

THRILLING SPORTS

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May, 1948

Featured Baseball Novelet

YOU CAN'T BEAT CLASS

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



Young Barry Nolon of the Beavers was the team's mystery man—and he kept right on puzzling everybody until that all-important, crucial, final game! 11

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The SIDELINE



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BASEBALL, as almost everyone knows, is a game where anything can and, sooner or later, does happen. But what happened to pitching in the American League last year should not have happened to a whole pack of thoroughbred beagles, bassets or other pedigreed hunting pooches.

Of recent seasons, canny observers of the so-called National Game had begun to hold the long-vaunted mound superiority of the older circuit as a hollow and rhomboid myth. With pitchers like Feller, Newhouser, Trout, Chandler, Newsom, Hughson and Ferriss, to list only the top headliners, the American League was truly showing the way.

Then came 1947 and the deluge. If there is any answer for the fact of the Yankees winning the pennant and championship, it lies in the emergence of two stars for one on the hill for the New Yorkers, with Shea and Allie Reynolds stepping in to take up double slack when Spud Chandler's arm went bad.

Way Off Form

Boston and Detroit were rated one-two in the pre-season speculation squarely because of supposedly strong staffs. But the Beantowners lost Mickey Harris, a 1946 17-game winner, via pneumonia even before the season opened. He took a long time recovering strength and put in only a few late-season appearances, compiling a lean 5-and-4 record. Ferriss, who won 21 and 25 in the two previous seasons, couldn't seem to get started and wound up with a 12-and-11 record. Hughson, another 20-game winner, came in with the same set of totals.

If Joe Dobson hadn't come up with an 18-and-8 season the Sox would have fallen into the second division.

Detroit had similar troubles, Hal Newhouser, perhaps the ace of the league, had a wretched time compiling a .500 average with 17 games won and 17 lost. Hutchinson held up with 18-and-10, but none of the other hurlers, including Houtteman, Trout, Gorsica, Hal White and Al Benton, managed to complete 10 full games.

Cleveland had its troubles, with Feller alone completing 10 games and emerging as

the league's only 20-game winner. The Browns got the worst pitching in the circuit and the White Sox, save for Ed Lopat showed little. Washington, on the other hand, got some good hurling from Wynn, Master-son and Heafner, but Scarborough, Ferrick and Candini slipped badly and the Senators stayed out of the running.

The surprise of the American League season on the positive side was the climb of 85-year-old Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics to a first-division slot—for the first time in fourteen lean years. Experts, viewing a line-up of castoffs and never-wasers with suspicion, suspected Connie of using mirrors in his famous scorecard.

Actually, the job was done by pitching. Phil Marchildon, with his 19-and-9 record, had a magnificent season with a light-hitting club, and Dick Fowler and young Bill McCahan had fine seasons, backed by Russ Christopher, Bill Dietrich, Flores, Savage and Coleman. So Connie's climb is not so much of a mystery after all.

But by and large the Junior Circuit was way off form. It's earned run average, at 3.71 per nine innings pitched, was good, but in 11,076 innings American League hurlers pitched to 42,002 batsmen, gave up 10,739 hits, 5,161 runs, 4,560 earned runs, 719 sacrifice hits, 4,745 bases on balls, struck out 4,633, hit 132 batsmen, made 190 wild pitches and committed 25 balks.

National League Showing

Against this the National League compiled an earned run average of 4.15 per nine innings, faced 47,434 batsmen in 10,960 innings, gave up 5,666 runs, 5,048 earned runs, 687 sacrifice hits, 4,476 bases on balls, struck out 4,529, hit 185 batsmen, made 205 wild pitches and committed 26 balks. Not much difference save in bases on balls in favor of the older circuit, you say?

Actually, where the National League made its real showing was in the upper brackets. Save for the members of the Cardinal staff, who seemed to become afflicted with the same blight that struck American League head-

(Continued on page 8)



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THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 6)

liners, their big guns came through in fine style.

Ewell Blackwell of the Reds went 22-and-8, Spahn and Johnny Sain of the Braves each won 21 while losing 10 and 12, respectively, and Rookie Jansen of the Giants crashed through with a splendid 21-and-5 to lead the league in percentage of won and lost. The older circuit had five 20-game winners to the American League's one—Bobby Feller—as Brooklyn's Ralph Branca breezed home with a 21-12 record to match Sain's.

Then there were other good seasons in the Senior Organization. For Philadelphia there were old Emil Leonard with a fine 17-and-12 and the Unschoolboyish Rowe with 14-and-10. For Brooklyn, Taylor went 10-and-5, Hatten did 17-and-8 and, among those who did not pitch 10 complete games, Lombardi went 12-and-11 and the reliable Hugh Casey 10-and-4.

Brechen and Munger hurled well for the hapless Cardinals, both winning 16 and losing 11 and 5 games, respectively. Al Brazle had a 14-and-8 record and Jim Hearn went 12-and-7. But Murry Dickson, Howie Pollet, Ted Wilks and Ken Burkhart failed miserably.

Good Pitching

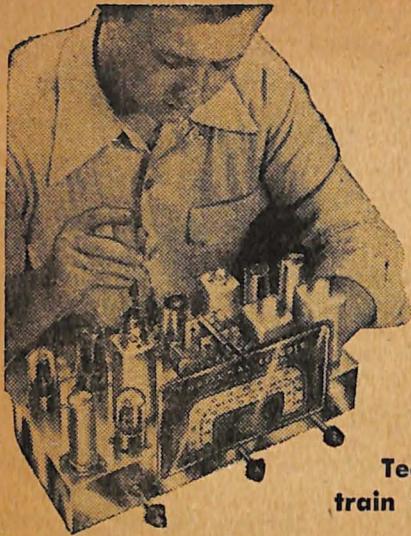
The Giants got some good pitching out of Dave Koslo as well as the lampoonish Floppy Hartung, the Pirates from Fritz Ostermuller and Tiny Bonham, the Cubs from unlucky Johnny Schmitz and Doyle Lade.

So, where the supposed big-shots of the American League went into a nearly unanimous tailspin throughout most of 1947, the National League hurling aces crashed through for the most part with more than was expected of them. However, down in the lower brackets the Junior circuit more than held its own, as the statistics show.

Perhaps, come the end of the season in 1948, the league roles may be reversed—

(Continued on page 108)

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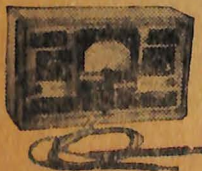
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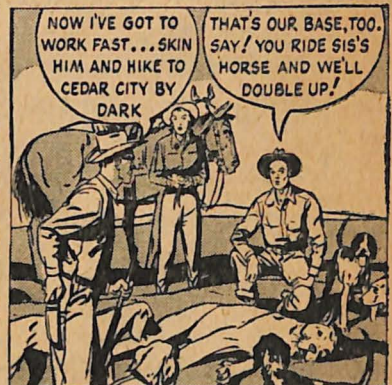
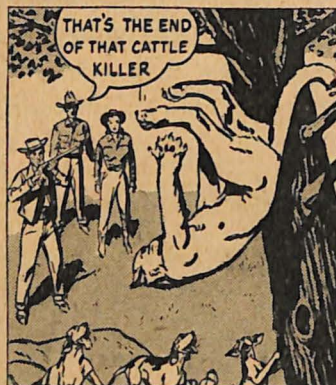
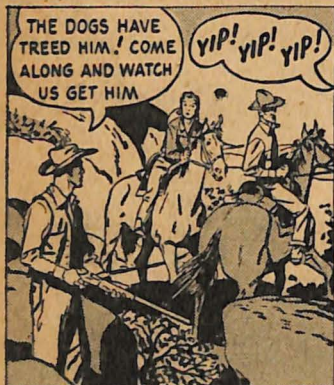
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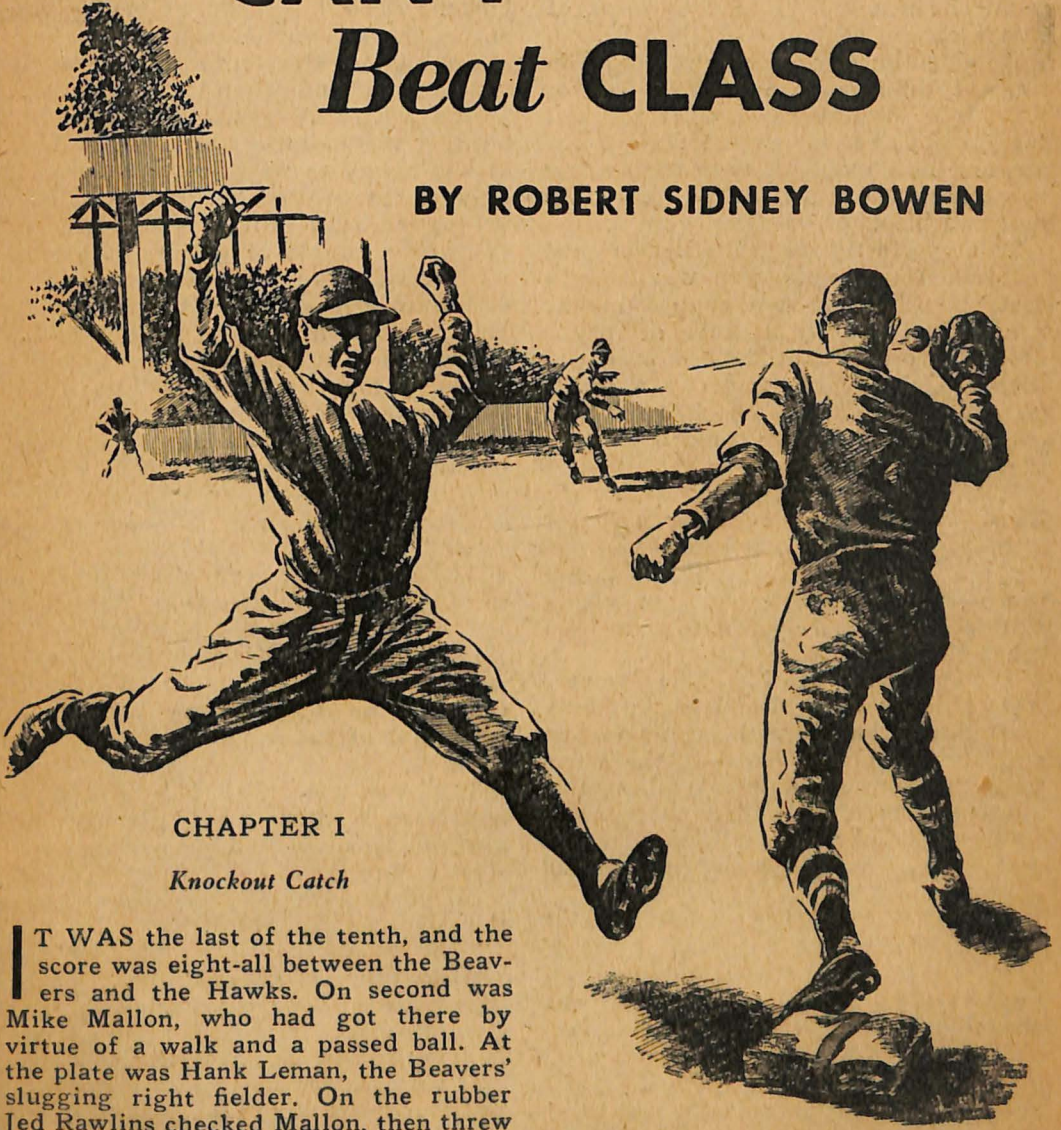


Barry Nolon was the team's mystery man
right up until the crucial final game!

You

CAN'T Beat CLASS

BY ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN



CHAPTER I

Knockout Catch

IT WAS the last of the tenth, and the score was eight-all between the Beavers and the Hawks. On second was Mike Mallon, who had got there by virtue of a walk and a passed ball. At the plate was Hank Leman, the Beavers' slugging right fielder. On the rubber Jed Rawlins checked Mallon, then threw a fast-breaking curve for the outside corner. Hank Leman swung—connected—and the ball went rocketing through the middle and out over second base. Mallon scored, and that was that. Beavers 9—Hawks 8.

Nolon pegged a clothes-line to first and got Ames

A Baseball Novelet

Up in the press-box, where I cover the daily doings of the Beavers, I made a couple of marks on my score sheet, punched out a line or two of the running story on the machine, then leaned back to light a cigarette and take it easy for a moment or two. Next to me Kelley, of the Record, was doing the same thing. He glanced my way, gave a little half grin, and a shake of his head.

"Ten innings it took, and seventeen runs!" he grunted. "I hate to think of what's coming!"

I nodded but didn't say anything. Besides, I didn't care a terrible lot for Kelley. He had only been covering ball for three years, as against sixteen for me, and he hadn't got wise to the fact yet that none of us oldsters cared to listen to his know-it-all.

To be perfectly frank the Beavers had just taken ten innings to win a game that should have been copped in the usual nine, and by a score of maybe fifteen to one. Yes, they *had* won, and they still held first place by a single game over the Bears, who had knocked over the Lions for their ninth straight that day.

However, the day after tomorrow the Bears were due in the Beaver park for a three-game series that could well settle the pennant race right then and there—even though each team would still have eight more games to go against other clubs.

The picture was this. The Beavers were holding their slim lead, but only after terrific battles with push-over second division clubs. Whereas, the Bears were slamming through everything like a squadron of tanks. In two short weeks they had climbed from fifth to second place. They were getting hotter and hotter.

It looked as if George "Silent" Knight, manager of the Beavers, would have to equip his players with machine guns if they were going to stand any chance of halting the Bears in the crucial three game series coming up after a day of no play.

Definitely the picture was not good. And, because I had watched Beavers come and go for some sixteen years, anything that concerned them concerned me personally. So I might have patted Kelley if he had gone on sounding off his yap. But he didn't and I cleared out and went back to the office to do my follow-

up story of the game. That took me until supper, so I went out to eat.

As the evening was so hot it was an effort merely to breathe, I hustled myself into an air conditioned movie just as soon as I had eaten. To have gone back to my hotel, where a few of the Beavers were quartered when the team was making a home stand, would have been sheer torture. I was glad to forget baseball for a couple of hours. Considering the current situation, it wasn't very pleasant to think about it.

Anyway, I went into the air-conditioned movie and, when I came out after seeing a strictly grade-G picture, the weather was twice as bad as it had been. It was agony to walk and I endured it only as far as Pedro's. There I got a very good idea—a nice thick ham on rye, and a couple of glasses of beer. I went inside and was just starting to slide into a booth when I saw "Silent" Knight all by himself in the end booth. He waved a half-eaten sandwich and I promptly took up his invitation.

"Congratulations, my friend!" I said sliding in across from him. "You must tell me sometime where you buy your rabbits' feet. I could do with that kind of luck now and then."

SILENT smiled and waited until he had finished chewing.

"We won it," he finally said.

I gestured to Pedro that I'd have the same as Knight had. Then I focussed my attention on the leathery-faced, half-bald pilot of the league leaders for the moment.

"Yes, you won it," I said. "But we've been friends these ten or eleven years now, so let's not kid each other. Just what is wrong?"

Silent Knight chewed some more, then gave me his answer.

"The Bears have been playing way over their heads," he said. "And my boys have been thinking too much about this coming series. Tomorrow's day off will be just the thing to uncoil them."

It was one of the longest speeches I had ever heard Silent make. And it was also just so much hogwash. I knew it and so did he because he grinned.

"Bushwah!" I snapped. "You're not speaking for publication in my column, now. This is just pal to pal. How do you feel about things?"

Silent took a long time thinking over

that question. Then he gave it to me in a few words.

"Scared stiff," he said. "And the boys are a little, too."

Another question was just coming off my tongue when he checked it by continuing.

"Don't get me wrong, Jack," he said. "I don't mean I'm scared of the Bears. I honestly believe we have a better ball club. But I'm scared for my own boys."

"Which is certainly too complicated for me to grasp all at once!" I growled. "Maybe you'd better give it to me in small pieces."

"We've been too lucky," Silent said. "Not in winning games but in not receiving injuries. Of course I have backing for every position. But a couple of the kids who would have to fill in for injuries aren't quite experienced enough for a series like we'll have with the Bears. Take Jake Bogardus at third. Tops in hitting, tops in runs batted in, the best hot corner man in either league. Just suppose—"

Knight suddenly stopped, and his well tanned face actually paled a little. He took a quick pull of his beer and gave a funny shake of his head.

"What am I trying to do, hex myself?" he choked.

"Don't be silly!" I laughed at him. "This is just an academic discussion. Just a hypothetical . . ."

"You can have it!" Silent cut me off and stood up. "Besides, I'm going fishing with some of the boys tomorrow and I need my beauty sleep. See you in the park Tuesday."

Silent Knight picked up his check and was gone. I finished my sandwich and had an extra beer to wash it down. When I left Pedro's I felt strangely low. I wished I hadn't talked with Silent. There is such a thing as daring the gods, they say.

The next day was a day off for the Beavers and it was a day off for me, too. Only I didn't go fishing. I spent most of the time working on a sports history I was writing, for which a publisher had been weak, and maybe foolish enough to give me an advance.

But I didn't do very much with it. I couldn't stop sweating and worrying about the Beaver-Bear series to start on the morrow. You would have thought I was going to pitch or take over Knight's place on the bench. Anyway, it

was a rotten day off for me and I was truly glad when it was over.

Then came Tuesday and the first game of the crucial series. The Beaver park holds a maximum crowd of thirty-three thousand but even when I got there, well over an hour before game time, there were at least thirty-six thousand jammed inside if there were two.

I entered by way of the clubhouse and went out onto the field. The pitching selections had not yet been officially posted but even the knot-hole kids out in the left center field bleachers knew what they would be. It was "Hooks" Hale for the Bears and Bobby York for the Beavers.

Both were portsidiers, both were nineteen-game winners to date, both would be out there throwing them to become the first twenty-game winner in the league that season. A beautiful pitcher's battle was in the offing and you could take your choice.

I wandered around, saying hello to the lads I knew. That, of course, included Bart Hall, fire-eating, pepper-pot manager of the Bears. He looked as contented as a cat who has trapped half a dozen canaries. Seeing him that way didn't make me feel any better. The worst of it was he sensed my thoughts. He chuckled like a steam engine going through a tunnel and jabbed me in the ribs.

"Don't be like that, Jacky, my boy!" he laughed. "You've certainly been around ball parks long enough to know."

"Know what?" I echoed.

"That you just can't beat class!" Hall flipped the words right at me. "And, we've got it! *Plus!*"

"I'll ask for a quote on that after the series, Bart." I grinned at him, and walked away.

EVENTUALLY I reached my place in the press-box, but getting there made the Times Square subway station at the five o'clock rush hour resemble a vacant lot. I got enough elbows in the ribs and score cards in the face to last me for the rest of my life. Even when I was settled in my spot it wasn't much better. Every ball scribe in the country who could write his name was there in that open-air Turkish bath. A couple of them were making pre-game notes on the back of my neck.

It was a madhouse in any direction.



But when the game started and Collins, at short for the Bears, stepped into the batter's box we forgot our inconveniences. We were about to see baseball as she am played and nothing this side of an earthquake would have distracted us.

The first seven innings were well nigh perfect. Both Hooks Hale and Bobby had every bit of their stuff. The opposing batters walked up to the plate and back to the dugout like a parade, inning after inning. True, in the second Jake Bogardus did get a fluke single between first and second. And in the fifth Bill Ames, who roamed the center garden for the Bears, clouted a ringing double down the left-field line. But both boys soon died on their respective bases.

And then came the top half of the eighth!

Hooks Hale was first up. He was one of those things every ball club manager dreams about—an ace pitcher who can

smack that old apple in turn, too.

However, Hale watched two go by for perfect strikes, then missed the third by a foot and trudged back to his own dugout.

That brought up Collins, the Bears' leadoff hitter. He was one of those wiggle-worms, perpetually after a journey to first base however he could get himself down there. Bobby York, however, made him miss on the first pitch and foul the second one off. Then York fed him a teaser which Collins took for a ball. The next pitch settled things. It was a little pop up and into York's waiting glove.

The third Bear to step up was Asa Logan, a very fancy first sacker. He was known to be a long ball hitter but he could also bunt and go down the base path. The Beavers guessed correctly, and played Logan for the long ball. And his first effort was a long ball, too—way, way out in left but a good twenty feet

Young Nolon, in a neck-braking slide, cut under the tag to wrap up the game for the Beavers



foul. The second toss by York was a called strike, and Logan yelled to the high heavens—in vain. And then came the next pitch!

I don't claim to be psychic but I knew, as that pitch came sailing plateward, that something was about to happen. My eyes were on that ball every inch of the way. And then Logan swung and got hold of it!

It was an inside pitch to a right handed batter, and Logan pulled it too much. The ball arced out toward foul territory in short left. Jake Bogardus streaked over from where he was playing at deep third. And, of course, Pat Allen started digging from left field but he had about a mile to go and would never make it.

Jake Bogardus did have a chance, and he gave it everything he had. Jake was that kind of a ball player. And so, when

I saw the wind start pushing that ball toward the left field boxes, my heart leaped into my throat.

Jake caught the ball a foot from the box railings. His momentum was terrific and he went into the railings with a jar that was felt by everybody in the park. For a split second he held up the ball to show that he had caught it. Then he crumpled on his face, still holding the ball tucked safely in his glove.

CHAPTER II

Wanted—A Miracle

A STUNNED silence held the thousands for a brief instant, and then came a murmuring roar of excitement

that mounted upward like an approaching storm. Every player on the field, and in the dugouts, raced toward the prostrate Jake Bogardus. At least fifty spectators jumped out of the left-field boxes, so that, in practically nothing flat, Jake was completely hidden from us up in the press-box by a swarm of milling humanity.

Up where I was wedged in fast, comments and counter-comments flew. I didn't say a word. I don't think I could have said anything for all the gold in Fort Knox. I couldn't think of a thing save my talk with Silent Knight in Pedro's two evenings before. How he had started to say . . . "Supposing Jake Bogardus got hurt?" . . . and had checked himself. Had Silent suddenly got a flash into the future?

Anyway, as I sat there at my typewriter and watched Jake Bogardus carried into the clubhouse on a stretcher, I felt sick. Jake Bogardus, probably the most valuable man on the Beavers, had been injured in the very first game of the crucial series with the roaring, clawing Bears. And Silent had called the turn in Pedro's two nights before. Fate had indeed belted the Beavers in the spot where it would do the most damage.

The ball game had to go on. So the field was cleared and the Beavers stepped up to take their last-half-of-the-eighth swings. They didn't accomplish a thing. They were still stunned by the tragedy. And they ate meekly out of Hooks Hale's hand, before going out for the top half of the ninth.

The public-address system announced that Barry Nolon would take over third for the Beavers in Jake Bogardus' place. I knew him fairly well and most of his baseball history—but I checked my record book just to refresh my memory. He was a twenty-three-year-old lad from Los Angeles.

He had played in the Pacific Coast League a little over a year, before serving three years with the Sea Bees in the Pacific. Out of service he had gone with Memphis, then Atlanta, and then Montreal. Last spring the Beavers had bought him from Montreal to serve as insurance for Jake Bogardus, whenever Jake needed a rest.

He had played in three games and had three hits for eleven times at bat. A two-seven-three percentage, if you want to be technical. He was five-eleven, fair-

ly well built, with sandy hair and a sandy complexion. A quite unassuming kid eagerly waiting his big chance—and here it was, with a vengeance!

Long years ago I had once tried to make a living playing professional ball. And, like young Barry Nolon, I had sat on the bench waiting for the big moment, the big chance. It had come in due time. I was stuck into a tight spot, and it had been up to me alone.

Of course, not a spot one tenth as tight as the one Nolon was stepping into. Still it was tight enough, and I had the chance to make a real hero of myself. I didn't. I fell flat on my face. And so that was my last year in pro ball.

I knew just about what young Nolon was thinking as he took rollers from Mike Mallon at first, while Bobby York tossed over his warmup pitches. I felt a little sorry for the kid and crossed my fingers and said a little prayer.

BILL AMES, who had the only Bear hit, walked up to the plate first. Bobby York worked hard on him, got him two strikes in the hole, then tried to make him go after a couple of bad ones. Ames did, but fouled both up into the stands in back of the Beaver dugout. The fifth pitch he fished for and really reached. It was a screamer well over Barry Nolon's head and down the left field line. Ames went into second standing up.

Maybe that was just what York needed to get back into the groove. Joe Crossi, who played third and followed Ames, couldn't do a thing. Four pitches later Crossi was on his way back to the bench. That brought up Jim Meek, who played second, and had more hits than anybody in the league.

He took a look at a strike and then made a noble effort to get himself a hit. It was a crack over second that faded fast. I was certain it was a single. But Peter Rice, the fleet Beaver in center, came in like light and caught the ball ankle high off the ground. Ames, of course, was not silly enough to tag up and try for third after the catch. Young Nolon could have read a book while he waited for him with the ball.

Two down, a runner on second and Brogan stepping into the batter's box for the Bears. Brogan was as good as any catcher in the league and his war club had won more than a couple of

games for his team. Against Bobby York, though, he hadn't got a loud foul all season. Those of us who knew about that and wanted to see the Beavers win breathed a little easier. We did for the first three pitches. Two of them Brogan swung at and missed. The third he let go by. From where I sat it looked like a beautiful slider that caught the corner. Bobby York, and Butch Mock, who caught him, raised a big beef. But of course it didn't get either of them anything. The plate umpire simply told Bobby it was a ball and to get back there to the rubber.

