe," he grunted. "It's worth a whirl, anyway, to see. Thanks."

And with a quick nod the youngster hurried out of the locker-room. Holden sat where he was for a couple of minutes longer, then got slowly to his feet, with not such a terribly happy look on his face "If I've overplayed the thing," he groaned softly, "I sure am going to find it out from here on in. Yeah, and maybe a quick switch will help a little."

With a quick nod for emphasis the Owl's manager hurried back into his office and grabbed up the phone.

THE NEXT DAY was the final of the four with the Hawks. And because of their sudden surging sprint

IF AT FIRST

toward the league lead the Owl park was filled to the last seat a good half hour before game time. Down on the diamond the visitors were just winding up their infield practice, while the Owls, with the exception of the day's selected battery, were taking it easy in the dugout and in front of it. Sitting by himself, Bill Jefferson watched the visitors go through their paces, but he was thinking of various other things. That's why Fallon had to repeat the words before they penetrated the rookie's conscious brain.

"I wonder if our hero will win for us again today?"

Jefferson half turned and looked over to where Fallon, Lacey, and Levine were squatted together by the bat rack. He grinned and shook his head.

"Not today, pals," he said easily. "Today it will be up to you guys, believe me!"

Fallon scowled, and looked puzzled. "Yeah?" he growled.

Without waiting for further comment the rookie went up out of the dugout and over to where Haynes was finishing with his warm up pitches. Fallon, Lacey, and Levine, stared after him with more perplexity than anger in their eyes. And a little later when the Owls trotted out onto the field to start the game, Bill Jefferson deliberately went over to first by way of third, short, and second. And as he trotted by each man at his position he winked and grinned broadly.

Savagely determined to grab off at least one out of the four, the Hawks went right after Hayne's offerings hammer and tongs. The first Hawk up whacked the very first pitch for a clean single to left. The second Hawk was first ball hitting, too. He connected but it was a slow hopper well to the right of the pitcher's mound. Already on his way in, in case the play was a bunt, Bill dashed over to his right and speared the ball. In practically the same movement he spun and threw the short distance to Levine covering second with every ounce of his strength.

The kid's throw was a white bullet
(Continued On Page 90)

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 89)

that arrived bag high and with a wicked hook to it. Levine had to lunge a little and grab it mostly with his bare right hand. He made the force-out but he was unable to regain his balance in time to peg to first. The Hawk coming down from first helped out with that, too. He slid into the bag like a run-away tank and dumped Lou Levine on his ear. Jefferson chuckled audibly as the second baseman got slowly to his feet.

Levine went beet red, and his lips moved, but he didn't say anything out loud. Still grinning at him Jefferson backed over to first to hold the runner close to the bag. The third Hawk hitter obviously had his instructions, too. He slashed at the first offering and also connected. A whole lot sharper than the hitter before him, too. It was a screaming grass cutter toward the right side hole. Bill Jefferson was off for it like a flash. So was Levine, as Fallon raced over to cover second.

IN A BEAUTIFUL stop that brought the fans to their feet, the rookie knocked the ball down, grabbed the handle, and once again ripped a wicked hook toward Fallon's toes on second. The veteran short-stop nailed it, and missed being dumped by the runner sliding in. But he had no chance for the throw to Haynes who had dashed over to cover first. Juggling the ball in his right hand that must have felt full of wasp stings, Fallon walked onto the infield grass glaring at Jefferson.

"Get your pegs up!" he bit off.

Jefferson stared at him in surprise. "What's the matter, Old Timer?" he murmured innocently. "Don't you like to play with me, huh?"

"Maybe you'd like a clout on the nose?" Fallon grated.

"Maybe I would!" the rookie said tight lipped and started walking toward him.

Sudden dumbfounded surprise blotted out the red anger in Fallon's face. The short-stop stared at the advancing rookie for a brief instant, then snorted, tossed the ball toward the

IF AT FIRST

waiting Haynes, and went back to his position. A second later Jefferson stopped and went back to his position, too.

As though Lady Luck was completely on Bill Jefferson's side, now, the Hawk batter rapped a high bouncer well to the right of the pitcher's mound. As before, the rookie darted in and snagged the ball. And as before he spun and rifle hooked the ball to Levine covering second. And as before the second baseman had to take most of it on his meat hand. This time, though, he did succeed in not being dumped on his ear. He rolled the ball toward the mound and ran over to Jefferson.

"Look, brat!" he breathed fiercely. "You want trouble?"

The rookie met his look, and nodded. "Yes, if you guys do!" he said evenly.