York did. He pitched again and Brogan got hold of it—a little. It was a medium-fast grounder that went across the carpet toward young Barry Nolan. The kid came in fast, and acted very sure. Meantime, of course, Tommy Jenks had run over from shortstop to back up. At the crack of the bat Bill Ames had legged it away from second.

An easy out, it looked. But it wasn't. The ball took a slight side hop and Nolon didn't get his hands over in time. The agate went past him and on down the left field foul line with Tommy Jenks chasing it for all he was worth. Tommy got the ball in time to stop Brogan from going to second but not in time to check the flying Ames from crossing the plate. And there it was.

Bobby York fanned Peterson, the Bear right fielder, for the third out. And the Beavers came grimly charging into the dugout as though they were going to get a million for themselves in their half of the ninth. But, it was not to be.

True, Hooks Hale walked the first Beaver to come up—Pete Rice. Mike Malon, though, couldn't make it. He hit into a double play. And a few moments later Hooks Hale got Hank Leman to pop to short for the final out. The Beavers were now sharing first place!

When I was able to elbow and knee my way out of the press-box I eventually made my way to the team locker rooms in the clubhouse. Gloom was thick enough to cut with a knife. In one corner was poor Nolon sick as a dog. The rest of the team of course didn't want to cut his throat but they were just too heartbroken for the moment to do anything but think their own thoughts. I passed up talking to any of them and went straight on into Silent Knight's private room. He had his shirt off but

that was all. He sat in a chair, staring into space. When he saw me, though, he managed a quick smile.

"Come in, Jack," he said. "Kind of a tough one, wasn't it?"

"Tough as a thing can be," I said, and dropped into a chair. "That bad hop. It—how's Jake? Gosh, but I'm sorry, Silent! How is he?"

The Beavers' manager didn't say anything for a moment. A great sadness seemed to fill his face, and for a second I wished I hadn't dropped in. However, I did want the straight stuff on Jake Bogardus before I went back to the office. Al Stickney, the Beaver secretary, hadn't called the press-box to give a report by the time I'd left.

"A world of luck for Jake," Silent finally said. "Crashing that box railing could have put him out of baseball for a long time. Jake's tough, though. He has a badly bruised left side, and a slight knee sprain. Nothing else, though. He'll be out at least four days."

I didn't say anything for a moment. I was thinking of two evenings back at Pedro's. So was Silent. His smile was a little bitter, when he spoke.

"Guess maybe I did hex myself after all, Jack," he said quietly.

"Bushwah!" I snapped, suddenly angry. "Jake is always going all-out for something. It's just tough it had to be today. What about that kid, though?"

"Taking it hardest of all," Silent said. "I only spoke a word or two to him when he came in. I'll see him again a little later. It was just one of those things. He'll be at third in tomorrow's game."

Silent was quiet and calm as he spoke but my heart bled for him. That is, if an old typewriter-punching gaffer like me has any blood in his heart.

"You've wrought miracles before, pal," I said. "You can do it again. Anything I can do, let me know."

"Thanks, but we've still got the best team," Knight said evenly. "Even with Jake out of the line-up."

I got out of there and back to the office before I started blubbing all over my notes.

THAT evening was even hotter and muggier than the previous two had been—and they had set a weather bureau record. From the office I went straight to my hotel room and stood under the

shower for almost an hour. It did little if any good. So I went downstairs to eat, not wanting any part of even the short walk to Pedro's. I saw Joe Crossi and Jim Meek eating together, but a good look at their faces told me they didn't want to be pestered by any ball scribes that night. So I sat down by myself.

I took my time because it was a little cooler in that hotel dining room. I was half hoping that young Nolon would come in. I knew full well the tortures that kid must be suffering, and thought maybe I could do something to get him out of the depths.

The kid didn't show up, though, all the time I was there. And so, when I was through, I walked out to the desk and took a look. His room key wasn't in his box. The poor guy was upstairs alone in his room eating his heart out. And maybe wishing up the nerve to jump out a window. It was the worst possible thing he could do. If anybody needed company that night it was Barry Nolon.

So I took the elevator upstairs and walked along the corridor to his single room at the rear. I reached it and was just about to knock when I heard young Nolon's voice. He was on the telephone, and I could hear him through the half opened transom over the door. The kid's voice was tight and strained.

"... got to see you! Don't you see? This is *it!* I'm in the Beaver line-up against the Bears. You've got to fix things for me!"

The kid stopped talking while the voice at the other end said something. Of course I didn't get that. And then Nolon spoke again.

"Ten grand won't do it. Think of me! Remember once what I did for you? Okay, okay, skip it. But you've got to come through. Sure, sure! Where are you calling from? Huh? Give that to me again!"

I strained my ears but of course I didn't hear a thing until young Nolon spoke some more.

"Got it, and I'll be right over. Thank heavens you called! Tell you about the thing when I see you. Be right over, so don't go away. S'long!"

I heard the sound of the phone clicking dead, then a rush of feet toward the other side of the door. I can't recall to this day just the exact thoughts I

was thinking. But I was thinking of plenty as Barry Nolon yanked the door open in my face, started to come out, but stopped dead instead. His face went deathly white, and then red to the roots of his hair. But he caught himself almost instantly.

"Why—why hello, Mr. Corkin!" he gulped. "Kind of a hot night, isn't it?"

"Too hot for an old fellow like me," I said with a smile. "Didn't see you downstairs for supper, so I thought I'd just drop up to see how you were making out. Things happen, you know. Just don't let it get you."

Maybe my impression was all wrong, but I thought for a second that the young kid was going to cry with relief. Once again he pulled himself together in practically nothing flat.

"Well, thanks, and it's darned nice of you to drop up," he blurted out, and fished an envelope from his inside jacket pocket. "I'm in a hurry right now, though. Want to get this letter off to my mother. See you later, maybe. S'long."

"S'long," I said absently, and watched him go down the stairs without bothering to ring and wait for the elevator.

Young Nolon had pulled a letter from his pocket to flash at me, but he hadn't flash-shown me the back of the envelope fast enough. That particular letter had been canceled by some odd chance on the back as well, and I had seen the cancellation.

So what? The kid's conversation had had all the earmarks of something I didn't believe was possible. That sort of thing had gone out for all time with the old Black Sox—or had it?

CHAPTER III

Hit and Run

FINALLY went downstairs to the lobby and found a comfortable chair in a corner where it was reasonably cool. And there I sat, thinking and wondering, and getting nowhere. At such times a man's imagination has a wonderful frolic. Mine was no exception.

In memory I lived over the error Nolon had made a couple of dozen times. Certainly, Jake Bogardus would have got his hands over and grabbed that ball.

Could Nolon have done it too if he had really wanted to? Or had it just been tough luck for a green kid?

About an hour later, when I saw Silent Knight walk through the lobby, I almost yelled and waved for him to come over. But I didn't and Silent went on outside without even seeing me. Why I held my tongue I don't know.

Anyway, I just went on sitting and smoking and wondering. It was just a shade this side of midnight when I saw Barry Nolon slide in through the side door. If he saw me, he didn't give notice. He took a quick flash-glance about the lobby and made straight for the automatic elevator that was used after ten o'clock. He was gone before I had time to hail him.

When I eventually dragged my sweating, weary body out from between the sheets, and stumbled toward the shower the next morning I simply didn't care whether school kept or not. However, an early morning shower can do wonders. It helped me a lot, if only to clear the fog away in my brain. I began to think more clearly.

Ten to one young Nolon could explain that seemingly cockeyed telephone call to my perfect satisfaction—if I asked him. After all, the chances of a single ball player able to throw a game are about one in five hundred. That medium-speed hopper and the funny little side bounce no one in the world could have foreseen. And the letter he claimed he wanted to mail? Shucks, maybe that had just been an excuse to get rid of old Jack Corkin. Maybe the kid had a date.

I felt much better and went down to the Globe and put in a good morning's work. Right after lunch, though, I headed for the Beaver park along with another record-breaking crowd. The

first thing I noticed was that the stunned blankness had gone from the faces of the Beaver players. Yesterday had been a real crusher, but it was now history. The boys were eager and determined to go out and regain their one-game lead.

Only Barry Nolon didn't look as if he had firecrackers tied to his hands and feet. The kid looked pale to me and his pre-game workout at third base was listless. He didn't miss anything that Silent Knight rapped his way and his throws over to first got there all right—still he didn't look good to me.

However, I've always been curious. So, when I saw young Nolon standing alone near the dugout, I strolled over to him. Maybe the look he gave me, when he saw me, was sharp. And maybe it was a tight expression that came into his face. I couldn't be sure.

"How do you feel, Nolon?" I asked.

"Fine! Why not?"

His voice had a nasty snap I'd never heard before. But I let it ride without comment.

"Sure, why not?" I echoed with a grin. "Go get 'em today, boy. You can."

"Thanks," he said flatly, and turned to walk away.

"By the way," I couldn't stop myself from saying, "I waited a spell for that chat last night. What did you do, deliver that letter in person to your mother?"

A LITTLE white, he shot a definitely scared look past me toward the Beaver dugout. And then he brought back slightly veiled eyes to my face. He grinned but it was a very poor imitation.

"Sure," he said and laughed. Then, quickly, "No, I went to a movie and fell

[Turn page]

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asleep if you must know. You see me come in?"

"No," I lied and watched him. "I hit the hay early. Well, get at them but good, son."

"Sure, sure!" he said hastily. "You bet!"

I started wending my way up into the sweat-house they called the press-box. I was certain that there had been something very fishy about Barry Nolon's actions. But what could I do about it? Go to Silent and tell him to lift the kid from the line-up because I had a half hunch he was up to no good?

Instead, I went up to the press-box and plowed my way to my usual seat. I got my tools in order and chinned with with the lads on either side of me. According to their comments you could have purchased the Beavers' chances of winning with a plugged nickel. With Jake out and a green kid taking over, it was just too bad. Silent should shift Jenks, or maybe Pat Allen, to third. Silent should do this and that if he wanted the Beavers to stand a fighting chance.

For once I didn't put in my ten cents' worth. Silent was the cleverest manager in the league for my money and when he sent Nolon to third it was because he considered it the best move he could make. And I just didn't feel like talking. I was content to grunt a word now and then, think my thoughts and watch the pre-game doings down on the field.

I suppose that was why I suddenly saw Barry Nolon walk down along the left field boxes to one just a little beyond a line with third base. There he stopped and talked with two men who were sitting in a box alone. I saw him shake hands with one, then with the other. I borrowed Kelley's binoculars and focused them on the box.

The two men were simply dressed and nothing to look at—strictly run-of-the-mill males. I didn't know either of them but that proved nothing. I watched them talk and laugh with Nolon a couple of minutes. Then with a leave-it-to-me gesture, the kid turned away and walked back to the dugout. Silent said something to him as he went down the steps but Nolon shook his head. I handed the binoculars back to Kelley, half wishing that I'd taken up brick-laying as my

father had once wanted me to.

The preliminaries over, the Beavers trotted onto the field and the game got under way. This time Bart Hall was sending a young right-handed speed-ball merchant against the Beavers, Lou Marsh by name. Seventeen victories and only three defeats was his season record to date.

In return Silent pulled a last minute surprise. He sent in Vic Fallon, who also pitched right, but who had been around the big time for several years. He didn't have Marsh's blinding speed but he did have everything else, plus the craftiest pitching brains in baseball.

Coffin, a fireballer too, had originally been selected but it was Fallon who walked out to the mound. In my book, if any of Silent's twirlers could put the Beavers back into undisputed first place, it was Vic. He was all pitcher from the first throw until the last. And he had pitched more full games than any other member of the mound staff.

Vic Fallon started the game by retiring Collins on three pitches. But when Asa Logan stepped in he was first-ball hitting, and he belted one that went far out between left and center. It looked like a sure triple but Pete Rice leaped on his mule at the crack of the bat and made a running catch over his shoulder that will be remembered for a long time.

Then, when Bill Ames stepped into the batter's box, I saw something that quieted my fears. Ames looked over two pitches. One was a ball, the other a strike. He connected with the next pitch solidly. It was a fast sinking smash, dead along the third baseline. In a flash young Barry Nolon went over and made a beautiful backhanded pickup. He was still pivoting when he pegged a clothesline to first and got Ames by three steps. Not even Jake Bogardus could have done any better on that one. So I began to enjoy the game as I should.

WHEN the Beavers came in for their inning licks they were out for blood. Tommy Jenks, one of the best bunters in the league, swung from the heels at Lou Marsh's first offering and drove it to the right-field wall. The only trouble was that Peterson, the Bears' right fielder, got back in time and hauled it down with a pretty, leaping, one-handed catch.

Pete Rice stepped in and drove the ball to an almost identical spot in left to give Jackson, the left-garden caretaker, a chance to do his stuff. Finally, Mike Mallon walked up there and clouted the first ball out of the park—two feet foul. The next pitch Mike straightened out very nicely, but this time the Bears' center fielder raced back and pulled it down for the third out.

That was the kind of ball they played the first inning. Not a pitcher's battle, but the kind of a ball game I like to see—lots of hardhit balls but no runs. That was the story of the second inning too. By then it was clear what the Bear hitters were trying to do. They were playing the one big Beaver weakness. Barry Nolon at third. As each Bear stepped up you could almost see him train his sights on third base.

However, with the exception of that one smash in the first, the Bears didn't get away with their hitting strategy. Against some other pitcher it might have worked. But not against a veteran moundsman with Vic Fallon's pitching savvy. He had evidently foreseen just that when he first walked to the mound. He pitched to the hitters accordingly. In three innings the Bears couldn't get a rapped ball closer to third than short-rop, with the one exception in the opening frame.

The clean-hit ice was cracked eventually in the bottom of the third. Naturally Silent had not put young Nolon in the clean-up spot, where Jake Bogardus usually batted. He simply moved the next two hitters up a notch, and put Nolon in the seventh spot. And so that brought the kid up to the plate to start off the last of the third.

Every eye in the park, of course, was clamped on him and there were a few foghorn comments by a couple of nit-wits that carried to all corners of the park. However, if the kid was feeling the sting, he didn't show it from where I sat in the press-box.

Nolon swung at the first pitch, but he didn't start his swing until the ball was smacking into Brogan's mitt. The next ball he let go by and it was right down the middle. Then on the third pitch he looked as though he were going to fall away from it, but lunged for it at the last split second. And his bat met the ball!

It was a hopper, right down the middle. Lou Marsh made a dive for it, but he didn't get a bit of finger leather on it. I watched the ball bounding out over second, watched Nolon running toward first. A chill began to creep back into my heart. It looked as if the kid was giving it the works, but for my money he was just putting on an act. He lost out. He was across the bag for a single before the throw came in from Jim Meek, who had raced deep behind second to scoop up the hit.

Whatever I thought about it or not, the ice had been cracked. The first base runner of the game was on at first. But Mock, the Beaver backstop, was up next. Mock watched the first one go by, then laced into the second pitch. It went sizzling across the carpet toward the hole between first and second. A beautifully timed behind-the-runner knock, it looked like a sure single. But neither team was playing that kind of ball on defense. They were definitely making the impossible, possible.

CHAPTER IV

Up a Tree

LIKE lightning Jim Meek went over from his second sack position and dived for the ball. He got his glove on it and the ball stayed there. He was half standing on his head but somehow he made the throw to Collins, who had dashed over to cover second. It wasn't a fast throw and it was a little to the third base side of the bag.

I fully expected to see Nolon, coming down from first, break up the play. But, he did no such thing. Just as he made his last stride he seemed to falter a little. And then he made a fall away slide but to the *right* of the bag. As a result, Collins wasn't blocked off at all and had a split second of extra time to touch the bag and peg to first. The throw beat Mock by a step for the second out of a double play.

"Where did that stupe learn to take second? He could have made both hands safe, just like that!"

It was Kelley on my right sounding off and, for once, I had to agree with his yapping. Barry Nolon's crazy base

running had cost the Beavers two outs. And a moment later, when Vic Fallon came up and cracked a single over first, it added to the cost.

Had Nolon not been snuffed off at second there would have been a run across, perhaps runners on first and third. Instead there were two down, and a lone runner on first. He died there as a moment later Tommy Jenks, starting the second go-around for the Beavers, popped up to the pitcher.

As Silent Knight walked from his third-base coaching spot back to the dugout I stared hard at him—as though, in so doing, I might read his thoughts. When he stopped and spoke a few words to Barry Nolon, who was just coming up the steps, I was sure I was going to see the kid sent back to the bench. But it didn't happen. Nolon nodded when Silent had finished saying whatever it was, and then went trotting out to pick up his glove on the foul side grass of third base.

"Silent's crazy! Can't he see?"

The sound of the sudden voice made me jump, because it had issued from my own lips.

"Sure, maybe he sees! But who else would he send in? Knight's been wrong all season figuring Bogardus for an iron man."

That was from Kelley. And he swung my way, ready to battle any arguments I put up. I didn't give him the chance. I was in no mood to discuss Silent's managing of the team with Kelley. I was too sick inside to talk with anybody. So I ignored Kelley, and gave my attention to the game. Every time I looked at Nolon I saw something that worried and confused me just a little bit more. This time it was to see him turn toward the left stands and half lift his glove arm in salute. And—to see those two lads he had talked with before the game, lift hands and return the greeting. Well, so what?

I was too mixed up even to try for an answer. I watched Collins walk up to lead off the fourth for the Bears and waited to see what happened. I didn't have long to wait. Vic Fallon threw the wrong pitch and, as though to atone to Bart Hall for his early strike out, Collins walloped it over the left-center fence for a round tripper and the first run of the ball game. That jarred Vic

a little, and he couldn't find the plate on Asa Logan, the next hitter. Logan walked and Bill Ames stepped in.

He stayed in the batter's box just long enough for the third pitch by Fallon to reach the plate. Then he swung and connected. The ball traveled six feet off the ground at about a hundred miles an hour toward a spot well to Nolan's left. It was something that just couldn't be speared but it was! Nolon went up high and out with his glove. He caught the ball and whipped it to first to double Logan almost before his feet were back on the ground.

"Now, I've seen everything!" Kelley bellowed in my ear. "A busher one inning and tops the next. What gives with that guy, anyway?"

I didn't reply because I didn't have the answer. I simply sat quiet and watched Joe Crossi rap an easy grounder to Jenks, who sidearmed it over to Mike Mallon with all kinds of time to spare. It didn't make sense. That belt by Bill Ames had had two bases written all over it. Yet Nolon had snagged it and made the most dazzling play of the series thus far. Why, after deliberately trying to get himself out in the third inning? Something was snafu.

COULD go on forever, giving it to you point by point for the next four innings, but it would be more or less like a record of the first four. Everybody knocked the stitches off the ball but there was always somebody camping under it when it came down. Not one other ball did Nolon have to go for. They were all hit to the right side, or to the infield—and nailed for outs. His next time up, in the sixth, Nolon struck out.

So they went into the first half of the ninth and the Bear half was over in no time. A pop to Fallon, a pop to Jenks, a long lazy one to Hank Leman in right—and that was that. The Bears were ahead one-to-zero, with just three outs left for the Beavers.

Hank Leman, Pat Allen and Heftner—that was the order for the Beavers in the ninth. One run to tie and two to win. The whole park was buzzing and so was my head. If, by any chance, one of those three got on, what would Silent do about Nolon, who was due to hit after Heftner?

Well, Hank Leman didn't get on. He bounced an easy one to Meek, who threw him out by yards. And neither did Pat Allen. He just swung at three, and missed. So, it was two gone, a single life left for the Beavers in the form of Heftner, the second sacker.

But good old Heftner came through. Lou Marsh ran the count to three and two. Then he tried to pull the string on one. He didn't pull it quite soon enough. Heftner caught hold of it and drove the ball on a line out between left and center. He went into second, standing up.

The instant I saw the base umpire's safe signal I switched my gaze to the Beaver batting circle. My heart started to sink. Barry Nolon was straightening up and heading toward the plate. And then my heart stopped sinking as Nolon stopped and looked down toward third.

Silent, down there in the coaching box, was waving Nolon back to the dug-out and signaling for somebody else. For an instant Nolon stood perfectly still. Then he slung his bat toward the bat rack and hurried into the dugout and out of sight.

The man sent up to pinch-hit for Nolon was big "Mugs" Olsen, a second-string catcher. He had all the speed of a Sherman tank. But, brother, if he managed to get his wood on that ball! I won't keep you in suspense. Mugs did just *that!* High and far out over the right-field wall for a homer it flew putting the Beavers back into undisputed possession of first place. I sank back in my chair, weak and gasping, while thirty-seven thousand others went off their nut.

When I got back to something approaching normal I gathered up my tools and made my way out of the press-box. I intended to drop into the Beaver dressing room to extend my congratulations to Silent, but when I came to the door that led under the stands to the clubhouse I found it locked.

I didn't have to be handed a letter saying that newsmen and well wishers were not wanted in the clubhouse. No doubt, after yesterday's game, the boys had been swamped with crepe hangers and mourners and the Beaver front office had closed off the dressing room to any one not directly connected with the club.

I took the pay customer's way out of the park and then around to Holland street, where you could usually find a cab. On Holland street was the players' exit from the clubhouse and of course four or five hundred faithful were gathered waiting for a flash glimpse of their favorites. I circled the crowd, and was walking on toward the cab rank when I spotted, at the edge of the crowd, the two gents I had seen Barry Nolon talking to.

I moved over a little closer and took a good look at both of them. What I saw close up didn't differ much from what I'd seen through Kelley's binoculars, except for one thing. Neither of them looked particularly happy because the Beavers had won. In fact, both of them looked pretty grim.

They were talking in low tones but I wasn't able to get close enough to hear what they were saying. So I moved back across the street and leaned against a telephone pole. Wild horses weren't going to move me away from there until I saw what, *if* anything, happened when Barry Nolon came through the clubhouse door.

I waited maybe twenty minutes. Barry Nolon was the seventh Beaver to come out. He seemed in a hurry and looked like the wrath of the gods. He ignored the few cheers that went up, pushed a couple of autograph hounds aside, and went right through the crowd to the fringe, where the two grim looking lads were waiting for him.

WITHOUT a word they each placed a hand on his arm and hurried him over to a parked car. It was a blue Buick and I could tell from the plate markings that it was a Drive-Ur-Self heap. As soon as they reached it one of them got in back with Nolon and the other slid behind the wheel.

By then, of course, I was sprinting for a cab but I didn't have any luck. Some so-and-so crowded me out of the first one by an eyelash. And by the time I reached the second cab in line the blue Buick was nowhere to be seen.

"Well, Mister?" the driver grunted as I stood there one foot in and one foot out of his cab.

"The Globe Building," I growled and pulled the other foot inside.

That evening I had every intention of

eating in the hotel dining room. I wanted to see if Nolon ate there. Particularly if he'd have his two pals with him. But another story kept me in the Globe sports room until after supper time. And then when I drew abreast of Pedro's on the way to the hotel, I stopped. Some unknown force drew me inside. I went in and there was Silent Knight, all alone in the end booth. He didn't see me until I slid into the booth seat across from him. His smile was genuine enough but the man showed the terrific strain.

"Evening, miracle man!" I greeted him cheerfully.

"Thanks, friend," Silent said. "Just one more and then I can take my first deep breath in weeks."

I grinned and gave my order to Pedro. After that I rechecked the menu for a couple of moments but it was only to stall for time. There were a couple of things I wanted to find out from Silent but I didn't know just how to go about it.

"That was a smart move, sending in Olsen to hit for that kid," I finally said.

Silent shook his head, and grinned modestly.

"Not so smart as lucky," he said. "It was the break we needed. But the way the game went from the first inning Nolon might have stepped up and done the same thing. He was certainly burned when I called him back."

"How about your feelings when his rotten base running cost you a run?" I got in quickly.

Silent shrugged and made a little gesture with his fork.

"Those things happen," he said quietly. "That kid is playing under a terrific strain, you know. Shows all over him. Getting me some hard knocks from you ball scribes, too. Not you, of course. But most of them."

"For sticking him in at third?" I echoed.

"That's right," Silent said, and sighed. "But any other shifting around would open the door wide for those Bears. Young Nolon was my best bet, so I put him in there. Doing all right, too, in spite of the press-box managers."

That one stumped me. Silent thought that kid was doing all right—so what could I say? Silent and I hadn't seen the same things happen on that field,

that's all. And as for the rest? Well, how could I back up with facts what I was thinking?

So I didn't breathe a word of what was uppermost in my mind. I just ate my supper with Silent and the two of us hashed over the day's game. He told me a number of little inside things that never get into print. He told me the plays he liked and those he didn't like.

But all through it he didn't say a single word against anything that young Nolon had done or not done. When, eventually, we left Pedro's he went one way and I went the other. I was more up a tree than ever.

Back in the hotel I looked in the boxes. Barry Nolon's key wasn't there. I asked the clerk if he'd seen Nolon come in. He told me he had an hour ago, that Nolon had been alone. I went up the elevator to Nolon's floor and down the corridor to his room. The transom over the door didn't show any light and it was still half open.

On impulse I lifted my hand to knock. But a second impulse lowered my hand. I turned and went back to the elevator and down to my floor. The thing was in the lap of the gods now. I had passed up my chance of doing anything about it . . . if there was anything I actually could have done.

CHAPTER V

Beavers Go Bragh

THE NEXT afternoon on my way to the park, as luck would have it, my cab driver elected to go through the middle of a truck instead of around it. Nobody was hurt except the cab, but it was forty minutes before I could get away in another cab. As a result I reached my press-box seat about three minutes before game time. And I had to yank some jerk by the scruff of the neck out of my seat to get it.

So I just about got my tools in order when Collins stepped into the batter's box to start off the third and final game of the rock-crusher series for first place. On the mound for the Beavers was another crafty veteran of the baseball wars. He was Hank Ogden and, although Silent wouldn't say so the night

before, I'd had a hunch it would be Ogden. He wasn't fast but he had beautiful control on a screwball and a butterfly-ball that sent heavy hitters half mad trying to knock off the cover.

For the Bears my line-up sheet told me that Carl Rankin was pitching. I expected that too. Rankin was another fancy pitch artist. The year before he had been way out in front in earned runs, strike outs, complete games and a couple of other items. And this year he was no more than a shade behind.

I took a look down at third base, and there was Barry Nolon. Maybe I would have fallen out of the press-box, if there had been anybody else!

Well, as in the first game of the series I can skip the first seven innings with just a few words. Only in this game it was eight—eight innings of the most perfect baseball you, I or anybody else has ever seen. Eight innings of no-hit pitching by both men on the mound. Eight innings of not a single ball being hit beyond the infield.

The six outfielders could just as well have sat in the stands and watched along with the rest of us. And believe it or not, young Barry Nolon could have sat up in the stands, too! He didn't have a chance to get his hands on the ball. Each time a ball was hit his way short-stop Tommy Jenks cut over in front of him and grabbed it and threw for the put-out himself.

It was eight innings such as I have never seen or ever hope to see. And then came the start of the ninth!

The first Bear up was Bill Ames. Ames fanned air again on the first two daisy-doodles Hank Ogden wafted up to him. But he didn't fan air on the third pitch. He walloped it but good, the first hit of the ball game, a triple to deep left center.

That brought Crossi to the plate and the Beaver infield moved in to guard the plate. Everybody knew that the squeeze was on, and it was. What's more it worked. Ames broke with the very first pitch, and Crossi dumped it beautifully up the first base line. Almost as ball met ash Ames was sliding. Mike Fallon, who fielded the bunt, didn't have a chance. All he could do was tag Crossi with it, then toss the pill to Ogden.

One run was over, and one was out. Ogden, stung deep, pitched just six

more times. And every one of them was a swinging strike, not even foul tipped. So the Beavers came trotting in for their last chances—three of them. It was yesterday's ninth all over again—one to tie, and two to remove the Bear menace for the rest of the season.

What Beavers were scheduled to come up in the ninth? Yes, you've guessed it—Pat Allen, Heftner, then the kid!

Allen didn't do any better than he had all afternoon. This time it was a pop to Asa Logan just off first base. And When Heftner walked up to the plate every one of the thousands in the park who were Beaver fans—which was about ninety per cent—pleaded for old Heftner to repeat yesterday's ninth-inning performance.

Maybe Heftner heard them. Anyway, Heftner hit a lofty triple over the center fielder's head. There was the tying run on third and just one out.

THE roar of the crowd was shut off as though a gigantic door had been slammed shut. Young Barry Nolan, waiting in the batting circle, tossed one of his clubs away and walked to the plate. I held my breath, waiting to see Silent Knight, down behind third, yell for the kid to go back. But Barry Nolon stepped into the batter's box and took his stance.

Was Silent crazy? Had he been struck dumb? I didn't come up with any answers.

Then came Rankin's first pitch. The tension seemed to snap a little. The pitch went wide for a ball. Heftner, who had broken off third, scooted back to the bag. The sign hadn't been on that time. Rankin threw again. Heftner bolted for home but stopped short after a few steps. And the pitch was wide again for a second ball.

Right about then a tiny light began to dawn in my thick skull. It grew when Rankin threw a third ball. The next pitch was over but the damage had been done. Silent Knight had out-smarted the Bears. Rankin couldn't find the plate on the next pitch and Nolon walked.

So it was one gone and runners on first and third. Thirty-seven-odd thousand people were going out of their minds. Up lumbered the fourth Beaver batter of the inning—big "Butch" Mock,

the catcher. He, also, had done little but fan the breeze all afternoon, but—well, after what had happened already, who could tell?

On Rankin's first pitch the big catcher swung and drilled a whistling single over second base. It faded fast and then took a crazy hop toward right center. The outfielder, playing deep, came in fast but the ball bounced between center fielder Ames and right fielder Peterson and went on another fifteen feet or so.

Heftner had by then crossed the plate with the tying run and when I glanced down at the bases I could hardly believe my eyes.

Young Barry Nolon was running like a frightened deer for third. He reached it *and kept right on going!*

The ball was on its way to Jim Meek, who had raced out toward the outfield. Meek took the throw and pivoted. His peg home was a white bullet. It smacked into Brogan's waiting mitt and Brogan snapped the mitt downward. But not in time—young Nolon in a neck-breaking slide had cut under the tag. The ball game was all wrapped up for the Beavers.

Popeyed, I stared as did everybody else. And then a half-strangled cry burst from my throat and from thousands of others. Nolon had got up onto his feet and was starting to dance with joy when suddenly he fell over on his back and lay stiff and still as a log!

I saw players rush toward him but I didn't wait. I was out of my seat and out of the press-box in nothing flat. If the door that led under the stands to the clubhouse was locked I was going to go right through it. It wasn't. However, it took me twenty minutes to fight my way to it, and another seven or eight before I was finally in the Beavers' dressing-room.

Bedlam was in high gear and the first three or four players I grabbed didn't stop yelling to answer my question. Pat Allen finally did. Nolon had been taken to the Club's hospital in a state of collapse or something. And what about the Beavers, *hey?*

I broke away from Allen and shoved and clawed my way to the door of Silent's room. He was alone by some miracle, sitting in uniform in his chair, wearing a smile that stretched all the way around to the back of his head.

"Magnificent!" he cried as he saw me. "If I manage ball clubs for the next hundred years I'll never witness such a display of courage!"

"Courage?" I echoed a little blankly. "To score from first on a single? Why hundreds of guys have—"

"Not that!" Silent cut me off. "Jack, did you know that Nolon has been playing these last three days with a temperature of a *hundred and four?*"

I SANK into the nearest chair and gaped at him.

"What was that again?" I managed weakly.

"A man who was a medico with Nolon in the Sea Bees has just explained it to me," Silent said. "He's gone to the hospital with the lad. It seems Nolon got a bad case of malaria out there in the Pacific, and this medico pulled him through. Seems Nolon had saved his life at one time.

"Anyway, Nolon got through malaria and another jungle disease—I've forgotten the name he gave it. It seems it can come back on you in a mild form even after you've been cured. Hits you like a ton of bricks."

"Go on, go on!" I snapped when Silent paused. "You mean . . . ?"

"Yes." Silent nodded. "It hit Nolon the first day of the series but he didn't let on to anybody. That's why he was deathly sick after the game. It wasn't from snapped nerves after making that game-losing error. He was just plain sick. But luck was with him. This medico and a friend were passing through town. He called Nolon's hotel just to say hello. Nolon told him what had happened, and the kid begged him to help him.

"Well, the medico did what he could. He got some of the same stuff, whatever it was, that he had used in the Pacific. It would at least let Nolon stay on his feet until the series was over. The medico was dead against it but Nolon begged because it was his big chance. So after each game his friends took him to where they were staying and doctored him up enough to keep him going for another day. Imagine it, Jack! Good gravy!"

I just sat there like a bump on a log, gaping at Silent.

"I never hope to see such courage on a ball field again!" he suddenly spoke

again. "Why I just thought it was nerve strain that made him look the way he did. If anybody had even mentioned that something else was wrong with him, I'd have yanked him from the lineup.

"I like to win, but I won't *kill* my players. Well, it's okay. He'll be all right in a few days. The thing lasts about a week, the medico said. But,

that's all right. I can shift the boys around now. They don't even know about Nolon yet. And when I tell them, it'll—well, it'll be the pennant for us, hands down!"

And it was! The Beavers won the pennant by six games. But, you know, in a way it was I who won that pennant for them—by keeping my big fat mouth shut!



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PIGSKIN PRODIGAL

By JOE ARCHIBALD

When his college team plays the old home town, Ernie Parr discovers that only fear can break the bonds of friendship!

THE big green Midstate Team, with eleven minutes left before the gun, capitalized on a Connell fumble at midfield and moved to the Blue's thirty-six yard line in three running plays. Ernie Parr had made the tackle but as he got up he knew he had been asleep and should have had his man for very little gain. The mental lapse, he thought, as he saw his replacement trotting in, could cost Connell a touchdown. They only led by ten points and a perfect

season was at stake. Cass McElver, the quarterback banged him on the rump as he started toward the bench. "I'll see you again maybe, Ernie, when you're awake."

Coach Wally Wakeman asked, "What's the matter, Ernie?" and then stared straight ahead as if he expected no reply.

It would have taken Ernie at least three hours to have fully answered the pertinent question even if Wakeman



Ernie cut in and put a shoulder block on the Sanford tackler

was interested enough to listen, and the blocking back was sure that he wouldn't be. Sometimes a long chain of circumstances lead up to a mental lapse most of which are important only in the mind of the culprit. The first link, more often than not, goes way back. In distance and in time.

He hadn't been too hot all afternoon and knew he'd added to Wakeman's worries. Huber, Connell's number one blocking back had been hurt two weeks ago, and his recovery in time for the big intersectional game with Sanford was doubtful.

Midstate, with time back in, kept to the running game, hitting outside the tackles. This time the right half helped in backing up the line and the Green made but two yards.

Ernie Parr had cause to remember Sanford University because it was located just outside the town where he'd been born, and as a kid he'd dreamed of going there. But many things had happened and his family had had to move away for a reason Ernie wished he could forget. In a few days he would be going back there for the first time in over four years and his name would be on the extra special program and a big number would be after his name.

He remembered a school principal saying, "Parr, you keep away from a certain crowd or someday you'll wear a number. You have a grudge against everything and everybody. What's the matter with you?"

There was a great roar from the thousands when Connell pushed Midstate back another eight yards by anticipating an end sweep. The Big Green's field general tried a third down pass and Ernie abstractedly watched it hit the turf untouched. Midstate looked for a break and punted for the coffin corner.

The ball sailed out on the eleven and Connell lined up on the defense. Ernie heard Wakeman sigh with relief. The clock was ticking the time away. After the first running play that netted six yards, Wakeman made substitutions, believing he could hold Midstate the rest of the way.

It was hard to go back where a guy would feel the thumps again. Not the ones Ernie would get from the Sanford huskies, but the harder thumps that carried more than physical pain. Like a

loud voice that would lift above all other sounds in the heat of play and warn the officials to look out for their watches. Like the doubt he'd see in familiar faces and the gauntlet he'd have to run down memory lane.

The squad, Wakeman had said that afternoon, would be quartered at the Blind Brook Country Club. The players would have a chance to get in some golf in addition to a light workout with a football. How many times had a scrawny kid, in need of a haircut and with patches on his pants, packed bags of clubs there for the people in the chips? Like George L. Strawbridge the rugged individualist and his daughter Lenore. What would George L. say when he saw and recognized Ernie Parr standing on the first tee getting ready to drive like any other gentleman?

"I'll keep away from a spot like that. I wonder if Lenore is as beautiful as ever and if she's married? She was fifteen then—a lot can happen in over seven years." Guys came back from the war he had helped to win and they looked nice in uniform.

Life was like football. You made one bad slip and you had a time of it fighting your way back. People easily forget the good things a man does but always manage to remember a single bad one. He wondered, while the big green team got rolling toward the Midstate goal line again, what had happened to a guy named Johnny Wyse and his sister Mary. They had been his kind and had lived in the same neighborhood. Mary had been a gangly kid with straight hair and braces on her teeth and in her adolescent way had made a play for him and had given him nightmares.

Sure he told himself, a guy can always have the thing in this world he wants the least.

The crowd was roaring like Niagara now and all the other players were off the bench and standing. He stopped his mental back-tracking and got up and looked toward Midstate's last line of defense. The Green employed an eight man line. Dekbrun, Wally Wakeman's powerful fullback, hit it square in the middle on a straight buck and seeped through with distance to spare. There was less than two minutes of playing time left after Ray Slagle booted the extra point. Connell 23, Midstate 6.

The big green team, when they gained

possession of the ball, futilely tried to cut the margin down. Smetana's interception of a frantic toss on his own forty-seven ended the game. It was a nice game to win, Ernie thought, as he trotted off with the others, and by such a comfortable margin. It should have a psychological effect on powerful Sanford.

The blocking back, as always, practiced more than a little restraint in the victory celebration for he had long since weighed the consequences of taking up even a part of the limelight. In the navy a man had suggested that he try for a commission, for he thought Ernie Parr belonged a little above the crowd. Ernie had been satisfied to go along with the tight pants and chowder cap, for when a man aspires to be a leader his past has to be an open book and placed where everyone can read.

A hand fell on Ernie's shoulder as he started for the showers and Wakeman said, "Huber's knee isn't coming along, Ernie, and you've got a big job to do next Saturday. Something is bothering you and if you want to get it off your mind, drop in and see me. Is it the marks?"

Ernie shook his head. "No, I'm doing all right with the books, coach. It is nothing. Nothing at all."

Dekbrun in passing, nudged him in the ribs. "Don't let it get you down, my boy. You're a better blocker than you think."

He mumbled his thanks, guessed that Dekbrun's background had been conducive to high morale, and that most of the days behind him were pleasant to recall. He, Ernie Parr had come from the so-called rowdy section of North Bend, and his clothes and his speech in those days had marked him.

He thought back to the day in high school when Frankie Gardner lost his expensive fountain pen and how all eyes in the physics class had turned to him. Frankie had found it a few minutes later and Ernie had said some things that had sent him to the principal's office.

Little links like that in the chain! He could tell the coach if he'd ever take long enough to listen.

THE trainer kept them there until he had checked their cuts and bruises and Wally Wakeman took the over-confidence out of them with criticism of their play against Midstate. He promised them that the bugs would be taken

out of their offense and defense before they got on the plane for Sanford, and reminded them that Sanford was the favorite, the choice of the experts to ruin Connell's unblemished record.

Maybe Ernie thought, I'll play far over my head to show them up back home. And then again maybe I won't be able to take it and get yanked out early in the game. I'll keep thinking, "They remember I was in that gang of guys that stole the car even though I did not know at that time that Lew Raniro had stolen it. They'll remember I spent a year in the Industrial School and was branded as a delinquent."

He was glad his folks had moved east when he'd come out of the navy. The change had helped the Parrs financially and their going must have, to some extent, caused North Bend to forget their son. When he got there he'd stay at the country club until the last minute when he'd have to go down into the town with the rest of the team.

There was only one person he craved to see and he knew he would catch a glimpse of her at Blind Brook. She would remember the days he had caddied for her, especially the one when he had finally succeeded in curing her of a wicked slice. She'd said, "Ernie, I won't ever forget you for this." She had been fourteen then, tall for her age, as beautiful as a girl could be, and as far beyond his reach as the sun. She would forget very quickly, he'd assured her.

Mary Wyse used to needle him about Lenore. She'd say, "I bet you're in love with her, Ernie. Don't be a fool. What chance have you got with her?"

Combing his hair in front of the mirror, he admitted that he wasn't bad to look at. He no longer talked North Bend's west-side dialect and his clothes were adequate, but two requisites he never hoped to have were necessary if he wanted to operate in Lenore's league. They were background and a bankroll.

"Sure, you look nice, Ernie," Wakeman's center grinned. "You are mouse bait, so leave a guy fix his up-sweep, too, huh?"

"So that was why you slipped up this afternoon," a towering guard grinned. "You didn't want to spoil your profile, Ernie."

These guys were okay and weren't using the hooks with malice aforethought. He elbowed the center in the

stomach and brought a grunt from him and then indulged in an infrequent laugh.

Wakeman had his squad out on the practice field on Monday afternoon and the workout was closed to the general public. Ernie Parr wondered if he had really stolen the coach's watch for the session seemed to revolve around him as if he had been the hub of a wheel. Dekbrun and Harry The Horse Baumann were packing for Wakeman, and he was doing most of the conveying. He was going through the rugged repertoire that had been Huber's in the earlier games, including all the blocks known to football men. Shoulder blocks, cross-body blocks, roll blocks and pivot blocks! The Connell martyrs, the scrubs, were using some tricks of their own. The sweat poured out of him and ran down into his shoes. He wondered how he would act if he was ever asked to carry the ball again. But he was satisfied to let Dekbrun and The Horse have the spotlight. The average spectator watches the guy with the ball and they reserve their cheers for him.

Wally Wakeman called a halt and walked over to talk to his team. "Baumann," he said. "You must remember to stop looking toward the spot in the line where you're going to hit. You telegraphed that last play to opponents. Ernie, take a lot of the weight off your heels in your offensive stance. On that cutback, Kettler, you were not entirely alert—let's run through that play again."

ERNIE PARR took his stance again. Baumann drew the scrub end and tackle across the line, then cut in and reversed his field in the secondary where he picked up his blockers. Ernie was with him out there and Baumann was as untouchable as a leper as he romped into the clear. Wally Wakeman said it was very nice, and that his backs were through for the afternoon. Ernie was going off the proving ground when Wakeman called him back. The coach had hold of the arm of his number two quarterback, George Kyle.

"You have much studying to do tonight, Ernie?" Wakeman asked.

"I'm caught up," Ernie said.

"Wish you'd do me a favor along with Kyle," the coach said. "The Rotary is sponsoring a dinner at the Millbridge Y tonight for a bunch of boys. The mayor

called me this noon and asked if I couldn't send a couple of varsity players over to speak a few words. You know what they want. Inspiration. The benefits of early training and clean living—you are living examples. I think it would be a good idea. Those kids—"

Ernie's lips drew taut. "Count me out, Coach. If there's one thing I hate to do it's make a speech. In fact I can't make one. Period. Get somebody else, will you?"

"Okay," Wakeman said. "But it would do you a lot of good to crawl out from under your shell, Ernie."

"What a laugh!" Ernie thought, "I could go there and tell them what happens to kids who steal automobiles because no one knows better than myself. I could tell them how awful a year in a reform school can be even though the folks nowadays give it a politer name. Sure and I could tell them to aspire to the heights because nothing is beyond the reach of any sprout in a democracy. I could even tell them about a guy who did not dare to look for a gold stripe in the navy, and who was really scared at the thought of going back to North Bend to play against Sanford."

Under the shower a few moments later he thought far back again and wondered if Lew Raniro had made good his vindictive boast at the Industrial School. "Once you get in a joint like this, Ernie, you're licked. When I git out I'll give some punks back in that town somethin' to remember me by."

He guessed Lew was in a bad spot somewhere. Everybody in North Bend used to say there was a bad streak in Lew, and they had predicted a bad end for him. Ernie thought bitterly, "They will also give him a real lift toward one with the toes of their boots."

Later in his room in Colfax Hall, Ernie looked at an old snapshot he had carried with him ever since he'd left North Bend. It had been the custom back there for high school kids to have them taken and then swap them around. Even that cheap photography had failed to detract from her loveliness, he told himself.

There would never be another girl like Lenore. It was possible that she already knew he was playing on the Connell team for the North Bend *Item* would surely be playing up the classic to the hilt, and she could be wondering if Ernie Parr would contact her the moment he

reached the club to find out if she really had remembered the kid who'd cured her of that slice.

She could stop wondering about that. She could make up her mind that she would have to make the first move.

THE Connell squad piled into a long sleek bus at the airport and drove to the Blind Brook Club. The familiar surroundings had their way with Ernie Parr despite an attempt on his part to hold them lightly. Old memories, pleasant and otherwise occupied his mind and the banter and the chatter of the other players seemed far away.

The bus left the main highway and purred up a winding road to the Blind Brook Clubhouse and he looked out over patches of the rugged championship course where he'd played a hundred mornings before the sun had barely cleared the mists. There was a four-some getting ready to tee off on Number Seven and he thought he recognized the stance of a tall, stoop-shouldered old man.

He got out of the bus, his legs a little shaky, and followed the others into the big lobby where a curious well-groomed crowd had gathered. Certain faces, a little older now, stirred his memory, but he was careful not to concentrate on any of them. Reporters surrounded Wally Wakeman and Dekbrun and Harry The Horse. Pretty girls, dressed for golf, eyed the Connell huskies with little stars in their eyes. He finally signed his name at the desk and was glad the old clerk was not there.

Walking to the elevator he glanced at a portly, florid-faced man buying a newspaper at the cigar counter and he knew it was H. T. Brainard who used to play a lot of golf with Strawbridge and who never could master the irons. The club member looked his way but gave no sign that anyone named Ernie Parr had ever existed.

He was glad to get in the room assigned to him along with Joe Volker and Nick Ladore, two of Wakeman's front line, and dropping into a big easy chair near a high window, tried to convince himself that he was really here. Nick said, "I'm goin' to miss football when I'm through with it. Nothing else will support me in the manner in which I like to be accustomed."

"Better watch your average in Eng-

lish." Joe kidded and stripped to his waist. "You don't look happy, Ernie. Was it somethin' you et?"

"I feel fine," he said. "It's the waiting that gets me. I wish we played the Sandfords in about an hour." He kept looking out of the window trying to get a glimpse of her, forgetting for awhile, that a girl can do a lot of growing in seven years and that beauticians like to change their methods at least once a year. He was looking for a kid instead of a woman and laughed dryly when he realized it.

Nick and Joe freshened up and asked him if he was coming along to give the place the once over. "I'm a little bushed," he said. "I'm going to grab some sleep. I haven't seen a bed like that in all my life."

"Strictly anti-social," Joe said. "What would impress the guy?"

An hour later the phone rang. He jumped up quickly and wondered if this was it. The clerk said, "Mr. Parr, a gentleman from the press to see you."

He was about to slam the phone back on the cradle, then changed his mind. "All right, send him up."

Ernie remembered the guy. Fat and sloppily dressed, with a glass eye. His name was Ford. "Yeah?" he asked.

"You're a hometown boy," Ford said, and chewed on the ragged stub of a cigar. "Played for North Bend High, didn't you?"

"Somebody must have seen my name in the papers," Ernie said sourly. "Yeah, I was born here but a guy can't ever pick his place. I used to know some people here slightly."

"I see," Ford said. "Too big for your pants now, Ernie. I remember—"

"You better forget," Ernie snapped. "You wake up the sleeping dogs and I'll personally murder you before I leave town. Tell 'em I'm Dekbrun's blocking back and will do my best to pin Sanford's ears back. That's all you'll print."

"Okay, pal," the sports reporter said. "Did I say I wouldn't? There was some nice local color here and that is all I come for. I won't get writer's cramp buildin' you up, don't worry."

THE rest of the day was like a journey under water and everything seemed blurred. Old faces of golfers he had known kept drifting by. In the dining room he ate mechanically and kept his

eyes on his plate, spoke only to the players around him. No one came up and tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "Aren't you Ernie Parr?" His old friends on the west side couldn't, of course. They did not belong here.

At ten o'clock in the morning, a lot of the club members watched the newspaper photographers snap a picture of Wally Wakeman's team lined up the way they would start against Sanford. Ernie in the backfield, looked around for a glimpse of Lenore Strawbridge and once he thought he saw her. But the hair of the girl in the tweed suit was not golden enough and her lips were too red. But this number stared back at him.

There was the light workout later and a game of golf. Ernie dared to play a round and Dekbrun, collegiate champion golfer, gaped at Ernie after the seventh hole had been played. "Don't kid me, pal. Those clubs are feelers stretching out from your brain. You'd think you'd played this course a thousand times."

"Just lucky, Dek," Ernie said. "I can't do anything wrong here, it seems, not these days."

The caddies he did not know. When it was over and he was walking toward the clubhouse, an old man with a goatee stopped him. "You look familiar, son. I think you're a boy used to caddy around here."

"A lot of kids look alike," Ernie said. He guessed the old coot did not read the sports in the North Bend *Item*. He kept on going, wishing the time would fly.

It happened just before the team left Blind Brook Club at one o'clock the next day. A bellhop called Ernie's name as he came out of the elevator. The blocking back called the boy over and was handed a light blue envelope with his name written on it in a feminine hand. Quickly he ripped it open. It said, "I want to wish an old friend good luck this afternoon. I called you on the phone this morning, but you were out. How are you, Ernie? Lenore."

This was the lift he needed, a bolstering of his morale and balm for his pride. After the game he could go and see her, and not like a lonesome dog looking for a pat on the back.

He did not realize that Harry The Horse was right behind him. "Woo, woo, Ernie. Do I smell perfume? What have you been keeping from us?"

"It is not a practice jersey," Ernie

said. "And it is something I've been keeping from myself." He hurried out of the lobby and into the chilled sunshine of the late November day, and he knew Dekbrun would do all right against Sanford. On the way to the big stadium he laughed and talked with the others and Wally Wakeman said, "I have now seen and heard everything. It should be a great day."

"Something has happened to the introvert," Dekbrun said.

"Could be, but I ain't talkin'," Harry The Horse said.

"Some day I'll tell you why," Ernie laughed.

THERE were seventy thousand people in the stands fifteen minutes before the kickoff, well-fed people wearing the best clothes money could buy. Furs and diamonds and camel hair and cashmere. Ernie Parr, as he trotted out with the big Blue players, wished he had the dough that had been invested in chrysanthemums alone. The big bands were playing and the pretty co-eds of Sanford, wearing the short skirts and shakos, and twirling batons, strutted over the rich green turf as high, wide and handsome as high school horses. It was a bowl of autumn madness.

The Sanford team, in their white jerseys, were huddled around their coach on the other side of the field. The officials were grouped together in the center of the gridiron and a pre-game hush settled over the great stadium. Ernie drew his helmet on and listened carefully to Wakeman's last minute instructions. A few moments later he stood and watched Dekbrun win the toss from the Sanford captain. Dekbrun pointed to the west goal.