And leaving the second baseman to mull that over Jefferson turned away and trotted over to the dugout. Benny Holden didn't look at the kid as he clomped down the cement steps. But he did take a good look when Fallon and Levine passed him on the way to the water cooler. What he saw in their faces caused him to smile inwardly.

As though piqued by the Hawk first ball hitting against their ace pitcher, the Owls went after the visiting moundsman with a vengeance. And by the time the third out had been made they had three big runs in the bank.

IN THE first half of the second the Owl infield just wasn't in the ball game, so to speak. After his slightly rough start Haynes pitched very carefully, and with very nice results. He struck out the first two men, and made the third hit a lazy fly that was promptly gobbled up by the right fielder. And then to keep the merry-go-round spinning the Owls knocked the Hawk pitcher out of the box and added four more to their run bank.

It was in the first of the third when Fallon and company had their chance to pay a little back. But for some reason or other, they didn't seem to take advantage of it. The first two Hawks

(Continued On Page 92)

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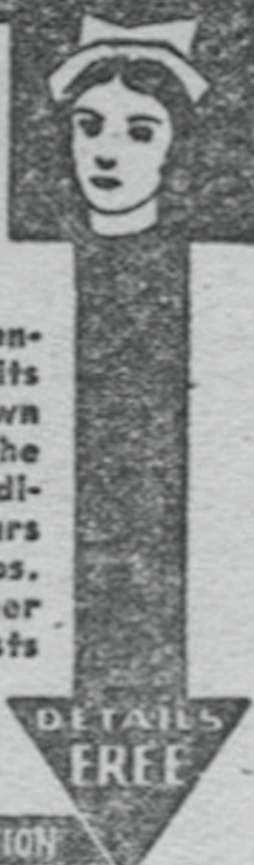


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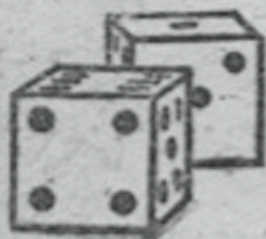
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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 91)

hit to the left side. Fallon grabbed them both, but both throws were dead center to Jefferson on first. He could have caught them in his pocket. The third out was a high towering fly back of first that looked like it was going three rows back in the stands. Racing over the rookie went skidding into the box railing, but he managed to shoot out his glove, grab the ball, and hold it. The fans really gave him a cheer for that one, and several of the Owl players grinned and nodded their approval when he reached the dugout.

The Owls got nothing but a goose egg in their half. And that's the way it was for both teams for the next three innings. But Bill Jefferson did not let up for an instant. Three times he had the chance to rip the ball in at Levine on second. And twice he had the opportunity to do the same thing against Fallon. But be it said, the veterans "took it" and didn't squawk. Neither did they pull any funny stuff when they gobbled up grounders and threw to first. In short, they were getting some of the same, much to their surprise, and it was giving them food for thought.

And then the balloon went up right after the third out in the first half of the seventh. The Hawks had a man on first, and their batter in the box cracked to the right side. It was Jefferson's ball and he gobbled it up. Although he had plenty of time to whirl and toss to Haynes who had loped over to the initial sack. he whirled the other way and rifled it to second where Fallon was covering. It was the fastest peg he had ever made, and as luck would have it, with a terrific corkscrew twist.

It took a great player to snare that ball and make the force out. And Fallon was great enough to do it. But he came up out of the dirt shaking his right hand, and then minutely examining all five fingers. When he saw that he still had five he rolled the ball toward the mound and walked over to Jefferson. And so did Lou Levine, and Tip Lacey.

"Look, kid," Fallon said as a slightly sick smile tugged at the corners of

IF AT FIRST

his mouth, "maybe we were wrong about you. What do you say?"

"Nothing," the rookie replied and stared at Lacey. "I haven't had a chance to peg to third, yet."

"Aw, skip it!" Lacey growled. "Red said we were wrong, and he's right; if we keep this up, somebody's going to get really hurt. Look, kid, what do you say we all shake, huh? We all got other things to think about."

"Check!" Levine echoed with a faint grin. "Me, I got to think about my hands. They're my only meal ticket."

"What do you say?" Fallon spoke up. "We call it off? We got to think of the team. Its going places, but good!"

Bill Jefferson hesitated, stared hard at each man in turn, and then grinned slowly. "Suits me fine!" he said quietly. "The way I've wanted it since the day I joined."

"Well, you've got it now, boy!" Fallon chuckled, and clapped him on the shoulder. "Let's go."

FALLON was, and his feeling was correct. He scored a run, and so did six other Owls before their half of the inning was over. In the dug-out Benny Holden sat hugging himself, and with all of his fingers *uncrossed*. And when the scoreboard in left center suddenly showed that Eagle-Lion game had been rained out after three scoreless innings the Owl manager felt like a man given life all over again.