Sanford's unbeaten eleven spread out to receive and the game that had been the talk of football addicts from coast to coast for many days was ready to begin. At the whistle, Harry The Horse Baumann ran up to the ball and booted it high and far to Sanford's five yard line where Coach Hy Byers' fullback took it neatly in his arms and set off the explosives in his legs. He battered his way to the fourteen where a host of blue tacklers smashed him to earth.

Sanford experimented with the left side of the big blue forward wall and found it giving very little this afternoon. The Cougar touchdown maker, Colter,

got only a yard. The left half, Arky Greenberg, tried a cross buck and got to the seventeen when Ernie Parr really backed up the line. Ernie wondered if Lenore had seen him make that tackle.

Colter went back and took a nice pass from center and punted far down the field and Dekbrun stooped to pick it up on the bounce near the sidelines then suddenly changed his mind. The ball rolled out on the twenty-eight.

Now, Ernie thought, we'll see if we are going to miss Huber. The signals rang clear in his mind and when the ball was snapped he saw the defensive end come in deep to get Dekbrun who would be running straight to the side.

Ernie cut in just ahead of Dekbrun to spill the Sanford tackle and put a shoulder block on another man. He kept on going through the end's vacated spot and lead his man up to Connell's thirty-nine for a first down.

Dekbrun slapped him on the shoulder when he helped the ball carrier up. "Your home town won't like this, Ernie," he grinned.

"You can say that again," the blocking back said crisply. "That is, most of 'em, Dek."

Sanford lined up, its backs drawn in. There would be no pass here. There was no reason for Connell to kick. The quarterback, they reasoned, would try two plays and then play it safe with a punt.

Hennenger, running the team for Wakeman, ran a play. It was Harry The Horse operating on a spinner. Harry was caught standing straight up and got only a yard and a half. Sanford employed the same defensive and Dekbrun quick-kicked. The ball went far over the safety man's head and he chased it to the eleven before he could get his hands on it. Wakeman's ends were down like scared rabbits and one of them picked the safety man up and put him down on the nine.

Sanford tried a running play to pick up enough yardage to take the pressure off their kicker and it was Greenberg fumbling as he broke through the middle. A Connell guard picked up the ball and pitched to the side, cluthing it as if it were a pot of gold. Here was the break that could mean the difference and Connell lined up quickly. Sanford dug in, the ends wide. Dekbrun got the call, and behind Ernie Parr, crashed be-

tween guard and tackle for four big yards. The mighty partisan crowd rose to their collective feet and implored the Sanford Cougars to hold.

HARRY The Horse, on the next play, hit the Cougars in the middle for three and a half. Ernie Parr, thinking far back yet well aware of what was expected of him on the play, cleared the way for Dekbrun off tackle and rolled over the last white line with the Sanford safety man.

The tremendous groan that welled up from the banked seats told him Dekbrun had reached pay dirt right behind him. He twisted around and saw the official lift his arms high. The Connell players indulged in a brief demonstration, then hurriedly lined up to try for the all-important extra point. Into the game came Wakeman's seventh point expert, Twinkletoes Romer.

The specialist delivered and Connell was out in front 7-0. The experts had said there would not be more than two or three touchdowns scored in the entire game. Well, Ernie Parr thought, we've got a third of them. Thanks for wishing me luck, Honey. I'll be seeing you, and I'll never forget you for this day.

Sanford in possession, struck back with every trick they had up their sleeves. They bulled their way slowly to the forty-nine yard line and picked up fifteen more when Ernie Parr was caught clipping. McElver, now in for Connell at quarter, roared at him and looked toward the bench. He said, when no sub came running in, "Watch that, Ernie. I know it wasn't deliberate, but givin' fifteen yards to these guys is murder."

The boos rolled down over the field and Ernie ground his teeth. "They're remembering," he said, forgetting that North Bend's population was only twenty thousand and that few of the townspeople would be in the stadium. On the next play he caught Greenberg trying to knife into the clear and belted him down. He made the tackle on Colter a few minutes later and wondered how much a man's bones could stand. Colter did not get up in a hurry and Ernie got a chance to rest and wash out his mouth with clear cold water.

He hoped that Strawbridge had lost all his dough. Then a guy like Ernie Parr could plan ahead. After this was over he'd go up to the ridge and ring the door-

bell and he would make sure of the score.

Twenty minutes later, after a nightmare of concussions he ran off the field with the bushed Connell team, and looked at the score on the big board. It was still Connell 7 Sanford 0.

The air mattress in the Sanford locker room was nice and he wished he did not have to go back and go through it all again. He hardly heard Wakeman reviewing the first half and giving pointers. All the lift he needed had been handed to him by a bellhop, and it would be enough to see him through.

He was battering at the brawny Sanford linemen a half hour later after a brief respite on the bench and taking Dekbrun through for short but effective gains. The ball was on Sanford's thirty-eight and the scoreboard said Connell 7 Sanford 3. Hennenger took to the air and hung out the line to Wakeman's great end, DeChene, on the Cougar's twenty-two. Then he called on Harry The Horse who ground out four yards through center. Six fresh Sanford players came in.

Hennenger failed with a bullet pass, then let Dekbrun take up the burden again with Ernie Parr sweeping the floor clean ahead. The crowd roared frantically as this Connell one-two punch pushed Sanford's tiring wall back. Ernie, when he got up on the three yard line, thought he would never run again. But there was a scent of perfume in the chilly autumn afternoon that put the drive in him and kept it there.

"All right," Hennenger said in the huddle. "There is only one play. We make this, and they'll never catch us."

"Tell them back at the old school I died with a smile on my lips," Ernie said.

He broke two rushing linemen apart, bounced one against the knees of a third Sanford plunger and went over the goal line with Dekbrun for another Connell touchdown. Romer trotted away from the bench and proceeded to boot the fourteenth point. Wally Wakeman called Ernie and Dekbrun out and said he'd never had a greater combination.

ERNIE sat through the rest of it and watched Sanford score on a long pass in the closing seconds. The Cougars missed the try for point as seventy thousand people, not as happy as they'd been when they'd swarmed in, began to

pour toward the runways. Connell 14, Sanford 9.

An assistant manager handed Ernie Parr a letter when he got into the big dressing room under the stadium. It said, "There is a car waiting outside Exit 8. This time it belongs to me. There is a crowd at The Elks want to see you, Ernie. Lew Raniro."

Wallie Wakeman banged him on the shoulder. "Yeah, you've got time, Ernie. Our train doesn't leave until midnight. Some home town folks want to see you. They contacted me when we first got in."

He did not get it. Why had Lew waited until now? He peeled off and showered and let the trainer look him over. Five minutes later he was dressed and looking for Exit 8. With the help of a groundkeeper he found it and went out through and saw the long green sedan with a natty figure of a man leaning against it. The man grinned and now he knew it was Lew. He had grown taller and heavier and looked sharp. He yelled, "Ernie, you old horse-thief!"

"It wasn't a horse, Lew," Ernie said, a lump in his throat. "Remember?"

"Oh, that? Look, that is all over. Jump in. We're goin' places. You played a sweet game, Ernie. I could use you. I am now coach of the North Bend High School."

What was this? Something was all wrong with the picture. "Look, Lew. Stop somewhere before we get to The Elks. I have to make a call."

"You needn't call anybody. They'll be there. Wait until you see her."

"Oh? Well, let's keep going, Lew."

A long low roadster squealed to a stop right behind Lew's sedan when it rolled up in front of the Elks. A girl stepped out, and Ernie knew he had seen her at Blind Brook. She wore a nice fur coat and hat to match and wore the colors of Sanford. And now he knew it was Lenore and was not pleased with the change seven years had made. He took the hand she held out to him. "Hello, Ernie. To think you used to caddy for me!" She turned to Lew and smiled briefly. "How are you, Lew?"

"I do okay."

"I'm terribly sorry I can't stay, Ernie," Lenore said. "But I just had to come and wish you luck."

"You've already done that," Ernie said. "I got your message before the game. It helped a lot. It—"

"You got my message? Ernie, what are you talking about? There has to be a mistake. I never—"

He reached into his pocket and then brought his hand out empty. "A mistake somewhere I guess. It wasn't signed," he lied, and all at once he knew he had built up for seven years a perfect specimen in his mind that hadn't ever really existed. There were other things he had built there that were just as wrong.

"Some other girl," Lenore smiled. "Well, have a good time, Ernie. I have a heavy date."

Walking into The Elks, Lew said, "You meant her Ernie? I thought—"

"Who else, Lew? But forget it. I sure have got to figure this one out."

"Mary Wyse," Lew said. "Wait until you see her, Ernie. She still is head over heels in love with you."

"Hooley," Ernie said, and then a gang of people poured out and yelled his name. He recognized most of them as if they had stepped out of yesterday. Names came back to him and as he spoke to them his eyes began to swim. The tables were decorated with autumn flowers and the high school band was in its place and ready to play. As a tall stringy fellow with an embryo mustache and mild brown eyes came up to him he wondered what would have become of Lew Raniro and Ernie Parr if there had not been a game called football. "Johnny Wyse," he said, and shook the guy's hand.

"Ernie, you remember Mary," Johnny said. "She is out in the little card room just off the lobby. She's afraid to come in. She's acting strange, Ernie."

ERNIE said, "Okay, I'll bring her in, Johnny," and excused himself. He went into the room and saw the girl standing near the window and looking out. She was a very pretty girl with silky brown hair that fell over her shoulders. She wore a tweed suit and one of those hats that look like a cheese box. On her, he thought, it looked wonderful. He kept looking around but she was the only girl there. Then she turned her head, and her eyes widened like a frightened fawn's. "Ernie!"

"You're Mary Wyse?" The shock was pleasant. "No braces on your teeth." He laughed and stepped quickly across the room. "And your hair, it's different. You've grown up and have done a swell

job of it."

"You haven't done bad yourself, Ernie. I saw her out there and I guess you're wondering about something," Mary said, and looked scared again. "She didn't write that note, of course. I did." She turned away from him and he thought she was going to cry.

"You? For heaven's sake, why?"

"I remembered how terribly bitter you were when we were in school, Ernie. When that thing—happened, and you left North Bend. Coming back here to play against Sanford I thought you'd need something to make you forget the things—I—was sure you wouldn't. I wanted you to play the best you ever played. I remembered how you worshiped her, Ernie, and guessed you never stopped. It was crazy, I'll admit. I—"

"Mary," Ernie said, and turned her around. "You know me as well as I know myself, and I guess you always knew what made me tick. Suppose I'd called Lenore when I first got in, you little goon, and—"

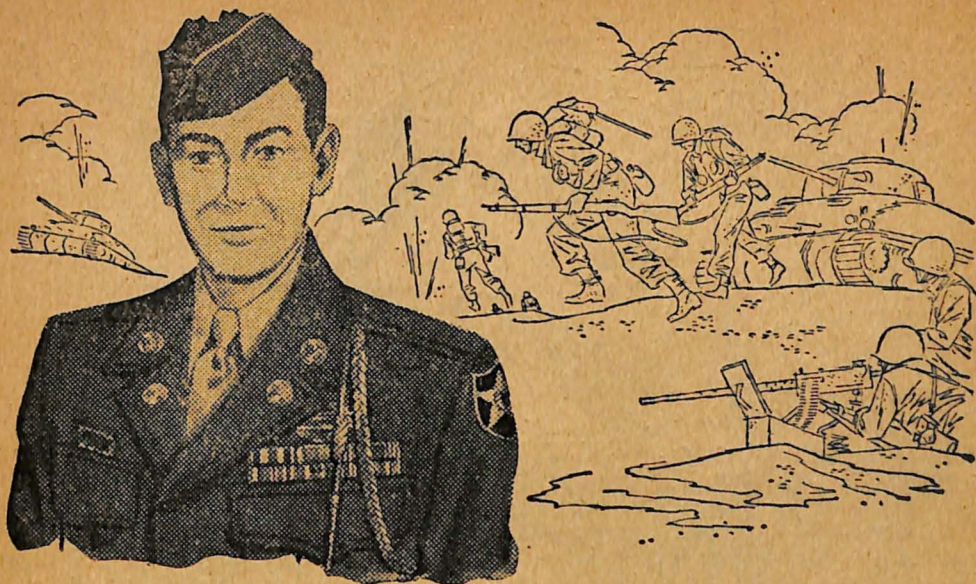
"That wasn't much of a gamble," she said. "I remembered your terribly stubborn pride, Ernie. You wouldn't make the first move in a game with a Straw-bridge."

Ernie laughed and kept his hands on her shoulders. "What a fool I've been, Mary. I've been fighting myself all the time, not the world, and I've fought me too hard. Now I know the people are not at all concerned over the kind of kid I used to be."

"If you'd stayed in North Bend, like Lew did, you would have found that out long ago, Ernie. They are only interested in the kind of man that boy made of himself." The scariness was out of her eyes now and they had little lights dancing in them. "We'd better go in there, Ernie, or they'll think—"

"Whatever they think is all right by me, Mary," the blocking back said. "I wonder if you'd drop me a line every once in awhile and tell me what you're doing—every day. When we were in school you made a play for me. I'd kind of like to run through it again."

Mary laughed and slipped an arm through his. "We will see, Ernie," and her voice was happy like the musical ripple of a brook. North Bend, like Managua, Nicaragua, Ernie thought, as he proudly convoyed her into the reception room, was a beautiful place.



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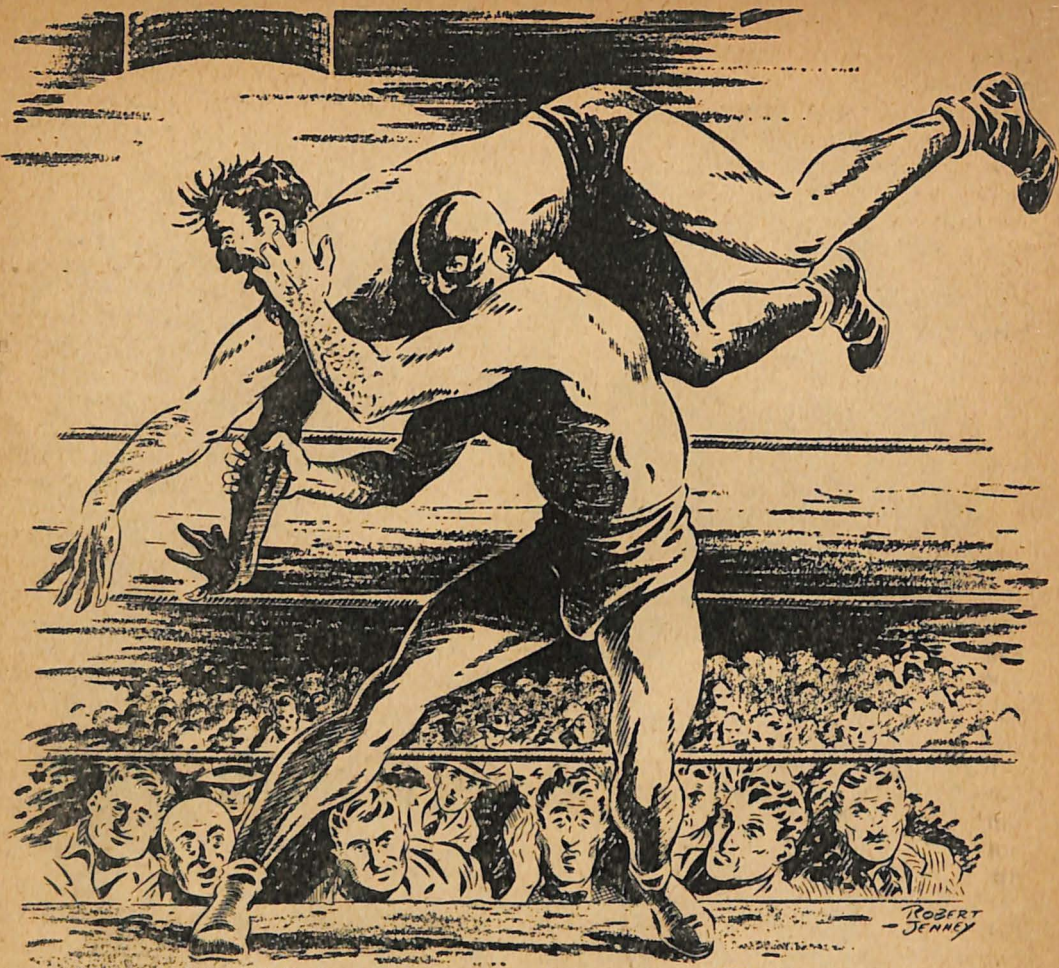
taken in February and March, and by V-E Day the division had driven all the way to Czechoslovakia.

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CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

**U. S. Army and
U. S. Air Force**



Luke heaved his opponent into the air and hurled him to the mat

Return of a CHAMPION

By TRACY MASON

A former star pugilist, turned wrestler and known as the Crimson Hood, awaits his chance to avenge a double-cross!

THE iron bedstead squealed protestingly as Luke Peele flung himself on top of the not-too-clean covers and looked up at the fly-specked ceiling of the little hotel room.

"Back again," he muttered, aloud. "Get out the brass band and the red carpet. The champ is back in town."

He twisted his big bulk in its rumpled clothes until he could reach a pack of cigarettes in the pockets of the baggy

pants he wore. He extracted one of the cigarettes, snapped a match on a broad thumb and blew a thin cloud of blue smoke at the grimy ceiling.

"Maybe," he told himself, with an ironic twist of his battered lips, "I shouldn't be smokin'. Maybe I ought to keep in trainin' for an important fight like the one tonight."

Outside, traffic grumbled and snarled and there was the constant squawk of

automobile horns, protesting the maneuvers of some other vehicle. Occasionally, hoarse voices raised in furious complaint, drifted up to the window of Luke's hotel room.

This was not the best part of town, nor the best hotel in the city. Far from it. But when a man is on his uppers, he can do without indirect lighting in the lobbies, obsequious room clerks and bellhops or deep carpeting on corridor floors. He can ignore the signs in the elevators inviting guests to visit the Palm Room or the Mauve Room or the Georgian Room.

A man who's down and out can do without a lot of things, after he's missed a couple of meals. He learns, in time, to never miss the extras.

Luke Peele had learned, and the learn-time had not taken too long. The last time that he had been in this city had been—

"Lessee," the big man on the bed muttered, his mouth spilling cigarette smoke. "It must've been in the Fall, because there was kind of a smoky haze hangin' over the park when I looked outta the hotel window. I remember I couldn't sleep and Getter was goin' nuts."

Getter, Luke recalled, was always on the verge of going nuts, after Luke got the title. Poor Getter. Always worrying about this and fretting about that! In the end, all his headaches had added up to one big goose egg and he was in the same boat with the ones who never bothered to think about what might happen next.

And the boat was sunk.

But that Fall afternoon, Getter had been jittering around the big, luxurious suite of the Alpine hotel facing the park, worrying because Luke couldn't sleep, worrying at the sign of the faintest cloud in the sky because this was to be an outdoor fight and Getter hated postponements. He was worrying because Luke's weight had been up a half a pound at the weighing-in—worrying because the contender had looked stronger than expected when the two men had shaken hands for the photographers. He was worrying about everything except the thing he should have been worrying about—the Commission and the District Attorney's detectives who, even then, were getting ready to close in and stop the fight.

YEAH, poor Getter! After all the testimony was in the books, it had been Getter who had gone up, along with two or three others, on a conviction of conspiring to sell out the title.

He, Luke, had gotten off easy. All the sniping of the D.A.'s questioners, the scornful inquisitors of the Commission, never could shake Luke's story that he had known nothing about any fix. He maintained all along that he had followed Getter's orders in training and never had received a nickel of the money Getter was supposed to have gotten. Furthermore he claimed that if the contender knocked him out, it would have been because the contender would have tagged him.

Well, yes, he had said, it was true he had been given a bad eye in training and, yes, it was true that he had hurt his ankle one day on the road. Getter had said those things would be all right, and he had always followed Getter's orders. And if he wasn't feeling in the best condition of his life, why Getter had explained that he was getting older and that was to be expected.

Yes, they had let Luke Peele off easy. They had just barred him from the prize ring for the rest of his life.

The big man on the bed rolled over to stretch out an arm to the ash tray on the night table beside him. He jabbed out the cigarette with a grinding punch, as though the lighted spark were going into one of Getter's pop eyes.

The law had given Getter two years, It had taken the little manager a good deal less than that to serve his sentence and return to the outside. Getter was smart. Getter had been able to convince the people he wanted convinced, that he had been framed. He admitted he had been a dope, maybe, but never a crook. He was sure that he could be trusted again, now that he had served his time and paid his debt to society. Getter had gone back to his life of thick steaks and two-hundred-dollar suits and Sulka neckties and blond girl friends.

But nobody ever had accused Luke Peele of being smart. Luke Peele had been wise only in the ways of the roped ring, the counter to a left jab, the time to slug and the time to box, the exact split second in which to move his chin out of the range of a flashing hook. When this world was taken from him, when he was exiled from the only life

he ever had known, there was nothing left.

Or not much. For a time, there had been fights in dingy, third rate clubs, under assumed names, for tip-money purses. But the Commission, in its inexorable vengeance against a champ who it always thought schemed to sell his title, finally reached the little third-rate clubs. Soon he was barred from them, too. He never had been a man to save money, even though he had known poverty before he had become accustomed to eating regularly and well. When the crash came he had nothing.

There had been lean days for Luke Peele—days when his stomach was an aching, gnawing void. The world about him acquired the strange habit of suddenly slanting and whirling for a bit, until he sat down somewhere—on a park bench or in a doorway. He was forced to close his eyes against this hideous gavotte.

This was at a time when jobs for capable, experienced men were at a premium, and how could Luke Peele hope to compete against them? True, he was big and he was strong, but big, strong men were a drug on the market at that time. As has been noted, Luke was experienced only in using his padded fists to their best advantage. He drifted from one brief job to another and, during long stretches, found no work at all. Big men have big appetites and perhaps Luke suffered more than others during these dark days, although the degrees of hunger suffering are too delicate for the average layman to distinguish.

It was during this time that he took the name Luke Peele. His name as champ had been something else, a name that became a bitter word in the mouths of sport lovers throughout the country and the world who never believed the story he had given the Commission and the D.A.

Luke found it expedient to give another name after a few incidents when, applying for a job and giving the name under which he had held the title, he was turned down bruskiy, blacklisted from even the most menial task. Sports fans are quick to raise their idols onto pedestals but when those idols fall, they are absolute in their renunciation of the minor gods who have failed them.

Luke Peele had been a popular champ. His downfall, therefore, had been crash-

ing, abysmal. Editorials had been written, raging at the manner in which Luke had "given the fight game a bad name." Reformers had used Luke as an argument supporting their selfish, narrow-minded views. Few people had heard the name Getter—few people ever knew what became of him. The headlines named the champ and it was the champ against whom the public's fury was turned, in the end.

WEARILY the big man on the sagging hotel bed rolled to his feet and walked over the gritty carpet to the window. He shoved his hands deep into his pockets and stared down at the teeming street below. His eyes were blank, his heavy face cast in hard lines. The champ had been quick to grin, ready to laugh always, in the old days. Luke Peele seldom laughed now, and when he did it was not always a pleasant sound to hear.

"One fifty, I'm gettin'," he told himself now. "One fifty for makin' a monkey outta myself and either lettin' this lug beat me or ringin' up a great win for myself, dependin' on how Shorty makes out. I used to spend one fifty a week handin' out bills to the guys that had sick wives and rent bills to pay and kids with birthdays comin' up and no dough in the house. Yeah."

He rubbed his chin, his fingers rasping over the stubble that coated his face. He wondered about shaving and decided against it. He'd wait for Shorty to report before he shaved or let it go. It depended on whether the promoters of this crumb rassling show decided he was going to be a hero or a villain at tonight's fight. Besides, the mask hid most of his puss, anyway.

He turned back from the window and flexed his long arms. Obeying a whim, he suddenly crouched into a boxing position, his fists revolving slowly. He lashed out a left and followed through with the right. He moved in against the phantom he had retreating, gasping with the shock of that hook to the ribs. He—stopped as he caught a reflection of himself in the foggy mirror of the bureau.

"Be yourself," he cautioned himself. "You're a two-bit rassler now, and glad to get the eatin' money. You're not the champ now. You're the Crimson Hood now."

The Crimson Hood! Shorty had

thought up most of the things that had happened to him since he had joined forces with the funny little guy. He had met Shorty while he was on the road, a dingo. Shorty had been one step removed from being a vag himself. He had been working a cheap pitch in a town that had suddenly embarked on a clean-up campaign.

The two men, Shorty and Luke, had finally fled the place together. There had been an encounter with a big deputy sheriff who had picked Shorty as the target for his pistol butt. Luke had disposed of the deputy and since then, the two had been friends.

"You look big enough to be in the ring," Shorty had said, one day, when the going was a little rougher than usual. "I used to do a little managing in my day, before that babe I was tellin' you about run out on me and I hit the road. How about me tryin' to get you a spot on some tank town card we might run across?"

"No fights," Luke had said shortly. "I don't go for fights."

"Well," Shorty pursued, "how about rasslin', then?"

"I don't know anything about rasslin'."

"Y' don't have to," Shorty had said, eagerly. "I can tell you all you'd have to know. We could put a mask on you, maybe, and bill you as—as the Crimson Hood, say. The yokes would go for that, I betcha."

"A mask?" Luke had asked. That had interested him. To fight, even in the most isolated tank town, meant risking recognition and the subsequent expose. Crumb promoters, he had learned, were quick to refuse to pay off for the bouts on the excuse that they would never have booked a man banished for life from the boxing ring, if they had known who he was. But with a mask—

"What's this rasslin' business about?" he had asked Shorty.

LUKE laughed bitterly, even now, as he remembered his first match. It was in a tiny Western town which magically blossomed into a tumultuous city each Saturday night when the construction workers from a nearby dam flocked into the place to spend their pay.

He had felt like an idiot when he had entered the ring, his face half covered by a red mask that Shorty had fashioned from some cloth he had dug up some-

where. He could not blame the spectators for their welling chorus of laughing boos. He cringed inwardly when he followed Shorty's instructions and stalked about the ring, beating himself on his chest with his clenched fists to the accompaniment of the raucous voice of the crowd.

His opponent that night had been a short, squat man with a hairy chest whose bald head proclaimed his years. This individual was a local favorite and it was he who drew the cheers that contrasted with the noises of Luke's reception.

"Thirty minute time limit," the announcer told the crowd. "From New Orleans, Louisiana, the Champion of the Mississippi Valley, the Crimson Hood!"

Boo upon boo, as Luke strutted around the ring again in that ridiculous chest-beating pose. Never again, he told himself. Going hungry was better than this.

But later, after the two men had used up the greater part of their time in struggling futilely, grunting, yowling and beating the mat with their hands in simulated pain, Luke Peele had discovered that his opponent could make the gentlest hold look like a bone-crunching twist.

Luke learned in time that the short man could take his awkward heaves with staggering motions that made it look as though he, Luke, were intent on slaughter. After that it hadn't seemed so bad.

When the hairy-chested wrestler, following the pre-bout instructions, had suddenly twisted from beneath Luke to roll over on top of Peele and pin his shoulders to the mat, while the crowd yelled in delirious delight, it had seemed like being part of some show—some sort of vaudeville act.

When Shorty showed him the fifty dollars he had earned by his antics, it had suddenly been perfectly all right. If suckers would pay to see him go through these dopey, faked capers—if they went for that sort of thing, he, Luke, would be glad to gyp them. These same fans, perhaps, had been among the ones who had howled for his neck when the scandal broke.

Luke Peele felt that he could get some measure of revenge on them now by laughing at them, behind that red rag of a mask. Let them yell and boo at what went on in the wrestling ring. It was as false as a dime store diamond. But the

revenge, such as it was, was not a luxuriant one.

"You did all right," the promoter of the first show Luke played told Shorty and him, after the bout. "My cousin puts on shows in a town fifty miles up the line. If you want, I'll give him a ring and see if he can put you on his card. He can't pay much, though. He's just getting started."

And so it went. Fifty bucks here, twenty-five there. In one town, a raging storm kept the customers home and the show went into the red so the wrestlers took carfare money and a promise of future compensation. In another place, the promoter skipped while the wrestlers sweated and strained through their performances.

One Christmas Eve—ah, miracle night!—the promoter, imbued by the holiday spirit and, apparently, deep draughts at a jug, doubled their contracted fee with a spurt of generosity which must have made his next day's hangover headache a monumental affair.

They literally toured the country. To Luke, it was amazing that some small towns, mere whistle-stops could sustain some kind of an "arena" where wrestling shows were staged. True, the exhibitions were not of the highest caliber, nor were the performers paid more than a few dollars, but wherever they roamed, Shorty and Luke, they generally were able to find some small town promoter who could book them in time to keep them from going hungry. Not always, but usually.

AT LENGTH, and after some grubby going, the "Crimson Hood" had been accepted as a member of a minor league wrestling combine that provided Luke and Shorty with a fairly regular schedule of appearances in towns of a little larger size than the tanks the pair had been accustomed to gravitating to.

Luke Peele was built up as a "villain," in a mild way, and rematches billed as "grudge fights" helped swell their meager coffers some. Luke became a semi-finalist and had the promise of getting top billing—if he followed orders and behaved himself.

He had learned all the tricks of wrestling by now—had, indeed, perfected a specialty, the equipment of every top-flight wrestler. Luke's was a vague hold known, locally, as the "Red Hood Slam."

It was nothing more, really, than a body slam, given with an added flourish that provided a fillip for the cash customers who screamed for Luke's defeat every time he went to the mat.

Given by a wrestling "hero," the slam would have been an innocuous thing, but Luke's added twist made it seem a heinous affair, breaking all the laws of good sportsmanship and proving to all and sundry that the Red Hood was a brute who never should be allowed to associate with civilized people.

"Gimme the slam," Luke's opponents would grunt in his ear during some bow-knot tangle. "The yokels are gettin' restless."

And Luke would heave his opponent into the air, twist him into a grotesque bend and hurl him to the mat with a roar of evil glee while the cash customers howled their booing rage.

Graduating to the semi-finalist level did not bring wealth to Luke or Shorty. Finalists in the circuit that showed Luke's wares were never beset by income tax troubles and the semi-finalists were always one jump ahead of hunger.

"We gotta hit the big time," Shorty kept saying. "We gotta get to the city and prove to the big shots that you're a draw."

"Never mind the city," Luke would grunt. "I'm satisfied here." The city meant the old crowd, the boys who had been his pals, the mob that had hailed him as the greatest champ in history. Yet, when the thunder had rumbled on the horizon, his pals had scurried away, leaving him to face the storm alone.

The city meant Getter and his like. It meant that he might be recognized by someone who might run to the Commish, blowing the whistle. Luke wasn't sure what power, if any, the Boxing Commission might wield in the wrestling profession, but his experience had taught him that it would be better not to investigate. It had been a long time since the papers had mentioned him, and the sell-out to the contender. Better this fly-by-night existence than to waken the sleeping dogs.

It had been Shorty, finally, who had forced the issue; or, rather, Shorty's kid.

Luke had grown very fond of the little man, his manager, and, bit by bit, he had learned Shorty's personal history while telling the diminutive manager absolutely nothing about his own past. Shorty

had a son who lived with his grandmother. This son was Shorty's idol. The infrequent letters the boy wrote became tattered things as Shorty read and reread the scrawls until their penciled contents became absolutely illegible.

"Ray, he says he's doin' good in school. Ray, he got a new pair of shoes with that last dough I sent him. Ray, he—Ray, he—Ray, he—"

And then, one day, disaster struck Shorty. A wire which reached him in a shabby little town on the banks of the Ohio River summoned him home. He was gone for a week, while Luke, strangely lonesome and restless, lost without his undersized manager, wandered from town to town, performing almost listlessly. When Shorty returned, the little man was a doleful creature.

"A car run over him," Shorty explained. "The guy didn't have no insurance and the doc—the doc says he's gotta have an operation if he don't wanta walk with one leg shorter than the other."

Shorty thudded a little fist into the palm of his other hand.

"I need dough, Luke," he said, fiercely. "I'll never get enough dough for that operation, with you playin' these tank towns. I'm puttin' it to you straight, Luke. Either we try for the big time, or I—I'm gonna quit this racket. I'm goin' home and get a steady job, or somethin'. We gotta hit the big time, or we bust up, Luke."

So they had come to the city, armed with recommendations from the bosses of the minor league circuit they had been serving. And Shorty had managed to beg, coax, flatter and promise his wrestler's way onto a card staged by the moguls of the grunt and groan profession, the man who made champions and, as easily, dethroned them.

"It ain't much," he told Luke, apologetically. "Just a prelim, but you'll catch on, they'll like you, Luke. Just give 'em a good show and they'll book us some place else. And we're gettin' a bill and a half for it, remember."

SLOWLY Luke Peele turned toward the door as the knob rattled and Shorty stepped into the room. The little man's homely face was wreathed with a smile as he tossed his battered hat onto the bed and came toward Luke, rubbing his hands.

"It's all set, kid," he said, in his piping voice. "I sold 'em a bill of goods, awright. You let this big clown give you the business in this go and then you sock him after the referee gives the other guy the tap. The other guy socks you back and you mix it. They figure it's time for another brawl and you're elected."

"Another one of them, huh?" Luke grunted.

"Yeah," Shorty returned. "But y'see what it means, don't you? A grudge fight like that and you're a cinch to go back into the next show. A better spot, next time. Oh, I built you up as a good man for one of them donnybrookes and they took me at my word. Of course them letters from the other promoters didn't do no harm, but it was my salesmanship that really clinched it, if I do say it myself."

"Sure," said Luke, huskily. "You sure can put it over, Shorty. Did they—uh—give you an advance?"

"Fifty bucks," Shorty crowed. "We collect the rest tonight, after the go. Right now, we can go out and put on the bag."

It was while Luke Peele was on his pie and coffee that the little manager spoke a name that brought Luke's head up with a sudden jerk.

"Who did you say?" he demanded, carefully.

"Getter," said Shorty, chewing industriously. "He's managin' the guy you rassel tonight, that Spike Gore."

"Getter, huh," Luke said. "Is he a little guy with sort of bulgin' eyes?"

"Uh-huh," Shorty nodded. "That's Getter. You know him?"

"Yeah," he said, slowly. "Yeah, I think I know him. Used to know him, I mean."

"He's a sharp guy, that Getter," Shorty said, a touch of envy in his voice. "Big operator. Guess he's got a dozen rasslers on his string, from what I hear."

"Doin' all right, huh?" Luke asked.

"Plenty all right," Shorty said. "This here Spike Gore is one of his new boys, he told me. The combine is fixin' to bring this Gore along, slow, till they can give him some champeenship or other. He's just a kid, y'understand, this Gore. Just breakin' in the racket."

Luke Peele sipped his coffee again. He remembered when he had been "just a kid, breaking into the racket," only then it had been the fight game and Getter had been promising him the champion-

ship, if he would follow orders blindly and behave himself. Well, he had followed orders and he had got the title. It had not been the way these wrestlers got titles, sometimes, but honestly, by dint of using his fists the right way at the right time.

Getter had been the all-wise, the all-fatherly, then, just as he probably was to this man, Spike Gore, now. Maybe the kid, Gore, would have better luck with Getter than he had had.

Luke Peele never had been a fast-thinking man, outside the ring. It was not until he was in his smelly dressing-room at the Crosstown Arena that night, climbing into his wrestling togs, that he was struck by his great idea.

Through the years that had followed the crash, he had entertained a dull, vague hope that some day, in some way, he could repay Getter for all the pop-eyed man had done to him. Getter may have paid his debt to society with his hours behind the bars, but he never had paid his debt to Luke Peele. There was a balance due on that account.

And now—now, the chance to square the books, to repay Getter at least in part, was presenting itself. Getter had a kid wrestler he had maneuvered into position for a climb to some championship. Getter had a gold-plated investment in this boy who was just breaking into the racket.

Luke figured that Getter would hate to see his boy beaten in this match with an unknown, a serio-comic figure that all the wrestling world would know had been imported from the sticks as a trial horse for Gore. No, Getter wouldn't like that a bit.

Luke Peele looked at the red cloth mask he held in his big hands, the "hood" that would hide his features from the spectators, and from Getter. A grin, the first genuine grin in years, slowly spread over his heavy features.

GRINNING with anticipation, Luke imagined Getter, the inevitable cigar in the corner of his mouth, watching his boy, Spike Gore, walk out to the center of the mat. He imagined Getter settling back, anxious only that he, the "Crimson Hood," make this farce look reasonably genuine.

Luke Peele even imagined the way Getter's pop eyes would start from his head when the Crimson Hood, this set-

up who had been given this spot grudgingly, as a generous boon by the moguls of big-time wrestling, seized Spike Gore in a genuinely painful hold. Luke knew several of these holds that were outlawed among "regular" wrestlers by tacit agreement. Suppose he used one and slammed the "future champ" to the mat.

"Hah!" grunted Luke Peele, aloud.

"You say somethin'?" Shorty asked, anxiously. Luke shook his head.

"Y'got it all straight now?" Shorty asked. "It's important we make this one look good. Satisfy the big shots with this one, Luke, and you and me are on Easy Street. Well, not exactly Easy Street, but there won't be no more all-night coach rides, no more rasslin' for ten bucks because the take wasn't what it should have been—no more flop houses and no more greasy spoon meals."

"Sure," Luke Peele said, heavily. "I got it all straight."

"When he pins you," Shorty recited, for the twentieth time, "you act like you been tricked, or somethin'. And when he lets you up, you take a sock at him. The old chin-brush stuff. Then he pokes you and you go down. Then they pull you apart and you raise a big fuss and tell him you'll tear him apart the next time you see him."

"Sure, sure," Luke said. "I got it all straight."

Yeah, he told himself, only that ain't the way it's going to be. Maybe this Spike Gore will sock me, after I've heaved him down to the mat, but it won't be no act. He'll be sore all right. He'll mean it if he tries to sock me.

And Getter, he'll probably try to murder me, too, for crossing up his boy. And Getter won't know who it is that's giving him the business. Getter knows the Crimson Hood is Luke Peele, but he don't know who Luke Peele is. Getter might be smart, a big operator, but there's some things he don't know.

Getter don't know the Crimson Hood is the guy he got barred from the ring for life. It is the guy he made a bum—the guy who went hungry while he went around, after comin' out of prison, telling everybody that it was me, not him, that tried to fix the title fight.

Sure, Luke acknowledged, inwardly, Getter is clever. I can see that now. When that sparring partner opened my eye, right after I sprained my ankle workin' on the road, he saw his chance

to clean up. He doctored that eye himself, not even letting Manny, the trainer, touch it, and he fixed that ankle himself, too. I told him the ankle hurt after I was on it more than just a couple of minutes and he said that would be all right. I asked him about the eye, in case the contender hung one on it, and he said that would be all right, too.

I know now that Getter was different, during the last part of that training. Before, he'd always been needling me to get to bed, to eat this and don't eat that, to cut out the cigarettes and the booze. But when I was trainin' for that fight, everything went with Getter.

I was a cinch to lose. I know that now. But nobody could have pinned a thing on Getter, if that guy hadn't squawked to the Commission and the D.A. hadn't looked into it.

Yeah, I was a cinch to lose the title, just like I'm a cinch to lose this thing tonight. If there was any betting in this racket, Getter would have a bundle down on his Spike Gore boy, and it's too bad there ain't any betting. But spoiling the kid will be enough.

Suddenly, Luke got up from the bench where he was sitting and flexed his long arms, feeling the muscles ripple under his skin. He felt good, better than he had felt at any time since the Fall afternoon he had stood in the bedroom of the suite facing the park, waiting for it to get time to go into the ring against the contender. It had been a long time, but it was worth it.

He was still smiling quietly when the call came for him to go into the ring. He slipped on the red hood and stopped to let Shorty fasten the ties that held it in place. When he walked down the aisle of the arena, toward the ring, his step was light, almost jaunty. His shoulders were thrown back and his chin, below the red mask, was lifted in something more than the faked arrogance he had displayed to other crowds.

He saw Getter as soon as he got to the ring. Getter looked the same. Getter hadn't changed. He still held the fifty-cent cigar clenched in his teeth, jutting from one corner of his mouth. He still wore his hat tilted back on his head. His pop eyes still looked bland and unsuspecting, hiding all those devious, snake-trailed thoughts behind their somewhat inane stare.

Getter looked as well-fed as ever. Get-

ter hadn't gone hungry. Even in prison, they had given him three meals a day.

The man who had been Luke's manager gave him an impersonal stare as he climbed into the ring. Getter's boy, Spike Gore, was a rangy youth, clean-limbed and fresh-faced, with close cropped hair and the healthy, sinewy look of a college crewman.

Luke wondered idly if Gore ever had wrestled in a tank town for a ten-buck purse only to find out the promoter had decamped with the box-office receipts and there were but eighty cents between him and his manager.

"Pretty boy," Luke Peele muttered, between his teeth. "Tonight you find out there ain't no Santa Claus. Tonight, you find out that with that guy behind you in your corner, you're headin' for nothin' but trouble."

He grinned across the ring at Getter, meeting the pop-eyed man's stare with a smile that contained hate, mixed with the heady realization that revenge was close at hand. He was almost sorry that the mask hid most of his face. It would have been good to see Getter's expression when he saw who the Scarlet Hood, Luke Peele, really was.

"—and remember," Shorty was telling him. "You know what to do. Fix this one up right, Luke, and it'll be plain sailin' from here on in. Thick steaks and soft beds. A bigger purse every time."

Luke nodded, half hearing the little manager.

"Make it look good, Luke," Shorty was pattering. "Make the customers like it, kid. We come a long way and took a lotta bumps for this chance."

A longer way than you think, Shorty, Luke told himself.

"Don't make any mistakes," Shorty kept on. "Remember, this is the big time. We're in, if this one is accordin' to Hoyle."

"Sure, sure," Luke said, impatiently. "Dont worry."

"I can't help it," Shorty confessed. "It's the kid, Luke. I keep thinkin' about the kid."

Okay, Luke said, silently, think about the kid. Think about anything only don't bother me. I know what I've got to do, and I'm going to do it. I'm going to pay back Getter. It's the first chance I've ever had and probably it'll be the last chance I'll ever have, but—

The kid!

I FORGOT about the kid, Ray! I forgot about the kid, Ray! I forgot about all this bein' so Shorty could make the dough for Ray's operation! That's the reason we're here, in the city. That's the reason I come back.

The elation that had filled him with the realization that he could avenge himself on Getter faded slowly. In its place came the thought of what would happen if he went through with his plan.

He would be kicked out of this big-time circuit, certainly, and very probably he would be blacklisted even on the tank-town grind that he had come from. Wrestling promoters, big or small, did not take kindly to promoters who administered the doublecross.

Luke Peele had come as far as he had by following orders without question and, by the strong code that ruled this sport, he never had been doublecrossed by a promoter. Unscrupulous though some of them might be, it was a fact. True, a couple had run out with the gate receipts but their brethren in the next town, or in the next state, had always come up with a little money, a fiver or a sawbuck, to help the stranded wrestlers over the rough spots.

But a crosser got nothing from the men engaged in this business. A clan-nish bunch, the managers spread the word about a wrestler who, for any reason, kicked over the traces. To cross this combine, the biggest of them all, would be to outlaw himself, to make himself a wrestling renegade.

He could take that, himself. It would be well worth the price to administer a doublecross to Getter, even though he never wrestled again. But there was Shorty and his boy, Ray, to consider.

He remembered the time—what was the name of the town?—when a scheduled match had fallen through, for some reason or other, and they were stranded, the two of them, in a fleabag hotel room for which they owed a week's rent.

"I'm gonna talk to the manager," Shorty had said. "I can talk him out of putting the fist on us, wait and see."

He had waited in the little room until Shorty had returned, grinning, a paper sack of hamburgers in his hand.

"The manager's a real guy," Shorty had caroled. "He okayed the cuff for the room rent and he gave me a fin."

And it was only later that Luke noticed the absence of Shorty's proudest

possession, his wrist watch. The hock shop, he learned some time later, had gotten that, so that Luke might eat and have a place to sleep.

There were other incidents, all of the same vein, and they came back to Luke now, as he sat in his corner, waiting for the match to begin. He thought of the deputy sheriff he had slugged to rescue Shorty from a brutal beating. He thought of the celebration the two of them had had that Christmas Eve when the over-exuberant promoter had doubled their price.

He thought of Shorty's face, the day he had returned from his home town with the news that Ray, Shorty's Ray, needed an operation to escape being a gimp.

He shook his head to rid himself of these thoughts. This was the rassling racket, he told himself, and a guy had to look out for himself in this business. One manager had wrecked his life while posing as his friend. How could he know that Shorty wouldn't do the same thing if the chance was offered him?

"Don't be a dope," something inside Luke said. "You know Shorty better than that."

It came time to go out there and wrestle. Luke Peele got up slowly, uncertainly. He looked past his opponent and saw Getter suck on the fifty-cent cigar, looking complacent.

"Don't forget," Shorty said, behind him.

He went out to wrestle, rage filling his heart. The cards were stacked against him, again. The fates that had charge of his life were snickering again.

These fates had given him this chance to get even with Getter and, as rudely, they had snatched that chance away. Because, Luke Peele knew, he couldn't go through with his plan. Not with Shorty's kid, Ray, waiting for the money for that operation.

THE anger stayed within him while he went through the motions of the match. When he gave Spike Gore the "Crimson Hood Slam" it was with a viciousness that brought the younger man down to the mat with a sickening jar. Gore was a youngster, unversed in the tumblers' tricks that every veteran knew. The match had run less than half its length before Spike was a shaken, wary wrestler, eyeing Luke almost uncertainly, while the crowd roared its ap-

proval of the match.

Luke looked at Spike Gore as the tall youngster climbed to his feet after a hard toss and wavered toward him again. He had this kid, he knew. All he needed to do now was to make a flying tackle, a smashing hold of any kind, and he could flip the boy over onto his shoulders. Getter would scream and curse and he, Luke, could unmask and show Getter the face of a ghost the pop-eyed man probably thought had been long laid.

There it was, right in his hand, and he couldn't go through with it. On account of some kid he never had seen in his life and the kid's father, Shorty. He grappled with Gore, brought his face close to Spike's ear.

"Okay, kid," he grunted. "Make it look good."

Then he was down and the referee was tapping Spike's shoulder and the crowd was hysterical. He lay there a second after Spike Gore released him and then slowly climbed to his feet.

And there, suddenly, was the opportunity he never had dreamed of.

Getter had leaped into the ring with the signal of his wrestler's victory. Getter was draping a robe over Spike Gore's sweaty shoulders. And Luke Peele had been instructed to throw a punch at Spike.

He staggered groggily, as though stunned by the fall that had put his shoulders to the mat. He wound up with a right hand punch that was the hardest he ever had thrown, even when he was at his peak in the ring. He threw the hook,

almost—not quite—at Spike. He felt the crunch of bone as the blow landed and he grinned as he saw Getter's face crimsoned by a red tide that swept down from the shattered nose.

GETTER went over backward, his head hitting the mat with a thud. He lay there as the others gathered around him and Luke was the first to lift him into a sagging upright.

"Holy mackerel," he said, from under the red mask, "I sure am sorry."

"I'll—I'll—" Getter spluttered, thickly.

Luke Peele didn't stop grinning. Getter might be a big-shot manager, but he couldn't have a wrestler disbarred for having followed instructions, even though the punch had gone a trifle astray. No, Shorty's operation money was safe, the way into the big time still lay open. And, more important, the bitterness that had been in Luke Peele's heart since that Fall day in the hotel suite had been magically erased by that one punch into Getter's nose.

The going had been tough and might still be hard again but, for some reason, Luke Peele was happier than he, he guessed, he would have been if he had gone through with his plan to double-cross the pop-eyed man who had ruined him.

He turned back to his corner, Shorty at his side.

"I sure messed things up, didn't I?" he asked his little manager. "I never seem to do the right thing."