The next day was the last day of the month. It was the big one for the Owls, and three very important things took place. The first was what appeared in the morning sports pages about the game the day before. For the first time since his joining the club Bill Jefferson, and his diamond deeds, were not featured. In fact, he got hardly any mention at all. Most

(Continued On Page 98)



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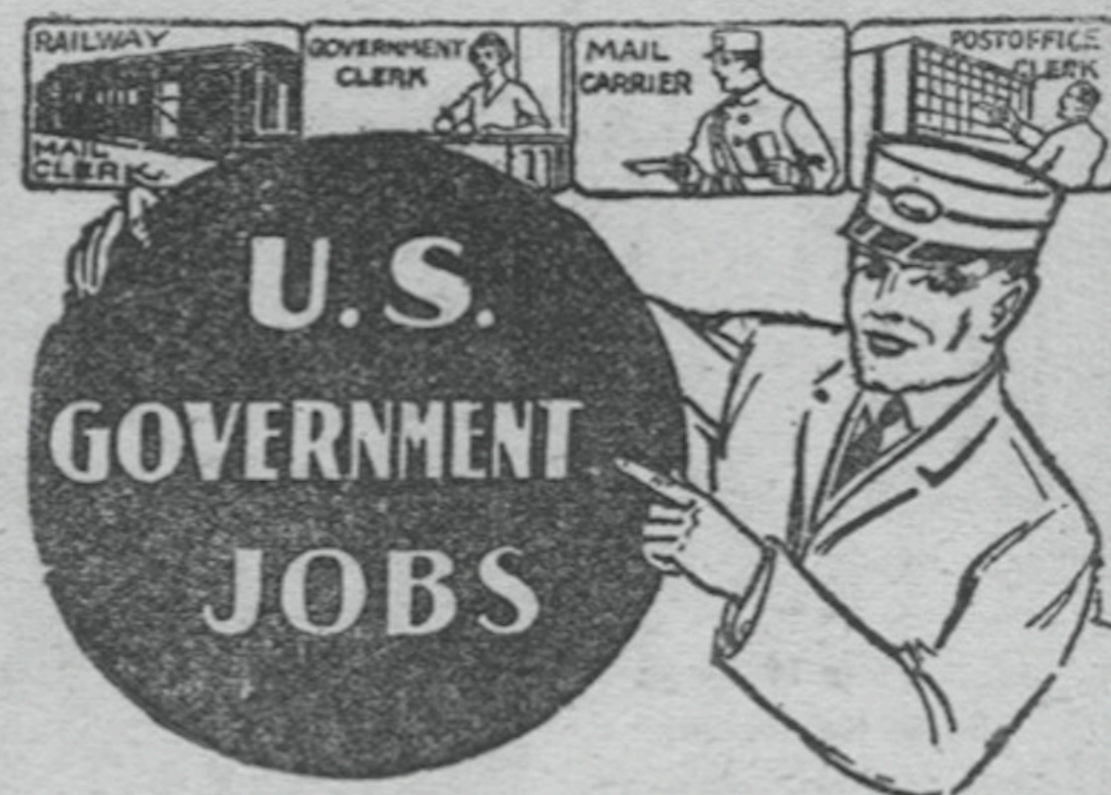
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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 54)

"What's the dope behind your sudden switch?" clamored the reporters. Ramsey shrugged. "I figured the Bruins had gotten timed to Munn's speedball and would be off balance for Ganzer's slow stuff. I couldn't use Jones or Kenton because I might have had to lift them for a pinch hitter our half of the inning. So I decided on Ganzer to finish up the fifth."

He scratched his head. "After seeing him retire the batter on just one pitch, I got a hunch to string along with him an inning or so. After all, Rube pitched two days ago and Jones can only go one of two innings. And you know the rest."

"How about that, Goose?" yelled the reporters. "What you feed those Bruins? Were you surprised you made out so well?"

"Heck no!" snapped Ganzer. "I just was surprised when Ramsey put me in. I've been working all summer on my pitching stuff and knew I'd make good if I got the chance."

"You convinced me," said Ramsey. "And you'll get plenty more chances next year."

He shooed the reporters out, thanked the club for their fighting finish, then called Ganzer into his office and handed him a folded rectangle of paper. Ganzer stared at it. It was a check for three thousand, five hundred dollars.

Ramsey said, "I put the pressure on my source of information. He admitted it was Munn, not you who owed those IOU's. I checked with Munn and he admitted it readily enough. That's your money back. Munn will make good to the club next year."

Ramsey waved a dismissing hand and Ganzer started out the door. Ramsey called after him, "And anytime you get tired pitching, we can always use a good pitching coach. Munn recommended you when he found out you paid up his IOU's."

Ganzer stuck the check into his pocket and walked into the clubhouse with a big grin on his face.

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SPORTS FICTION

(Continued From Page 41)

KLEMPNER was dragged back to his corner, and Hank Charlton's gloved mitt was raised in token of victory. Then Whip led the way for his fighter back up the aisle toward their dressingroom.

The closed door blocked out some of the clamor. Hi Skellen, one of them now—one of the Secret Trio—willing to hold his story forever if need be, joined in their elation. An elation that was squelched by the crochety voice which all three knew by now, that of Father O'Malley as it suddenly issued from a corner of the room.

"A splendid victory," the priest said levelly as he came forward. "Splendid!" He held a congratulatory hand out to his curate.

"Thanks, Father." They shook.

"Nevertheless," the elderly little priest went on, eyeing all three of them, "I will have to report to my superiors, of course. The report will be in the nature of a request. A request for guidance in this matter. I cannot make the decision myself."

The room felt as if an Icelandic wind had just swept through it. None of them said anything; they just stood there, waiting, looking at the little black-frocked man.

"It will take some time to write such a report, of course," Father O'Malley continued, "for it must be framed correctly, in fairness to all. It will be sent to my Bishop who will, I am sure, study it and pass the missive along through channels to the Cardinal. Ultimately a reply, will be made and returned through channels—perhaps censuring me, perhaps not." Father O'Malley paused, gazed from one to the other of them. The room was very quiet, only Hank Charlton's breath, still coming hard from the exertion of the bout, making sound.

The little priest walked across to the door. "What with the channels it must pass through the decision should arrive, I judge, about the middle—of July. Goodnight, gentlemen."

He opened the door, went through. The door reopened, bursting upon the happy back-thumping of those within. "Mr. Malone...."

"Yes, Father?"

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"You won't mind if in my report I use what you said about the Lord being in our corner?" The elderly, wrinkled face broke into a warm smile. "It might help, you know, with some superior who might not understand fisticuffs too well."

The door closed, for good this time, to leave the ecstatic Secret Trio to themselves until the members of the Fourth Estate, complete with photographers, arrived to do the story on the "foreigner" who might be the next heavyweight champion of the world.

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(Continued From Page 93)

of the nice words were directed toward the field play, and hitting, of Fallon, Lacey, and Levine.

The next big event of the day was a twin bill between the Owls and the sixth placed Ravens. Playing airtight, machine gun fire ball, the Owls took both ends of the double header in a romp.

And the third big event was the one that was strictly tops. While the Owls took two from the Ravens, the league leading Eagles dropped one to the Lions. As a result, when dusk descended upon Newton that evening the Owls were up there on top of the heap by a full game.

Later that night Mark Pratt called on Holden, in the Owl manager's hotel suite. The club owner was beaming, and as tickled as a kid with his first real ball and glove.

"I tip my hat, Benny!" he cried as he came in. "You certainly called the turn about being up there the first of the month. And as for your wonder boy, he's worth every dollar of the fifty grand you paid for him!"

Holden smiled and reached for a pipe, his only vice.

"I didn't exactly pay fifty grand for Jefferson," he said quietly.

"What?" Pratt gasped. "You didn't pay...?"

"Oh, sure, sure!" Benny Holden waved him down. "Chick Haines got your check all right. But it was for more than just a kid rookie. It was, you might say, for a whole new infield. Practically a whole new team. And a very sweet and cheap buy it turned out, too!"

"Wait a minute!" the Club owner exploded. "You're not making sense! What the devil are you raving about, anyway?"

"It was like this," Holden said easily, and stuffed his pipe. "I suddenly had a bunch of prima donna brats, clawing up each other's back. Then Harris broke his leg. I remembered the first base kid I'd seen in Saint Paul. A very cocky, I-show-them youngster, but with plenty of moxie to back it all up. Chick wanted fifty grand. I decided it was worth it if I could use him two ways. Well, it

worked out as I had planned, and what I mean, *hoped!* The kid's cockiness, and his press notices, rubbed the boys the wrong way; they forgot their private feud and started to give him the works."

The Owls' manager paused and smiled down at the pipe he held in his hand. "To tell the truth, it turned out even better than I had hoped," he murmured presently. "The kid proved he really was fit for the big time. That he did have all kinds of moxie, and twice as much guts. He started giving a few of the boys the works, and in yesterday's game they saw the light. Now, everything is ducky. We're on top, and there we'll stay. But there's one little string to that deal that hasn't been taken care of yet."