NEXT ISSUE

YOU ROW WITH YOUR HEART

A Crew Novelet by WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE

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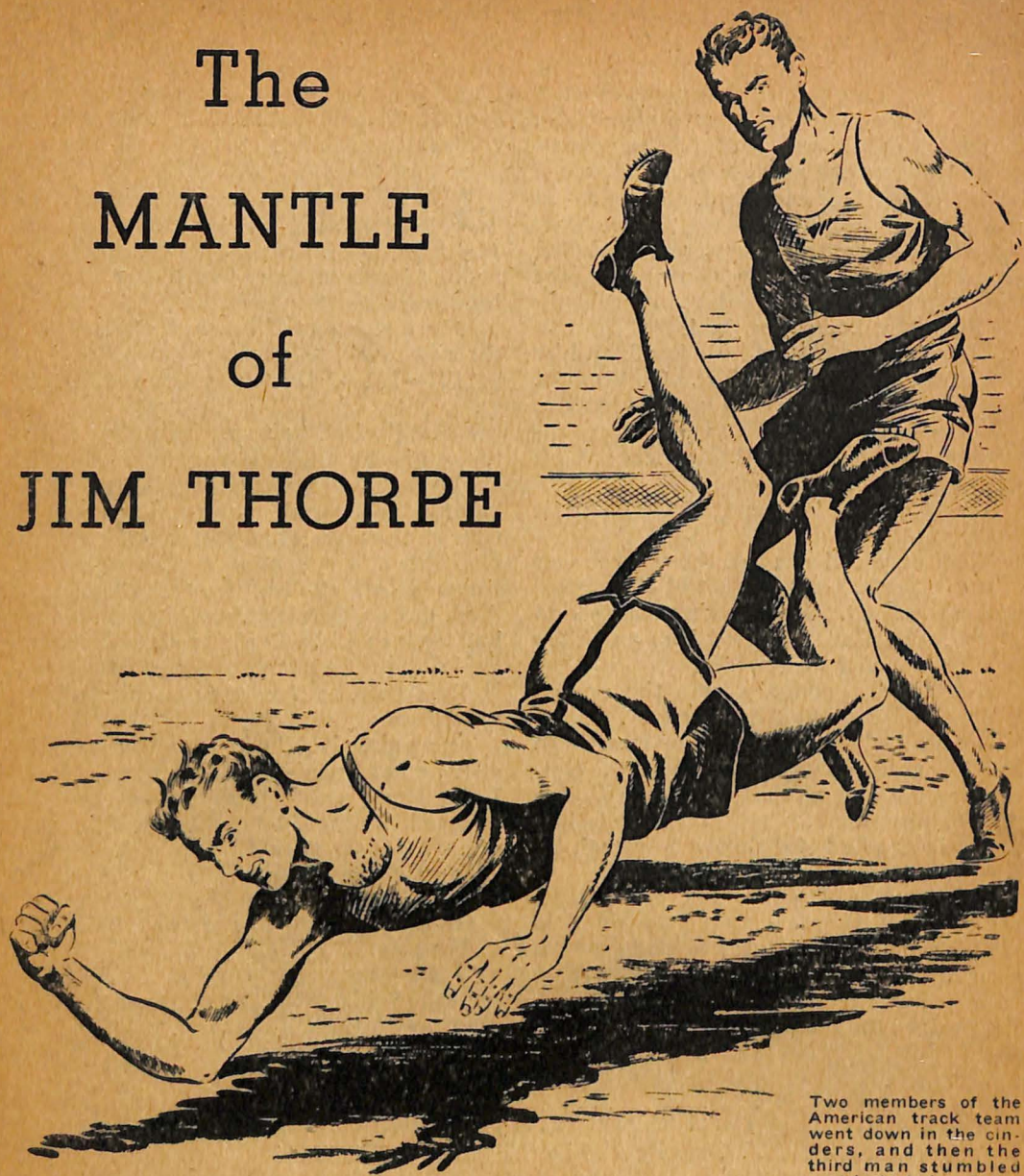


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The MANTLE of JIM THORPE



Two members of the American track team went down in the cinders, and then the third man stumbled and started to fall

CHAPTER I

Jonah Label

ED TIMMINS trotted around the cinder path in the clammy morning mist and found himself thinking of a football player known to fame as "Crazy Legs" Hirsch. After four consecutive days of seasickness on the big Atlantic liner which had transported the rest of the Olympic track team and himself to England for the big games,

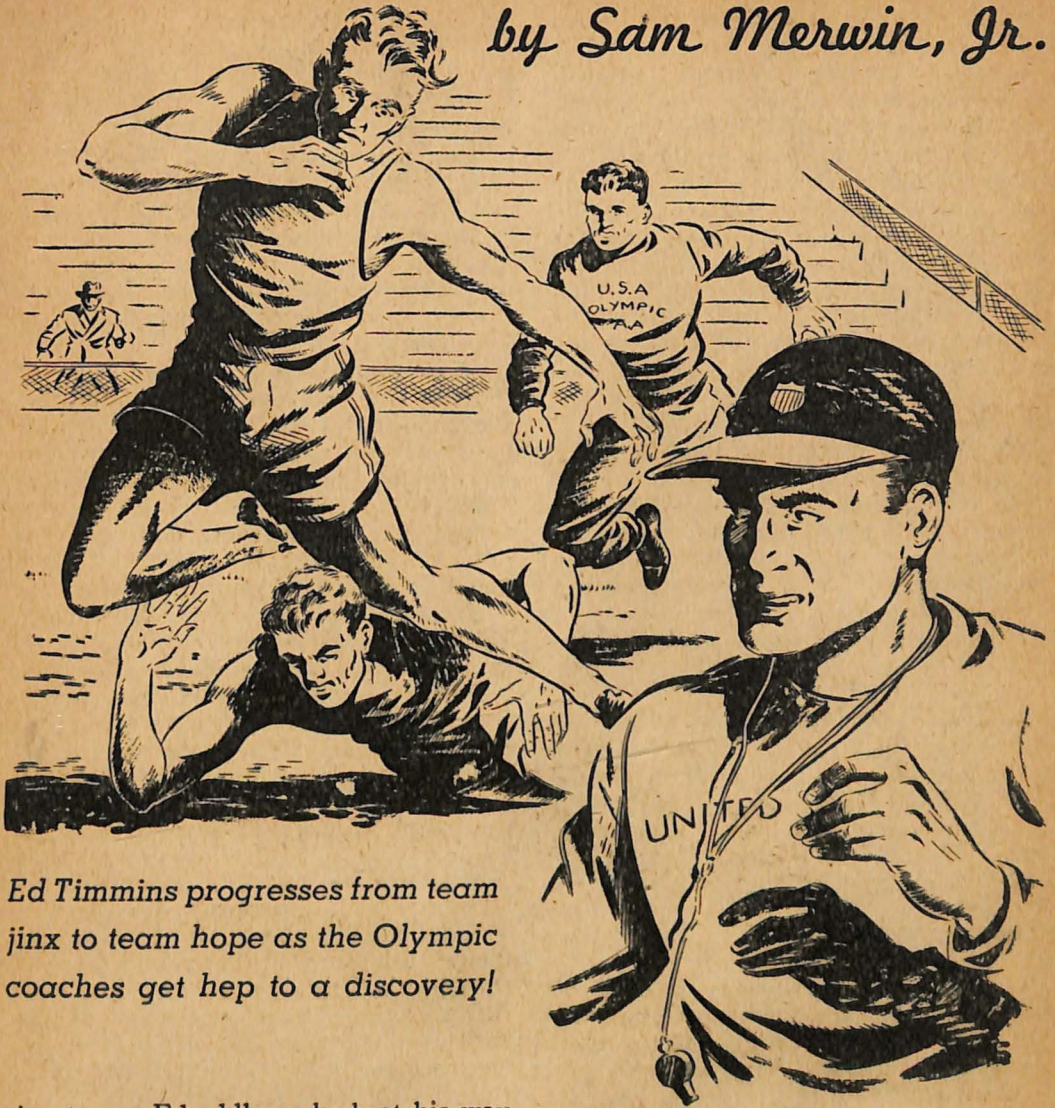
his nether limbs felt ready for individual padded cells.

Whoever said that victims of seasickness recover instantly upon first touching terra firma was, he thought, a direct descendant of Ananias and Baron Munchausen. Trying desperately to follow a straight course, he staggered past Les Burdon, coach of the middle distance runners, who was conferring at trackside with Tom Curtis, head man of the entire coaching staff.

Both men paused in their conversa-

A NOVELET OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

by Sam Merwin, Jr.



Ed Timmins progresses from team jinx to team hope as the Olympic coaches get hep to a discovery!

tion to eye Ed oddly as he beat his way past them. Feeling their eyes on his back he wished the fog were thick enough to hide him entirely. Never had he felt so rotten, not even when he had vainly sought points for his alma mater in the Drake Relay hurdles three years back.

The thought of running a fast time trial in the 800-meter within a matter of minutes almost made him retch. Yet, being acquainted with Les Burdon's tactics in the past, he knew it was coming. The ptomaine that had brought about his failure in the Drake hurdles would have been a relief.

Ed heard the sandpaper sound of

spikes on a hard-packed track coming up behind him. Ben Wallace, big blond middle-distance ace of the U.S. squad drew alongside and slowed up to run evenly with him. Wallace was a friendly and good natured soul who liked his laughs—when he wasn't actually racing. With the chips down, he was a rough tough no-quarter competitor.

"Drink yourself a good breakfast, Timmy?" he inquired. "If you don't stop reeling around the track Burdon is going to give you an alcohol test. Tsk,

tsk—and we need our human stopwatch.”

“Quiet, churl,” said Ed with what he hoped was a smile. His face felt as if it were parchment. Wallace laughed, picked up his pace a notch and moved smoothly on with the stride that had won him the national half-mile title.

For the thousandth time Ed wondered just why he had been selected for the trip. His showing in the trials had not been exceptional—he had come in second in his heat and third in the final, which was passable. But his best time in the 800-meter was only 1:58—good, but not world beating. And his all-around record as a college and club athlete was nothing to shout about.

Ed knew he was something of a freak. A beanpole at school and college, he had been fast in the sprints—but his overgrowth had caused him to fall in one crucial race, to pull a tendon in another. His coach had finally given up on him as a sprinter.

“I don’t want your death on my hands,” he said reluctantly.

BUT Ed had not given up. He liked to run, liked the atmosphere of competition and athletic fellowship around a track. Stubbornly he had tried the high hurdles. A year later he had been on his way to breaking the intercollegiate record when he had become hopelessly entangled with one of the jumps, fallen with a crash and broken his fibula—otherwise shinbone.

“You’re giving me gray hairs!” his coach had told him in the hospital. “For the love of Pete leave me and my track in peace.”

Thus enjoined, in his junior year, Ed had sought honors in field events. His lack of weight made him ineligible for shot put and hammer throw and he had nearly decapitated a visiting alumnus with a long and wild discus heave. As a high jumper he could not make his long legs behave properly though he could hurl his slim torso over the bar at well above six feet.

So he had wound up as a pole vaulter while the coaches moaned. For a while it appeared that he had found his niche. But just as it looked as if he might approach thirteen feet a faulty pole had snapped under him in practise and the jagged end of the splintered bamboo had neatly broken two of his ribs and

removed a large hunk of flank steak at the same time.

He braved the track coach and sought middle distance honors in his senior year, specializing in the quarter mile. It was then that he had first become known as the human stopwatch.

“Run me an easy quarter—say fifty-seven seconds,” the coach would order, and Ed would circle the track in exactly the time demanded. It was the same if he was asked to run it in sixty-one or fifty seconds flat. But the squad had three men on the roster who could run it in forty-eight or better.

Ed found himself being used as a metronome and went back to the hurdles. He had grown, not only in poundage but in coordination and thus found himself back on the team. He upset very few hurdles and began to look like a sure thing. But a treacherous hamburger, eaten the night before the Drake Relays, had put an end to that ambition.

After college, of course, came work. Ed was an engineer and managed to get himself a job in the home office of a big Eastern company. Automatically he joined the athletic club and went back to middle distance running. In two years, while he had won none of the big meets, his fame as an accurate judge of time and as a reliable pacer had got around.

So—here he was in London for the Olympics and, apparently, for the ride.

“Half milers—back to the post for trials,” Les Burdon’s deep voice boomed through the thinning mist. Feeling more like a victim of seasickness and ill-luck than ever, Ed complied. He stepped off the track to shed his coveralls and flexed the muscles of his thighs.

“You all right, Timmy?” Burd asked him. “You took the ocean badly.”

“You mean the ocean took me,” said Ed, then saw that the coach was in no mood for badinage and light remarks. “I’m okay, Mr. Burdon.”

“I hope so,” said the coach. “I want to make these monkeys realize they aren’t over here to enjoy a free trip to England. So give them a fast first lap—as near fifty-nine seconds as you can. Then, if you can’t make it, drop out. You’ll have done all I want of you. Got it?”

“Sure thing, Mr. Burdon,” said Ed with a cheeriness he did not feel. He wondered if he could run two hundred

meters in fifty-nine seconds, much less twice the distance. Well, all he could do was try.

He got set and up on his fingers, hoping he wouldn't topple over and upset the whole rank of starters like a row of toy soldiers. His head was doing airplane swoops and the track rocked dangerously. Then, before he was ready, the gun barked sharply and the trial was on.

Burdon had given him the pole position, but it did little good. He got his legs moving but they seemed to be in slow motion. Apparently the illusion was not a false one, for the field of four other runners was packed solidly in front of him by the time they reached the first turn.

Ed put his head down as low as his neck would permit and dug in after the others. Well ahead of him around the turn he could see big Ben Wallace striding along with ease and assurance. For the moment he hated the blond ace. Something, it seemed, always went wrong with him when he had a chance to show what he could really do. He was even flunking as a pace setter.

The first lap was anguish. Even with his mates taking it not too hard it seemed to him as if the pace were incredibly fast. He wobbled and fought to keep his balance and, at the same time, to pull the field back to him. It was a fight to stay within shouting distance.

AS HE swung around the last curve of the lap he seriously debated dropping out. Surely his seasickness gave him an excuse. He eyed Les Burdon, who stood grimly eyeing his charges with Head Coach Tom Curtis, a step behind him, eyeing them still more grimly over his aide's shoulders.

Sweat seemed to burst through his skin and then, suddenly, the sickness left him. The track stopped wobbling and his spikes bit the cinders crisply. Furthermore, he felt less winded than he could remember being at this stage of an 800-yard race. He speeded up his stride without shortening.

He could see the gap between himself and the rest of the field narrowing. Ben Wallace was still leading but Mark Henderson and Alan Noyes were running in echelon, almost abreast of him as they came out of the first curve of the final lap onto the straightaway. It had

developed into more of a race than a trial. Still feeling fresh, Ed put on still more speed.

By the time they reached the final curve he was almost up with them. Wallace continued to hold first place after fighting off the efforts of his rivals and Henderson and Noyes slipped back into single file behind him, hugging the inside of the track for the curve. Scorning such tactics, Ed moved on up alongside of Noyes, almost even with him, preparing to flash past all three of the runners as the track straightened out for the final sprint.

Excitement, the thrill of competition, surged within him and he forgot that he had ever been seasick. He was going to give them a fast lap, seconds under the fifty-nine Les Burdon has asked for—but it was going to be the second, not the first lap. And he was going to lick the field.

It was then that Al Noyes, running third, wobbled badly. He had shot his bolt in his effort to pick up distance earlier in the lap. He half stumbled, then reeled. One of his shoes brushed the back of Ed's left ankle and Noyes sprawled forward into Henderson, knocking him in turn into Ben Wallace. Three quarters of the American 800-meter team crashed to the cinders.

There was no question of finishing the race. Ed pulled quickly to a stop and swung back to help his colleagues. Les Burdon came up on the run, trailed by Chief Coach Tom Curtis and Doc Martell, the squad trainer. Quickly they got the fallen runners off the cinders and onto the soft turf of the infield.

Henderson was unconscious, the left side of his face imbedded with cinders and streaming with blood. Noyes, his wind knocked out, was making feeble motions with his arms, resembling a sea lion in action. Ben Wallace rolled on the grass, hugging a damaged knee close to his chest. All had been cut by cinders.

It was Wallace's knee which disturbed the coaches the most. Once Henderson recovered consciousness and Noyes got his wind back, Doc Martell, a grizzled old man with a bald spot the color of aged vellum, got busy with the ace middle-distance man, probing his knee with expert fingers. Once or twice Wallace flinched as the trainer touched a sensitive spot.

"Wrenched ligament," said Martell in

a high voice. "Can't tell how bad she is. Need plenty of diathermy. We don't want her to swell."

"And with the Swedes hotter than firecrackers!" exclaimed Tom Curtis to Les Burdon. "Why does this have to happen to us? Les, you'll have to work Noyes and Henderson until we see whether Ben will be in shape to run. I'll try to weed out an eight-hundred man from the four-hundred boys and the relay men in case Ben doesn't come around."

Ed, standing helplessly at the edge of the group, felt neglected. What was he supposed to do—sit the races out? After all, he had been about to win the trial when the accident happened. Then Curtis turned on him and Ed wished the chief mentor had continued to leave him alone.

"As for you, Timmins," he said, advancing upon the hapless runner like a lion stalking a Christian in the Colosseum, of ancient Rome, "you remind me of the baby elephant who got his first chance to march with the other elephants in the circus parade. He was on the end of the line, trunk in tail with the big elephant in front of him. All the other elephants were likewise—until the little elephant stepped in a manhole and pulled the tails off of the twelve other elephants. Except that you're not wearing your tail today, it fits."

"But, Mr. Curtis," protested Ed. "It wasn't my fault!"

"That's right," said Noyes. "I lost control on that last turn and—"

"Are you suggesting that I doubt the evidence of my own eyes?" roared the chief coach. "After seeing Timmins stagger around the track like a drunken sailor do you think I don't know what happened?"

HE PAUSED, swung back to Ed. His eyes flashed and his face was crimson with exasperation.

"Timmins, I am well acquainted with your record," he went on. "All through school and college you have been plagued with hard luck. But to date it has plagued only you. Perhaps this—this—" he nodded at the damaged athlete on the grass "—wasn't your fault. But I'm not going to have you damaging my team any further."

"I'll try not to, sir," said Ed, his voice trembling.

"You're a very lucky young man," Tom Curtis went on, savagely. "Yes, Timmins, your luck has changed. You are, from now on, enjoying a pleasure jaunt to England at the expense of the United States Olympic Committee. Go look at Westminster Abbey if it's still standing. Take a run up to Wimbledon for the tennis. Tour the cathedrals if you like." He paused again, his face purpling.

"But stay away from any track on which my boys are running. I wish I could wish you on the Swedes but I'd be accused of deliberate sabotage and the whole American squad would be disqualified—justly so, too, because it would be deliberate sabotage. Do you get me, Timmins?"

"Y-yes, sir," said Ed, feeling as if someone had replaced his heart with quicksilver. "I'm sorry, sir, honestly I am. If you'd only give me ano—"

"No," said the coach, not unkindly in tone. "Not that, Timmins. I don't doubt that you're a nice sort of fellow. You probably have lots of friends back home. You're undoubtedly good to your mother. But you're poison to this team. So do me a favor and stay away, will you?"

Les Burdon, an arm around his shoulders, walked off the field with him. "Sorry, Timmy," he said. "But I can see the old man's point of view."

"But I didn't do it," said Ed. "Noyes swung into me as I was coming up to pass and caught a foot on my leg. That's what happened, honestly."

"I'll believe you, Tim," said Burdon. He shook his head. "If you'd paced the field as I ordered the first lap it would not have happened."

"I couldn't, Mr. Burdon. I tried but I was still too seasick." He paused, a gleam in his eyes. "You know, sir, when I did snap out of it after that slow first lap I felt like a million dollars. I'll bet I've been running that first one too fast all along. I had plenty of sprint left today to win going away."

"By golly, Timmy, maybe you've got something at that," said the coach, an answering gleam in his eyes. Then they faded. "But we'll never get a chance to find out this trip, I'm afraid. Tom Curtis isn't a man to back down once he's made his decision. But buck up, kid. We'll figure out something." He didn't sound encouraging, hard as he tried.

CHAPTER II

Timmins Gets a Surprise

FOR the next couple of days Ed Timmins wandered around like a lost soul. He took a trip up to London and looked at Westminster Abbey. Then he adjourned to Piccadilly and sat through a movie he had seen two months earlier in New York. He tried to drink some beer but found the British version was too highly carbonated for his liking, which was slender at best where alcohol was concerned.

So he went back to the South Coast town where the American Olympic Track Team had its headquarters. When he reached the hotel at which they were staying he found everyone out at the track. He was standing in the dismal lobby, looking out at a singularly dreary landscape and wondering what to do next when a cheerful feminine voice called his name.

It was Sheila O'Brien and she was bearing down on him from a group of lank and hefty females, clad mostly in slacks and sweaters, who had gathered in the center of the lobby. Her face, innocent of makeup, was shining with more than good humor and her brown hair was gathered severely behind by a barrette.

"Hi, Sheila," he said. He was actually glad to see her, to see anyone who had a kindly word for him, even a female track athlete. Sheila was the sprint and broad-jumping hope of the women's team.

"Where've you been hiding, Timmy?" she asked him. "I haven't seen you."

"I'm a blighted being," he told her. "I'm merely a non-paying spectator by orders of Tom Curtis. Single-handed I wrecked the middle-distance team."

"You're kidding!" she said, regarding him through dark glasses that gave a mournful look to her usually smiling face. She was not, he supposed, a bad looking girl basically. If she weren't so—so darned unfeminine. He had got to know her slightly on the boat coming over. He launched into an account of his downfall, making it as humorous as he could under the circumstances.

But she didn't laugh. "Of all the rot-

ten luck," she said when he had finished. "That Tom Curtis sometimes confuses himself with Jehovah. I could wring his big bull neck." She paused speculatively, as if weighing the prospect with relish. "Wait till I—" A call from a large matronly creature cut her off.

"I've got to go out to the track now," she said, making a face. "Say, Timmy, since you're barred from working out with the men, why not come along? Pop Winslow has his hands full. Maybe you could help him out."

"Maybe I'll wreck the women's team too," said Ed mournfully. "I seem to be down on the books as a number one, unqualified jinx."

"Baloney!" said Sheila inelegantly. "I'm not kidding. Come on."

"I'll try anything once," said Ed dubiously. On the way out to the field where the women practised he felt suddenly embarrassed at finding himself in such a muscular bevy of unbeauties. But when they got there and Sheila put the proposition to Pop Winslow, a grizzled and kindly veteran of the track wars, the veteran accepted Ed's aid gladly.

"I know your record well," he said, to Ed's considerable surprise. "You are sort of a jack-of-all-trades around a track, aren't you, Timmins?"

"Sort of a jack-of-no-trades at present," said Ed. Pop merely grinned and gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder and told him to go over to where a group of the girls were practising hurdle bends. More supple than any male athletes, they could do perfect half splits with ease.

"Take a trial, easy," he told them. He watched keenly after starting them off and was disturbed to see that not one of the three entrants in the event had an approximation of what he considered perfect form.

He went to work with them, seeking to implant some idea of proper hurdling. Two of them were still using the broken-knee jump which male hurdlers had abandoned by 1910. The girls may not have been pin-up types but they proved amazingly anxious to learn. Within an hour he had speeded them up by plenty.

"Thanks," said Pop Winslow after watching them do a trial heat. "They're great kids but they've never had much coaching. Don't ask me why. Guess it's

just that women's track isn't taken seriously back home. They'll be up against it when they meet the Czechs and Yugoslavs—and the Russians. We haven't a Stella Walsh or a Babe Didrickson to pull us through single-handed this time."

"How about Sheila O'Brien?" Ed inquired curiously.

"She's good, all right. She'll get us some points if any of them do," said the mentor. "But she's no superwoman. Care to look at the disc entrants?"

Ed did. And was nearly the victim of his jinx. In trying to show the leading American contestant how to get a little more purchase into her tosses, Ed let fly a demonstration platter—which nearly decapitated Doc Martell, who had wandered onto the field to look the girls over after finishing his ministrations to the male members of the track team.

"Gosh, I'm sorry, Doc!" Ed exclaimed. The trainer had had to fall flat on his leathery face to avoid the flying saucer. He grunted and shook his head as Ed helped him back to his feet.

THE trainer shook his head, then gave him a quick glance.

"You're a dangerous man around a field and no kidding," Doc said. He turned to greet Pop Winslow, who came up. But Pop, save for a brief nod to the liniment specialist, was not interested in Martell.

"Where did that disc land?" he inquired sharply. One of the girls, who had been standing by, indicated the dent in the turf where it had come down. The woman's coach promptly called for a measurement and pursed his lips in a whistle.

"One forty-six-eleven," he said, looking in disbelief at the tape in his fingers. "Timmins, can you do anything with a javelin?"

"I've just fooled around with it," said Ed. "Why?"

"Never mind," said Pop Winslow. "Let's see how it goes, shall we?"

Uncomprehending but game, Ed managed to get hold of a men's javelin and gave it a try. His first two efforts were shanked miserably as he failed to get a solid grip on the spear. His third, however, soared a hundred and ninety-one feet even. His fourth and fifth were under a hundred and eighty, but his

sixth toss carried a hundred and ninety feet, seven and a half inches.

"Can you handle a sixteen pound weight?" said Pop Winslow abruptly. Ed didn't ask questions. Weight throwing was one event of track and field which he had missed. But he managed to toss the awkward "hammer" a bit more than a hundred feet on his fourth try without fouling. It was something like the discus throw.

"Timmins," said Pop Winslow then. "Get into the locker room and let Doc give you a good rubdown. You're going to be a busy little bee from now on. And I've got to get back to the girls. Now get going."

"But I'm off the squad," said Ed, bewildered. "If Mr. Curtis—"

"Don't worry about Tom Curtis," snapped the coaching veteran. "He's going to welcome you with open arms after I talk to him."

"But what am I supposed to do?" Ed asked. "I mean, I've been told—"

"Let Doc take care of you," said Winslow. "We've got to make sure your holiday hasn't softened you up. Believe me, Timmins, I know what I'm doing."

"Yes, sir," said Ed, dutifully but with considerable doubt. Sheila O'Brien was waiting for him at the edge of the field. She was agrin from ear to ear.

"Isn't it swell?" she said. "Timmie, I knew you could do it."

"If I knew *what* I'm supposed to be doing it might help," he protested.

"—And no dallying with my star performers!" shouted Pop from the middle distance, effectively putting an end to the conversation. Ed made a gesture of helplessness and took himself off, leaving a still-grinning Sheila behind him.

"Look who's starring for the girl's team now," crowed a familiar voice then. Ben Wallace, in a lounge suit, was grinning at him in different style. "Think you can take any of them, Timmy?"

"I wouldn't bet on it," said Ed, restraining a wholesome impulse to bash in his tormentor's face and stamp on it with his spiked shoes. He got a laugh of sorts from some of his ex-teammates, who had gathered round, and went on into the locker room as ordered. He should, he decided, have stayed in bed—preferably back in the good old United

States. He was in for a lot of ribbing.

"Relax," Doc Martell told him later, when, after a shower, he lay on the rubbing table. The able old trainer was giving him a real going over, prodding at tendons and muscles and checking him as if he were a new-born baby.

"Will he do?" asked a new voice. Ed sat up and discovered that Tom Curtis had come into the room. Pop Winslow was right behind him. Doc nodded.

"I'm thinking he had a pretty dull time of it on his vacation," he said. "No, gentlemen, he's in as good shape as any athlete on the squad."

"He's going to have to be," said Curtis grimly, "if he's going to pull us through in the decathlon." Ed sat up straighter.

"The decathlon!" he exclaimed. "What is this, anyway? I never went out for the pentathlon in my life. And the decathlon—"

"Is ten events," said Curtis quietly, sitting on an edge of the rubbing table. "Incidentally, Timmins, I'm sorry about the other day. A lot of things went wrong that morning and your tumble was the final blow."

"That's all right, sir," said Ed doubtfully. His head was still spinning at the rapidity of his reinstatement and the form it had taken.

"It's like this, Timmins," said Pop Winslow, taking the floor. "Our squad is suffering from a well-known American ailment—specialization. We have nobody who stands a chance in the decathlon. Not in the same league with the Swede's Kurt Olsen and Franz Luytens, the Belgian champ. They know it too."

"Why, I figured that Curly Wilson—" began Ed doubtfully.

"Wilson," said Tom Curtis succinctly, "pulled a tendon three days ago when he tripped over his own pajamas. That's one of the things that had me on the ragged edge two mornings back when you pulled your one-man wrecking crew act."