"No?" Mark Pratt echoed, as his eyes became sharp and crafty.

"The matter of a couple of cases of scotch," Benny Holden grinned at him.

"Two cases of scotch?" Pratt exclaimed with relief. "Why certainly! I'll have them sent to your... Wait a minute! I didn't know you drank, Benny?"

"I don't," the manager chuckled. "But a couple of my ball scribe friends do. You think Jefferson got those press stories because he deserved them? Heck, no! They were simply to feed the fire under Fallon, and Levine, and a few others, and keep it burning brightly. Last night I told my two friends to relax; the job was done. So now I owe them each the case of scotch I promised."

"And they'll be delivered first thing in the morning," Pratt chuckled. "That was clever, Benny. It was damn clever all the way around!"

"Oh, it wasn't anything any smart manager wouldn't have thought up," Benny murmured and lighted his pipe.

Mark Pratt didn't say anything to that. Perhaps he was secretly wondering just how smart Holden would be come Fall when his contract came up for renewal. The Owls' owner would find out...then!

THE END

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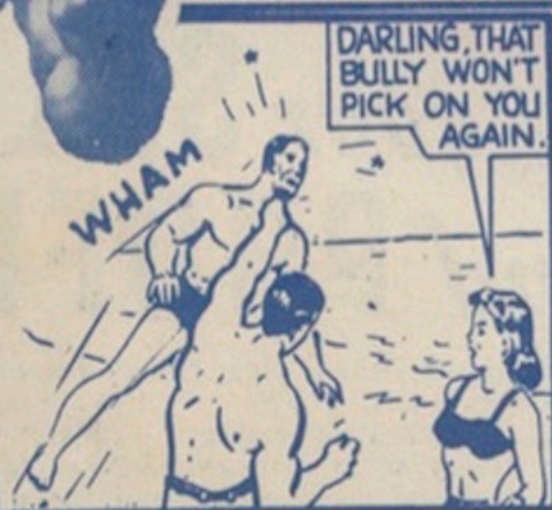
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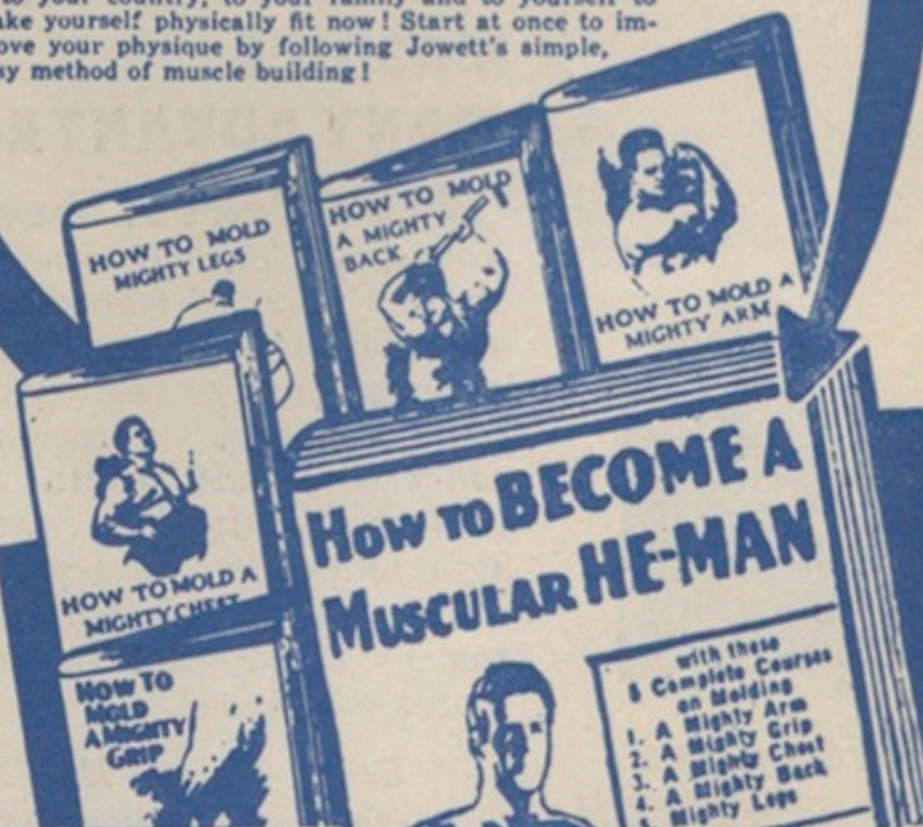


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