He paused thoughtfully, looked at Pop Winslow and went on gravely.

"Besides, Wilson isn't really in it with Olsen and Luytens," he went on. "Curly is a good sprint and hurdle man, but he's pretty sad in the field events when he gets by the jumps. And the Russians have a big Mongolian with an unpronounceable name who is supposed to be a world-beater at everything."

THE trainer scratched his head as an aid to memory.

"There have been six Olympic decathlons since Nineteen-Twelve, when the event was first inaugurated," said Pop Winslow, taking over the threads of the conversation. "The United States has won three of the last four—Harold Osborn in 'Twenty-four, Jim Bausch in 'Thirty-two and Glen Morris in 'Thirty-six. We don't stand a dog's chance this year unless you—" He paused, meaningfully.

"But why me?" said Ed after a moment of silence. "I'm not even sure of the order of events in the decathlon. It's a brand new event for me."

"You're our best bet," said Tom Curtis. "That's why. I'll admit, when Pop came to me just now and suggested you I almost tore his head off. Frankly, I've always considered you an also-ran, Timmins. You've been close in a lot of things—but you never do win the cigars. Perhaps this is to our advantage."

"You've done some vaulting, haven't you, Timmins?" Pop Winslow asked.

Ed told them about it—and about his fiasco as a high jumper years before.

"We'll have to work on your jumping and vaulting then," said Curtis thoughtfully. He turned to Pop. "I think we ought to keep him under cover. How about it, Pop? We've got to have some surprises—and the press coverage we've been getting on the men's team hasn't allowed us to hide a gnat."

"It sounds good," said Pop Winslow, nodding. "I'll keep him working out with my unit. Think you can stand the girls for a bit, Timmins?"

"If I don't kill them all, sure," said Ed. But he winced as he thought again of the ribbing he was in for from his unknowing teammates. Pop Winslow apparently read his thoughts, for he smiled and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Remember, Timmins, if the boys make it hard to take, you're going to have the last laugh, and a honey of a laugh it will be. Meanwhile, you're going to have to work like a dog for the next ten days. You'll be too tired most of the time to worry about your feelings, except your outer ones, of course."

"I'll have the last laugh," said Ed doubtfully, "if I don't get beat by one of these Belgians or terrible Turks or something."

"You aren't going to get beat," said Tom Curtis calmly. "Not and live happily ever after. If you can do half the things under pressure you did for Pop this afternoon you should win in a walk."

"I hope you're right," said Ed. He began to get into his clothes and the coaches exchanged glances.

"Just what is the order of events?" he asked.

CHAPTER III

Tough Chore

HE WAS first told about it there in the rubbing room, then, later, on the women's field. It was a rugged deal—the most rugged he had ever tackled.

"They take two days to run it off," said Pop Winslow. "Both of them are five eventers—which means you'll have to be in top trim. The first day is the easier one. All you're up against is the hundred meters, the running broad jump and the four-hundred-meter jump, that sixteen-pound weight throw, the high jump and the four-hundred-meter run. And, of course, the competition, which is going to be tough."

"You say that's the easier day?" said Ed. "Holy smoke!"

"The second day you're going to be up against the hundred-and-ten-meter high hurdles, the discus, the pole vault, the javelin throw and the fifteen-hundred-meter run. In that order too. The last event is the toughest."

"Glory!" said Ed, exhaling. "I'll have to be a one-man team."

"So will the opposition," Tom Curtis reminded him. "Think you can do it?"

"I can try," said Ed slowly. "That fifteen hundred is going to be hard going." He paused, added, "How do they figure the scoring anyway? I never have got that straight. It runs into a lot of figures."

"Right," said Pop Winslow. "But it's simple once you understand it. If you break an Olympic record in any event, you get credited with thirteen hundred and fifty points. If you fall short in any event the judges credit you with a proportionate number of points depending on how close you come."

"And the winner is the guy who comes closest in the most events," said Ed. "How close has anybody managed to come to date?"

"Bausch has the record for his win in 'Thirty-two,'" Pop Winslow told him. "He came in with eight thousand four hundred and sixty-two and a fraction out of a possible thirteen thousand five hundred. He was terrific in field events."

"He must have been," said Ed. "I always thought Barney Berlinger of Penn was the best decathlon man we ever had."

"He probably was," said the older coach. "But he had the bad luck to hit his peak between Olympic years. Have you got it all straight now, Timmins?"

"I—I guess so, sir," said Ed. He watched them leave, turned to Doc to inquire as to what sort of shape he was really in.

"You'll do fine, young fellow, if you don't bean yourself with your own discus," he said with a chuckle. "Now get back to the hotel and take it easy."

They showed movies that night of some of the competition the American squad was due to meet in the games. Sitting with Sheila, Ed watched Luytens, the Belgian, and Olsen, the Swede, who offered his best-known opposition. The Russian was an unknown quantity to the camera men and was not shown. On the whole Ed was grateful. Luytens and Olsen were going to be trouble enough.

The Swede was obviously a tireless runner with plenty of kick, who could also handle the jumps and hurdles with ease. And Luytens, a tremendous brot of a young man, looked like Blozis or Jack Torrance heaving the shot. His discus and javelin throwing were on a par and he could top six feet in the high jump.

"If I thought you got me into this—" he murmured to the girl beside him.

"Oh, Timmy, get some nerve," she told him. "These guys are human. They can be beaten and you're the boy to do it."

"Me and who else?" he countered gloomily. He wondered where his jinx would strike next.

After the movies "Curly" Wilson took him unobtrusively in charge. The decathlon veteran was limping badly as he led Ed to his room in an isolated section

of the big hotel. The girls, who were billeted at a near-by baronial manor, had been shepherded off once the movie was over.

"I went against Luytens when I toured with that AAU unit over here last year," Wilson told Ed. "He's tough but he likes to break fast in the runs. He isn't sure of his staying power. Olsen, on the other hand, has nothing else but. If he weren't living in the era of Haag and Andersen and the other Scandinavians, he'd be a top middle distance man."

"Where do I get him—if I do?" Ed inquired.

"You have a chance in the field events," said Wilson. "Olsen is a laugh in the weight throw and discus. And he'll be lucky to top ten feet in the pole vault. You've done better than that, I hear."

"Years ago," said Ed gloomily. He shook his head. "Apparently I've got to be top man in the runs to get Luytens and top man in field events to nail that Swede. Is there anywhere I can take it easy?"

"Not in an Olympic decathlon," said Wilson. "Wish I were in it but this darned leg of mine won't bear up under it. You've got to remember you're working against records all the time, as well as against human opponents. That's the big trick to this decathlon business. There's nothing else like it in modern track."

"Double trouble," said Ed. "Tell me more, Curly."

WILSON smiled and fixed his steady gaze on Ed.

"It's like this," the injured veteran said. "You won't win all the events unless you're Jim Thorpe reincarnated. So you've got to figure in trailing in some. But to keep your point total up you've got to score well. So you can't really afford to kiss any event good-by—not and have a chance to win."

"It's a good thing I've batted around as much as I have," said Ed. He grinned and got up. "Well, I'll give it the old college try."

"I'll be around to help if I can," said Wilson quietly. They shook hands then departed for the night. Ed had some trouble getting to sleep but he finally made it. He felt rested when he reported

at the women's field.

He didn't feel rested long, however. Since he had not vaulted in years, Pop Winslow told him to practise vaults first. A lot of muscles Ed had long since forgotten made themselves felt before many hours had passed. He also found himself a trifle vault shy and too ready to recall his accident.

"Don't try to top more than ten feet," said Pop Wilson, who had turned up to watch him. Gratefully, Ed agreed. He managed to make this height after a half dozen failures—with a vault that cleared the bar by half a yard. He knew then that he was going to be all right in the event and felt better.

He rested then and watched Sheila work out in the broad jump. She had a tendency, he noticed, to lose speed just before the take-off and made her leap from six inches to a foot back of the mark.

"Hey, Sheila," he told her. "You've got to get your stride grooved and measured exactly. You'll get nine inches to a foot more if you do." He showed her how and she got better results.

Then he went back to his own labors, this time at the high jump. His vaulting practise had tired him, but he managed to get over five ten. He was going to have to do four inches better in the games. He did more vaulting in the afternoon and finished up with a slow fifteen-hundred for a finale. He was a sore and winded young man when he finished.

It went like that from day to day as he followed a diversified schedule laid down for him by Tom Curtis and Pop Winslow. Curly Wilson was on hand most of the time to offer advice as needed and his work steadily improved. However, just when he began to think he had mastered one event, he would slip in another. By the end of five days his whole body was aching from the demands he was putting upon it. He began to wonder if he would be able to start.

His only trouble was the ribbing he took from his unsuspecting teammates. They misconstrued his hard work entirely, labeled it an effort to show off in front of the girls and had no hesitation in stating the fact.

"Oh, lay off, Ben," he told Wallace at the end of a week, when the big middle distance man outdid himself in the hotel

lobby. "I'm too beat."

"If you'd worked as hard to make the men's team as you are with the girls," the big blond replied, "I'd be lucky to have a job in the relays."

Ed wanted to swing, so tired was he, so aware of his own inadequacies, so unsure. But he knew it was foolish and wrong and hesitated and then Sheila came up from somewhere and led him off. He looked at her and wondered why she didn't do something about her looks. She might even be pretty if she tried.

"Thanks," he said. "Thanks a lot. I don't suppose he meant wrong."

"He's nervous too," she replied. "Everybody is." He regarded her curiously.

"What about you?" he wanted to know. "You're in this thing too."

"I'm scared blue," she told him quietly. "I'm afraid I'll fall flat on my face at the starting blocks. I'm afraid of losing. I'm afraid of my shadow. But for some reason I'm not afraid for you, Tim. You're going to be great."

"Maybe," he said and, a few minutes later, it was curfew time and they separated. But that night, in bed alongside Curly Wilson, he felt oddly warm and at peace and was grateful to Sheila for her kindness.

"And she's worse scared than I am," he muttered.

"What's that?" said Curly Wilson sleepily.

"Nothing," said Ed. "Go back to sleep, Curly."

The next day his sore muscles began to grow better. He was scheduled to run through the whole program that day and the next, then take it easy until the games began with only light workouts. He felt alive, not tired, and eager to test himself against the records.

He did the hundred meters in a smart eleven and one-fifth seconds, running only against the clock. He was a second and one-tenth over the record but he would do better in the games. He had plenty left when he crossed the finish. Pop Winslow and Tom Curtis exchanged a satisfied look.

IN THE broad jump he did just under twenty-three feet—again not world beating but adequate. However, as an ex-sprinter he figured to do well in that event. He managed to throw the weight

a hundred and twenty feet, which was not good—but his two best efforts, one of them close to one forty, were disqualified when his spin caused him to step out of the circle.

"We'll have to work on this one," Pop Winslow told him. "You're handling yourself like a schoolboy. You need control, boy—lots of it."

"I know," said Ed. He shook his head determinedly. There was a rumor afloat that the Russian had heaved the weight over one seventy-five. And Luytens had topped one-sixty the year before in a Stockholm meet.

He had more trouble in the high jump. While his legs no longer were wildly flailing appendages, he still had trouble with a dragging left foot and ruled himself out at five feet eleven. He wound up the day running the four-hundred meter in a fast fifty seconds flat.

"How do you dope me on the day?" he asked Pop.

"Not good, not bad," said the coach. "You'd be in there, but you'd have to go like blazes on the second day to win it this year. We'll see."

They did. He managed a good fifteen-six for the hurdles, a second and a half over Spec Towns' record. In the discus he threw a more than respectable hundred and fifty-five feet. He managed to squeak over the twelve-foot bar in the pole vault and just failed to get two hundred in the javelin. He wound up by running the fifteen-hundred meter in four minutes two seconds.

"You'll do, Tim," Tom Curtis told him. "If we could only get your weight throwing up! Well, nobody will have everything. There was only one Thorpe."

"He must have been great," said Ed ruefully. "Won every event, didn't he?"

"Every one," said the aging mentor. "Remember, you'll have an added advantage, Tim. They won't be expecting you. They don't know much about you. So they'll have to guess against you as well as the Russian."

"I'll keep them crossed," said Tim, pulling on his coveralls. . . .

The next few days were lived at a pitch of excitement which made them, to Ed, faintly unreal. He was eating, sleeping, working out lightly but so highly was he tuned that events blended into one another in dreamlike fashion

until, at last, he found himself marching in the great parade of the athletes in the huge stadium at Wembley where the games were being held.

It was an impressive display, with massed flags and the finest national specimens—young men and women both—of almost every nation in the world marching in front of the biggest throng Ed had ever witnessed. A good hundred and fifty thousand people packed the immense stand, bigger than any in America.

Then the ceremonies were over and he was one of many hundreds of athletes preparing himself for his rugged schedule the next day. Decathlon competitors, being few in number, were eliminated from the trial heats in which contestants in other events had to compete.

A group of news cameramen wanted pictures of the decathlon men and Ed got his first in-the-flesh look at his competition. He spotted Luytens, then Olsen, easily from the movies he had seen. The Belgian looked even bigger than he had on the screen, a broad-shouldered black-haired young man with serious expression and undershot jaw. Olsen, on the other hand, was silver blond and thin to insignificance in trousers and blazer. There were perhaps a dozen others entered for the event, most important in the games—a dozen and the Russian.

His name, it developed, was Korshevetzky and he was of medium height. But he was chunky in a manner to suggest vast strength and, even in obeying the cameramen, moved like an athlete. Ed found himself standing beside him in the first picture taken and studied him closely. Korshevetzky ignored his competitors as if they didn't exist.

"A human iron curtain," Ed thought. He looked at the little shield on the breast pocket of his white flannel blazer and, for the first time, felt a thrill at representing his country in the greatest of all athletic contests. Somewhere behind him a band burst into "The Star Spangled Banner" and, unconsciously, he stood very straight for the cameras.

"Where's Mr. Wilson?" Luytens asked Ed when the photographers had finished their chores. "I have been looking forward to meeting him again."

Ed explained that the veteran was unable to compete. "I'll do my best to make

things interesting," he concluded.

"Of course," said the Belgian, but he was obviously uninterested. His eyes were on Korshevetzky, who was walking away toward where his own teammates were stationed. Ed felt a sudden touch of anger.

Within forty-eight hours, he told himself, Luytens, Olsen and the Russian were going to know the name of Ed Timmins, U.S.A.

CHAPTER IV

Supreme Effort

THE RUSSIAN showed his stuff in the very first event the next day, the hundred-meter sprint. He got off to an unexpectedly fast start, leading the field by ten yards at the halfway mark. Ed, who had figured this event in the bag for himself, was forced to put his head down and dig.

Little by little his longer strides brought him closer to the Soviet ace, with Luytens and Olsen on his heels and and the others far in the ruck. He put on every ounce of speed he could muster, came abreast of Korshevetzky ten yards from the finish, and went on to win by a good two meters going away.

He was sobbing for breath when Pop Winslow caught him and pounded his back. The roar of the crowd made talking difficult, but Ed gasped out his delight when the time was announced over the amplifiers. He had run his fastest sprint in years, pushed to the limit by the Russian—time, ten and eight tenths seconds, only half a second over the record held jointly by Ed Tolan and Owens.

"You'll be close to the maximum on that one," Winslow shouted. "Better lie down and take it easy until they call you for the broad jump."

Ed nodded and took it easy. But the rest period was a scant half hour. The long-legged Swede proceeded to take over in the second event. On his second try he got away for a leap of twenty-four feet, one and one-half inches. Luytens managed to nose out Ed for second place by an inch with a leap of twenty-three nine. But Ed had no complaint, since it was the longest leap he had

ever made. The Russian was fourth with twenty-three three—close enough at that.

In the weight throw, a titanic duel developed between Korshevetzky and the Belgian, with Ed battling a huge Italian for third-place honors. He did better than one-forty, however, which kept him in the running as Luytens won the event, his first victory, with a heave of just beyond one hundred seventy feet. Korshevetzky's best throw, which must have been close to one-eighty, was disqualified as his foot went outside the throwing circle on the takeoff.

"Siberia for him," said Luytens. Since seeing Ed in action he had lost his disinterested manner around the American representative, and was treating him as a foeman worthy of respect. Even the Swede, grinning shyly, had a few words to say in broken English. He was surprised when Ed replied in Swedish.

"I spent five years in Minnesota," he explained, and Olsen nodded eagerly.

"Fine place, that Minnesota," he said. "Just outside of New York."

But there was not much talking among the competitors. The challenge was too rugged and there was too much at stake. Ed, knowing he was in no better than a near-tie for the lead, determined to make the high jump decisive.

He was not the only man present with that idea, however. But he did manage to squeeze over the bar at six-one, leaving it trembling behind him but still on the nails. He lay there in the sawdust of the pit, waiting for his jinx to begin operating and knock it down. But the bar stayed in place.

As it turned out, this was enough to win him his second event of the day. Olsen failed at six with Luytens and the Russian losing out at five-eleven. All Ed had to worry about now were the four-hundred meter and the next day's events. To date it was dog eat dog for the three of them, with Ed holding a slight edge.

In the four-hundred, however, Ed found himself in trouble. Korshevetzky broke away to another fast start. Ed, who figured upon running the distance in forty-nine seconds, used his automatic stopwatch to check the pace and found it too fast. He ignored it—and, after the first half, found himself neatly boxed by Korshevetzky and a member

of the Yugoslav team.

In vain he struggled to get clear. It was impossible to break through and when he slowed down to run around the trap his opponents slowed down too. Ed began to reach the boiling point on the final turn, realizing that his time was way off, thanks to the maneuvers forced upon him, finally managed to run wide of his tormentors and hit down the home stretch in a desperate sprint.

But the act of running wide cost him further ground and he came in third behind Olsen and the Belgian, with a miserable time of fifty-three seconds. He could only shake his head and curse feelingly when Pop threw a robe around him.

"If that's the way they want it, they'll have to catch me the next time," he said. "Pop, I'm sorry but the so-and-sos boxed me neatly."

"They're getting a load from the officials right now," said the veteran coach, nodding toward the judge's box. Lord Burghley, the once-great English hurdler and Olympic title-holder in Nineteen Twenty-eight, was obviously giving Korshevetzky and the Yugoslav a tongue-lashing.

"If they try it again," said the mentor, "they'll be disqualified."

"How do I stand on the day?" Ed inquired anxiously. "I figured I was okey going into that four hundred but after that—" He shook his head.

"You're in third place, but it's still plenty close," Winslow told him. "Just take it easy until tomorrow—then give it the works."

TAKE it easy—well, it was no-soft snap. Curly Wilson took him in hand and they attended a movie, one Ed had seen months before in New York. By the time they emerged he felt somewhat easier and was able, after considerable tossing around, to get a little sleep. But he was still angry clear through.

He eyed the Russian hungrily the following day, late in the morning, when they lined up for the one-hundred-and-ten-meter hurdles. But the Slav appeared impervious to anything but a threat to his country's political warfare on the United States—and that Ed resolved to give him.

So, in his determination to make real

time, he managed to judge his second hurdle a hair too closely, knocking the obstacle over and losing stride for a precious fraction of a second. He had been a trifle ahead of the field until this mishap occurred, and the incident put him a yard behind Korshevitzky and even with the Belgian, who was showing unexpected form in this event.

"I've got to get him," Ed told himself and went savagely after the rest of the obstacles, racing the course now, not the opponent who had angered him. But, try as he would, the best he could do was to draw within a foot of his arch-opponent as they hit cinders after leaping the final hurdle.

Then, as in the opening event of the day before, Ed put down his head and drove, pulling away from the field to win by three fat meters at the tape. He was mad enough to be close to tears at having knocked over a hurdle. But Pop Winslow and Tom Curtis, who were both waiting at the finish, seemed unruffled at his mishap.

"I'm sorry," Ed told him, rubbing his ankle, which had been banged against the wood. "I blew that one pretty."

"Not quite," said Winslow. He eyed the stop-watch in his hand. "I clocked you in fourteen-nine. It's the fastest you've run to date." Just then the amplifiers confirmed the time, which was excellent, but Ed still mourned.

"If I hadn't kicked that second jump around I'd have had fourteen-six sure," he said. "I was racing the Russian instead of the track."

"You've got to do both in this business, Timmins," Tom Curtis told him gravely. "That's what makes it so gosh-darned tough. But you're doing fine. Just keep it up and the U.S. will have another title to its credit."

Ed went all out but so did the others. He hurled the discus in what was, for him, a record heave of a hundred and sixty-one feet. But Luytens won the event with a super-toss of a hundred-seventy and Korshevitzky was second with one sixty-six. So he was still behind the Belgian with Korshevitzky and Olsen crowding him closely, in that order. By this time the others were virtually out of competition.

Ed went after the pole vault and, for once, had not much trouble. He managed to clear twelve feet-six with his final

try, leading the other three, who managed to tie, by three inches. Point totals were still close.

In the javelin throw, he once more could manage only a third, though his throw of one-ninety-four feet, eleven inches, was scant inches behind Olsen's winning toss and the Russian's second placer. He was going to have to win the final event, the fifteen-hundred-meter run, to put the Stars and Stripes at the top of the winner's pole.

He felt, suddenly, very tired and slumped on a bench at the side of the field, gathering his resources for a last tremendous effort. Tom Curtis came over and sat beside him and was joined by Les Burdon, the middle distance coach.

"Timmy," said Les Burdon, "when you ran that seasick race you said something about making a discovery. Do you recall it?"

Ed, who had not allowed himself much thought about his middle-distance fiasco, scowled, then looked up, his eyes alight.

"Sure," he said. "Thanks, Les. I've been running my first laps too fast all my life. If I knock off two-three seconds, I can make up twice that at the finish with the kick I have left."

Then his face dropped. "But that's only in the eight hundred. I don't know how it would go at fifteen."

"I figure that Russian is going to break fast, pile up a lead and trust to exhaustion of his opponents to bring him in," said Burdon quietly. "That's the way he's been running all his track events."

"So use that human metronome of yours and dope out a time for the race and run it. Four minutes flat should do it."

"I'll try for three-fifty-eight," said Ed. "That Olsen is going to be plenty tough. A minute for the first lap—heck, a minute for the first three and fifty-eight for the short finale. Maybe I can pick up some in the middle."

"That's the stuff," said Burdon. He gave Ed a pat on the back.

AT FIRST it looked as if it would work out that way. Ed did his first circuit in a minute even, as planned. The Russian, paced by the Yugoslav, was a full twenty-yards in the lead. Luytens, running steadily, was in third place,

then came Ed, then Olsen, who was running easily at his elbow.

On the second lap Luytens, apparently near the end of his rope, faltered as did the Yugoslav, who dropped out of the race at its conclusion. So it was Korshevitzky, then Ed, then Olsen, as they swung into Lap Three. The Russian, by now, was almost thirty yards ahead and still running strongly.

Apparently Olsen decided something should be done about it. He passed Ed just before the turn and took off in pursuit, running with tireless strides. And this tirelessness infected Ed, who began to fear he would be left in the ruck entirely. So, stepping up his own pace a couple of notches, he took off after the Swede.

The Russian, sensing what was happening, continued to pour on the coal and progress was slow. But Ed knew with his inner sense of time that he had run his third lap in fifty-seven seconds as the gun sounded for the short fourth lap. And he was still five yards behind the Swede and fifteen behind Korshevitzky.

He got his second wind then and lengthened his stride still further. But the men in front of him weren't quitting and, by the time the lap was half concluded, he was still five yards off the pace, with Olsen and the Russian running neck and neck in front of him. The time was plenty fast.

Ed was within three yards of the leaders as they went into the final curve and managed to hold his distance, even while moving wide to have a clear field for his final sprint. His second wind had vanished now, and he was hanging on in there by determination alone.

Then he saw Korshevitzky falter and knew he had the Russian at least. The sight gave him new spirit and he came driving out of the final curve like a sprinter in his first trial heat. But Olsen

came up with an unexpected final kick and, for a little while drew away.

But Ed, past the stumbling Russian, was not to be headed. He passed the Swede ten yards from the tape and broke it, half falling into Pop Winslow's arms and muttering, "Three fifty-four anyway."

He was only a fifth of a second off—and the final win was enough to give him the decathlon.

He was, in fact, the first athlete since Jim Thorpe to top a total of nine thousand points.

Later, as he left the locker room with Ben Wallace and Curly Wilson hanging onto him, he saw a gorgeous young creature smiling at him.

"Hey," he said, stopping short. It was Sheila, a Sheila wearing lipstick and powder and with her hair beautifully groomed. He shook himself loose from his fellows, saying, "Sorry, me lads, I'm collecting a dividend."

"Dividend, interest and principal," Wallace murmured. "Ask her if she's got a sister."

"Dig up your own dames," said Ed witheringly, deserting them. He took Sheila's arm and contented himself with just looking at her.

"How come?" he said. "You aren't the same girl."

"I promised Uncle Tom I wouldn't put on make-up until I won my events," she said. "He's scared to death of women with lipstick around a track team."

"And if you'd lost?" he asked.

"Well," she said, giving him a look, "I guess I'd have had to cheat."

"Uncle Tom?" he muttered. "Is Tom Curtis your uncle?"

"Check," she replied. "But let's talk about something more important."

"Like hundred yard dashes maybe," said Ed.

Grinning, they went on their way toward a train for London.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

A MAN'S GOTTA RIDE

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THRILLS IN SPORTS



FAMOUS SPORTS COMMENTATOR

AL GIONFRIDDO MAKES THE GREATEST WORLD SERIES CATCH!

WHEN Joe Di Maggio came to bat in the sixth inning of the sixth game of the 1947 World Series, a kid named Al Gionfriddo was playing left field for Brooklyn. Gionfriddo was no star. Most of the fans, even of the Flatbush variety, didn't know much about him. He was just a bench-warmer, insurance in case one of the better players was hurt.

On the other hand, DiMaggio was one of the immortals . . . a tremendous hitter, an outstanding fielder. He had won many a game by his prowess, and now he had a chance to finish the series in a blaze of glory. There were two men on the bases, and a

always seemed to be coming in to save the bacon for somebody.

Al watched Hatten let one go. He was hoping with all his heart that the Yankee Clipper would strike out. But, there had been a slaughter of moundsmen. They couldn't seem to do anything right . . . and a guy had to be awful good to get rid of a fellow like Joe DiMaggio.

Hatten pitched again. From out there in left field Gionfriddo couldn't tell whether it was a fast ball or curve. Not that it made any difference. Joe swung on it with that loose, free motion of his, and in the sudden stillness you could hear the resounding crack of wood against leather.

The kid saw the ball rise against the sky. It was labeled "home run" . . . and a home run meant defeat for Brooklyn, and the end of the series. Gionfriddo started back as fast as he could go . . . and he could sprint with the best of them. You don't think about anything at a time like that. You just go as fast as you can . . . marking the trajectory with a quick glance over your shoulder. This is sheer physical effort and desperate hope. The nearly 75,000 spectators had burst into full cry . . . triumph for the Yankee rooters, despair for those who backed the Bums.

Al angled toward the bull pen. He was going faster than ever, but there didn't seem to be a chance in the world he would catch that prodigious fly. The baserunners were flashing around the sacks, for they didn't believe the outfielder lived who could get close to the ball DiMaggio had hit. Maybe Gionfriddo couldn't, but the substitute, who hadn't been good enough to win a regular post even with tail-end Pittsburgh, was giving the old college try.

He saw the stands looming before him. The ball was hooking toward the gate in back of the bull pen. That was the end of the road. If it sailed over it . . . good-by everything . . . and that gate was 410 feet from where Jolting Joe had lashed into the ball.

Al was beginning to breathe fast as he



resounding clout at this moment would undoubtedly be the finishing blow.

Being a youngster, brand new to World Series thrills, Gionfriddo was tight as a string. At the moment the task of stopping DiMaggio was up to Joe Hatten, the pitcher . . . but the Brooklyn pitchers hadn't been very effective, except for old man Casey, who

neared the gate. He flashed another look at the ball. It was dropping fast now, and the question was whether or not it would fall beyond his reach. The kid leaped. He felt the impact of leather against his glove, and clutched as he had never clutched anything before in his life. He had it . . . he had it!

Gionfriddo had been so intent on the effort that, for a moment, he hardly realized what had happened. The importance of it did not soak into his mind until the overwhelming burst of noise beat upon him like stormy

waves rushing over a beach. Then he knew he had made the greatest catch in world series history . . . one of the greatest catches baseball had ever seen.

When he walked back to the bench, the substitute was grinning.

He was too happy to talk . . . too completely overjoyed to get a word past his lips. And the team-mates on the bench nearly hammered him to a pulp with congratulating handclaps, for they, too, found words completely inadequate.

JOHNNY DAWSON MAKES HIS LAST BIG TRY

THE weariest man in golf walked to the fog-shrouded seventeenth hole at Pebble Beach. He was stocky, bronzed Johnny Dawson, who was forty-four years old, and had been trying to win the National Amateur Golf Championship for more than half the years of his life.

Johnny was one of the most popular men the links game had ever known, but in his best competitive years there was always some one like Bobby Jones, Johnny Goodman, Harrison Johnston or George Voigt to stand between him and the crown he wanted so much.

Dawson's opponent in this final round of the championship was Skee Riegel, a dozen years his junior, and one of the best amateurs in the world. The year before Skee had set a record of 136 in the 36-hole qualifying round. During the week of play over the immensely difficult Pebble Beach course, Riegel had been only three strokes over par.

What was more important, he was strong as a bull, and had not tired in the least. He was still good for an endless amount of play, and Dawson was so weary that merely swinging a club was a distinct physical effort.

Riegel had been three up after twenty-seven holes of play, but Johnny, with a veteran's courage and determination, won back two of them. If he could overcome the exhaustion that rode his shoulders like the old man of the sea, he might pull this match out at last.

But as they faced the slugging one-shot next to last hole, even Johnny Dawson's high heart had to admit that the odds were enormously against him. The seventeenth called for a full wood shot to a green that was almost invisible in the fog. Riegel did not hit the carpet with his shot, and tired Johnny teed up his ball. He had to win not only this one, but the last as well to square the match, and if that miracle were achieved,

he'd hardly be able to drag himself through an extra hole.

He lashed into the ball. It wasn't a good shot, and he knew it . . . a wide slice to the right of the green. Miracles sometimes happen, but seldom when you want them most. He had to lay a difficult pitch shot dead, and that wouldn't be enough if Skee knocked one up. Skee didn't. He still had a long putt left . . . so Dawson faced the last shot in the locker.



It didn't come off because his exhaustion-hammered muscles lacked coordination. He barely reached the edge of the green. Then, Johnny Dawson knew he would never win the championship. He had tried for so long. When he had failed in earlier days there were other years to look forward to. But, they had run out on him. He was getting too old for the sort of competition young men offered. A week of playing thirty-six holes a day took too much out of a fellow who had reached his middle forties.

When he failed to sink the long one, Dawson walked toward his opponent, hand out-

stretched, a tired smile on his face.

Riegel pumped his hand vigorously.

"Johnny," he said, "of course, I'm glad I won, but I wish it could have been anybody

else I beat. You're a great guy, John."

And, that's what everybody thinks of the red-faced, weary man who couldn't win at Pebble Beach in his last big try.

THE GEORGIA BULLDOGS MEET THE NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

THE Georgia Bulldogs rolled into Chapel Hill that bright autumn day cocky and confident. They had won eighteen straight games. In addition to that, they had beaten North Carolina in the Sugar Bowl last New Year's day, and were sure their gravy train would continue to roll on to victory.

True, the Tar Heels had "Choo Choo Charlie" Justice, one of the great backs of the country, but one star doesn't make a football team any more than one swallow makes a summer.

During the first half it looked as though the Bulldogs were justified in their optimism. They led 7 to 0, and kept Justice well bottled up. Georgia, with passing wizard Johnny Rausch flicking 'em and Donaldson and Brunson bucking and running, were doing well enough to satisfy any but the most partisan rooters.

It wasn't until toward the end of the third period that North Carolina started rolling, and by that time it seemed a little late. The Bulldogs had their opponents back on their heels in their own territory, and Rausch tossed a pass that looked for a moment as though it might pay off. But Johnny Clements went up into the air with gluey hands and intercepted it.

Nobody knows what to expect in wide open modern football. The suddenly-inspired Tar Heels, led by Justice, promptly took their way to Georgia's 25-yard stripe. They were hot as two-dollar pistols, and seemed a sure bet to score. But, Bob Cox fumbled at that point, and Georgia recovered.

One such break can decide a ball game, and has decided many of them. After a couple of plays, the Bulldogs punted 'way back into Carolinian territory, but Justice, squirming and slide hiping returned it to just past the mid-field stripe.

That didn't look so bad to the Bulldogs. It takes a lot of stuff to travel 49 yards, and the Georgia rooters weren't worried. The Bulldogs were looking for passes. But, in spite of that, Pupa dropped back, and wafted a long one over the heads of the secondary defense. Somebody should have been back there, but nobody was, and Bob Cox took the aerial. Up to that point Cox had been the goat, because he had fumbled when a fumble

was most hurtful, but this time he held onto the ball. There was no one near him, and he sprinted calmly, almost casually, across the goal line. A moment later the score was tied.

That spurred North Carolina into victory mindedness. Twice, early in the fourth period, they moved toward the enemy pay dirt, but each time they fumbled, and lost their golden chance. By that time Chapel Hill was almost in the throes of hysteria. You



couldn't make mistakes like that against Georgia, and expect to win.

There wasn't much of the game left when the North Carolinians finally gained possession of the ball on their own 20-yard line. Then the gears began to mesh. Justice and Pupa, engineering the flanks and cracking the line, moved to midfield once more.

Then, Pupa dropped back, and Cox moved out. On two passes, the ball was down on the Bulldogs' 17-yard stripe. There was a howling bedlam, for Georgia had been a strong favorite . . . and Georgia had to stop this attack right where it was. But, you never can tell. Pupa faded once more, and his control was perfect. He fired one into Art Weimer's arms no more than four yards from the end zone, and Weimer went over

for the touchdown that won.

North Carolina was a great ball club that day . . . a fighting, won't-be-beaten ball

club, but it wasn't quite so good on succeeding Saturdays. That's the reason nobody has found a way to figure out football!

KID LAVIGNE FIGHTS FOR WORLD LIGHTWEIGHT HONORS

KID LAVIGNE was lightweight champion of America. He was the Battling Nelson of his day; a man who was no great shakes as a boxer, but who could punch and take a punch. Not that he walked in wide open as Nelson did, and invited blows. The Kid had a sort of awkward ability to block, but there were many that landed, as his battered face often testified.

Across the Atlantic, the British boasted a champion, too, a sharp shooting boxer named Dick Burge. No one could claim a



world title until Burge had been accounted for.

Lavigne wanted to fight Dick. He wanted to fight anybody who would risk going into the ring with him. So, with his manager, Sam Fitzpatrick, he sailed for London early in the summer of 1896.

The British were keen about the match, and it was arranged at the National Sporting Club on Derby Night. Everyone of wealth and prominence in the United Kingdom was present. This was to be one of the great nights in the history of Fisticiana.

Burge lived up to all the best traditions of the British ring. He was a fancy dan, who could step around, and jab like a master. For ten rounds he made the American look

like a second-rater. Lavigne waded in, belting away with both hands, missing . . . missing . . . while Dick raked him with every punch in his repertoire.

The Saginaw Kid's face was cut to ribbons. He dripped blood. His eyes were mere slits through which he peered at his enemy. But he kept punching. He centered his attack on the body. Once in a while his fists would dig into the Englishman's body . . . not often early in the fight, but with increasing frequency.

Burge sported no cuts or scars. There was no blood on his face. But those body punches were sapping the strength from him. The enthusiastic Englishmen at the ringside didn't know that. They saw their man apparently fresh and unpunished. They saw the American, battered, gory, and felt sure of the result. What they didn't know was that Lavigne had taken worse punishment than this, and come on to win.

At Maspeth wicked-hitting Joe Walcott had ripped an ear from Lavigne's head, cut him to a pulp, yet had lost just the same. Only Dick Burge knew his own apparent supremacy was a sham. He wasn't beating Kid Lavigne, no matter how easily he seemed to be winning.

After the tenth round the spectators began to understand that something was wrong. Dick slowed down. His jabs began to miss the target. He tired. Lavigne caught up with him oftener, and more solidly. No blood . . . but the band of crimson on Burge's ribs and midsection grew brighter.

At the beginning of the seventeenth round, the English champion began to wobble on his tired pins. Lavigne belted him with another left to the stomach. Dick bent over, obviously in pain. Resistance had been drained out of him. Lavigne let go a right . . . a hard right, with all the strength he had behind him.

The soggy glove landed on the point of the jaw, just where the beard begins to turn the other way.

Burge's knees buckled under him. He seemed almost to pause in the act of falling. Then, the Kid let him have it again . . . and while the referee counted Dick Burge out, Kid Lavigne became lightweight champion of the world!



DAMON RUNYON WAS A BASEBALL BARD



ONE of America's greatest sports writers was the late Damon Runyon, but not so many of his admirers knew he wrote verse as well as stirring tales of the games we play. Duell, Sloan and Pearce have brought out a volume of Runyon's "Poems for Men." One of them:

OPENING DAY

*There's a bang in the whang
Of the first round clang
For a battle of fistic cracks.
There's a kick in the click
Of a barrier's flick
As the horses tear up the track.*

*There's a thrill in the trill
Of the whistle shrill
That starts a football play.
But, say—
Give me the thrill
In the springtime chill
Of baseball's opening day.*

THE DANGEROUS GAME OF SIX-DAY BIKE-RACING

REMEMBER the six-day bike race of 1924. Young Bobby Walthour was riding in one of his first races . . . a slim, blond boy, who was fast as a streak on his wheel. His father had been one of the finest riders of another day. When old Bob was pedaling, Mrs. Walthour came to the track every night and let the little fellow sleep in his daddy's bunk.

Now, the years have passed, and the old man no longer rides. His son is in there, instead.

The rhythm of the riders moves faster and faster. One hears the tug of powerful legs pulling up sprockets and pushing them down. There is a circling line of colored jerseys . . . around and around the track.

Suddenly, there is a spill. Half a dozen riders go skidding down the steeply banked track in a tangle of bodies and bikes. Over the din you hear a piercing woman's voice: "My boy, my boy! He's killed!"

That's Ma Walthour. At one time or another she had seen her husband break nearly every bone in his body, and had taken those misfortunes calmly. But she could not stand seeing young Bob hurt.

He wasn't killed, of course. He wasn't hurt badly, for in a couple of minutes he was back in the race. Bobby became a very fine rider,



and never suffered the battering his old man took.

But, Mrs. Walthour's scream of anguish . . . grating on the nerves . . . remains as a nerve-jerking thrill after all these years.



More Highlights of Sport in THRILLS IN SPORTS
by JACK KOFOED in Our Next Issue!

While the crowd
screamed, Red
threw with all his
strength

ROBERT
JENNEY



FAST BALL

By A. N. BORNO

His speedy pitch wouldn't whistle any more—but the Old Fireballer still had something, and proved it in a pinch!

THE bullpen coach called to him. "That's your signal, Red. Let's go." Red stared towards the dugout far across the field. He hadn't seen the manager's signal, but if the bullpen coach said it had been sent that was good enough. He stood up, slipped on his glove, and strolled over to the pitching rubber to start warming up.

It would give him a workout. He

didn't expect to be sent in, but the work would do him good. The lefty in the bullpen had been warming up for twenty minutes, so if the starter didn't last he'd be called in. The manager knew what he was doing. They were old friends.

Just before he started throwing Red glanced in at the infield. The boys were taking the field, protecting a one-run lead. It was the last half of the ninth.

Just three outs and the game would be over. Then he could meet Ellen and the kids outside and they'd have dinner together. Having them around all the time really helped a lot.

Red pitched slowly and easily. He knew just how to warm up, how to pace himself, which pitches to work first, and just when to start throwing hard so that he'd be ready when he got to the mound. That was the result of many years of experience. He was just a kid barely out of high school when he started pitching in organized baseball. Two years later he was a major leaguer.

Now his little girl was all of twelve years old, and Red remembered that she was born right after his first world series. That didn't seem like such a long time ago, but Red knew it was. Time goes by slowly, but it never stops moving.

RED had always been crazy about baseball. He still was. Baseball was alive. Every day brought a new game, and every game was different. Every day was an experience all by itself. A man couldn't break away from that, not after it had been his life for almost as long as he could remember.

He curved a slow pitch down to the catcher and grinned as he watched it float along. He remembered the headlines the papers first carried about him when he broke into the majors. They were all about his fast ball. The reporters said he was the fastest kid who'd ever hit baseball, that he had more steam than a locomotive, that catchers had trouble handling his stuff, and a lot more that helped make him the cockiest swell-head in baseball.

They called him The Fireballer, and the name stuck. They still called him that, except that now it was The Old Fireballer. He had quit trying to blaze fast balls past the batters more than five years ago. That was when he had to start using his head.

Red flipped a knuckler down to the catcher. That was one of the first pitches he developed after he lost his speed. He used to sneer at pitchers who used knucklers, sliders, fork balls, and all the other fancy pitches that most of the older boys specialize in.

He quit sneering when he was forced to learn them himself, and when he did he learned fast. He picked them up

pretty easily. He learned how to use them, too, and even after his speed was gone he was able to win from ten to fifteen games a season.

Red interrupted his motion long enough to glance at the infield as the crowd roared. The first man up had just lined a double to left center. The home team had the tying run on second and the crowd was up in the air. The young lefty next to him also glanced at the infield, and started throwing harder than ever. Red grinned.

"Take it easy, kid," he called to him. "You'll knock yourself out before you get there. Besides, you may not have to pitch anyhow. Slow down. You've worked long enough to be warm now."

The kid grinned for just a second, but went right on bearing down on every throw. He was nervous. He sensed a chance to impress the manager and he didn't want to lose out on it. Red turned away and went on throwing, himself.

For just about five seasons Red had managed to get along pretty well with his slow stuff. The question was how long he could go on doing that. He didn't like the thought. Life without baseball scared him, but facts have to be faced. He wouldn't be able to go on forever. He'd have to stop sometime, and then what? He quit thinking about it. Maybe he could get himself a ball club of his own to manage when that happened. He knew he was kidding himself when he thought about a manager's job, but it made him feel better.

He was on his way out when he hooked up with the club. The team he'd been with for three years gave him his release without any kind of warning. That was the first time Red ever worried about a job.

Both times before that when he was released he had known he'd make a connection with another club, but this last time he was really scared. It came so suddenly he hardly had time to think about it.

That was when Ellen brought the kids down to join him. She knew him like a book, figured he'd be sick about his release, and started living in hotels to keep him company. She helped a lot and brought him luck. The day after she joined him the manager called and gave him a temporary contract. The team was on tour so she had to pack quickly to keep up with him.

THAT was ten days ago. He hadn't pitched a game since then. Every day the manager promised him he'd get a chance if the starting pitcher needed help, but if help was needed he always called on somebody else.

At first Red did a lot of worrying about that, but then he forgot about it. The manager was an old teammate. Red knew he wouldn't be tossed out of this job overnight. He just took it easy and spent most of the time showing the kids his old tricks. There were quite a few rookies on the club. The manager was pointing to the future, building up a young team.

Another roar went up from the crowd. Red saw the runner from second tear around the bases on his way home while the batter went into second with another double. Now the score was tied, and the manager walked out on the mound to talk to the pitcher. Red turned away and automatically started working harder. He concentrated on his medium-fast curve. That was his best pitch.

He threw a few fast balls. There was still plenty of speed on them, but not nearly enough to get by consistently. He might sneak one past a batter now and then, but he couldn't use it often. Sooner or later it would be tagged and slammed out of the park. It didn't have any real steam behind it. The old hop was gone. What was left was no more than a fast straight ball. Once a good major leaguer saw one go by he'd use the next one for batting practice.

Red heard the crowd howl again, but this time he didn't even bother to turn around. He kept right on throwing. The team was in trouble and out of habit he started bearing down on his pitches. He threw harder with every pitch, gradually working his arm into shape. He felt good, the ball was light in his hand and did everything he wanted it to do. For a second he wished the manager would call for him, but he knew he wouldn't.

The next roar from the crowd forced him to look around. The batter was walking to first, and the manager was walking out to the hill again. Red looked at the man waiting to get into the batter's box. He was a left-hander. Red figured the kid would surely be called in to pitch.

He was wrong. The manager was leaving his starter, who was also a lefty,

in there. He was playing the percentages, and probably figured his pitcher still had enough to save the game. Red didn't blame him. The kid who was doing the pitching had plenty of sand. He was a fighter all the way. He deserved a chance to pull the game out of the fire.

Red remembered the first time he started a game. It went something like this one. Red had it easy all the way until the ninth. He struck out fourteen batters and gave up only two hits during the first eight innings, but in the ninth they got to him. Almost before he realized it the bases were loaded with one out. He just had a two-run lead to work with so he was really in a hole.

He begged the manager to leave him in, and when he did he got the other two batters on four pitches. The crowd's cheers made him feel like a hero while he trotted to the clubhouse. He could understand why this kid wanted to finish the game himself.

He knew what the pitcher was going through. He was scared, badly scared. The noise from the crowd made him nervous, made sweat ooze out of the palm of his hand. No matter how much he rubbed it against his pants, no matter how much resin he put on it, the hand would still be wet.

Gripping the ball was harder than ever. It was twice as difficult to control. And to add to it all he was tired by now. Every time he raised his arm to pitch the ball grew heavier. Unless he came through with a burst of strength his fast ball was useless. He was pitching with very little more than nerve, and usually a man needs a lot more than nerve to get a ball past a major league batter.

The most important thing is to keep calm, to keep thinking all the time and know what you're doing. That isn't easy when a run-hungry crowd is raising the roof and the other team is riding the daylight out of you.

"O.K., Red, you're on."

"What?" Red hardly heard his catcher.

"The Chief just signalled for you. He wants you in there."

RED picked up his jacket automatically and started walking towards the infield in a daze. He hadn't heard the third and loudest roar that came from the crowd when the second straight batter was walked, loading the bases. Now the manager was on the mound, waiting for

him, and the starting pitcher was walking towards the clubhouse.

Red couldn't understand it. The kid had been warming up much longer than he had. He was the logical person to go in. The game was practically lost anyhow. It would have been interesting to see what the kid would have done with the heat on.

Red was approaching second base when he finally realized what was happening. This was his tryout! This was the chance the manager had promised him to prove he still had enough stuff to hang onto a major league job.

This was what he had been waiting for during the past ten days. This explained why the manager hadn't sent him in sooner. He waited for the toughest possible spot before deciding whether or not he wanted to keep him.

What a laugh! With the bases loaded, the score tied in the last of the ninth, and three heavy hitters including the league's leading slugger coming up, the manager was sending him in to make up his mind! He would have been better off if he had never gotten the job!

Red tossed his jacket aside and began taking his warm-up pitches immediately. "It's a tough spot, Red!" Was the manager trying to be funny!

"Yeah!"

"See what you can do with them. I'd like to win this game."

"Yeah!" Red had trouble controlling himself.

"Pitch these guys slow. They're good but they can be fooled. Keep your pitches away from them." Red didn't answer. Nobody had to tell him how to pitch!

"Just watch what you throw them, Red. I don't like to lose a game like this." The manager walked away. Red hardly heard the catcher as he went over the signals. He saw Ellen and the kids sitting in a box on the field. He wasn't going to enjoy losing this game either!

The catcher walked back to the plate. Red picked up the resin bag and toyed with it for a second. He glanced around the bases, barely noticing the runners. The crowd's roar, rising in intensity again, was just a dull noise in the background. He didn't hear the taunts from the bench jockeys.

He turned to study the batter. He recognized a tall, powerful right-hander he had pitched against once before, a kid

playing his first year in the majors. He could be fooled. He stood so close to the plate he was a sucker for a good inside curve. But it had to be good. The kid could give the ball a ride.

Red didn't want him to see that curve right away. The catcher called for it, but Red shook it off. They wouldn't have him swinging at the first pitch. All they needed was a walk to win the game.

Red shook off a knuckler. The slow stuff would come later. He wanted to throw the fast one first, low and on the inside corner. That was his best pitch to open with. The kid wouldn't be expecting any fast stuff from him anyhow. The catcher finally flashed him the right signal.

Red gripped the ball, put his foot against the rubber, and stared at the man on third. He didn't need a windup. He stretched, reached back and threw the ball with everything he could put behind it. It travelled over the inside corner, level with the knees. The batter watched it go by. Red's expression didn't change as the umpire bawled out the first strike.

The second one had to be the curve, right around the wrists. The kid wouldn't be looking now. He was ready to swing. It had to be the curve, and it had to break right around the wrists. If it broke anywhere else he'd hit it, and an ordinary outfield fly would bring in the run. It had to be just right. When the catcher called for it Red nodded automatically.

Again he gripped the ball, took his stretch, watched the runner on third take a long lead, and aimed at the batter's arms as he threw. The ball curved in towards the plate. The batter swung but the ball was close enough to handcuff him. Red had him in a hole.

The catcher shouted encouragement as he stepped in front of the plate to return the ball. Red didn't hear him. When he started pitching he forgot all about the spot he was in himself, but it was there, in back of his mind, torturing him. It was a dirty deal, especially when it came from a man he had considered an old friend!

He could waste one now. The batter was nervous, realizing he was behind. He might swing at a low outside pitch. Red wasted one, just a little on the outside. The batter didn't bite. The catcher called for the curve again but Red wanted to waste another one.

He didn't want to use the curve until he absolutely had to, didn't want the batter to see it. He threw another change-of-pace ball on the outside. The batter almost went for it, but checked his swing just in time. Now he had to come through.

THE pitcher fingered the resin and screwed the ball into his glove. The curve had to be just right again. Just a little off and the game would be gone. He almost laughed when he thought of that! He threw the ball in the same spot. The batter swung desperately, but he didn't have a chance. The pitch was in there perfectly.

Red realized the crowd had quieted down. His infielders were shouting encouragement, and the catcher was hopping up and down in front of the plate. The crowd started roaring again as the next batter walked up. This was their hero, the league's leading slugger. Red knew him well. He had been around for more than seven years. He wouldn't be fooled.

Red happened to glance at the dugout where the manager was leaning on the step. When Red glanced towards him he shook his fist in a sign of encouragement. Red's mouth worked itself into a momentary sneer.

There was only one thing he could do with this batter. He had to pitch him slow, and hope. Blinding speed might get past him, but he didn't have anything like that so there was no use thinking about it. The catcher called for a change-of-pace curve on the outside. Red nodded and took his stretch. He turned quickly and flung the ball to third. The runner dove back headfirst and just barely made it. Getting him would have been a neat break.

Red turned back to the plate, stretched, and threw his slow pitch. The batter bent towards it but held his swing. It missed the corner. Now the batter would be looking for something good. He knew Red didn't want to slip too far behind him. The knuckler might fool him.

Red stretched, then stepped off the rubber and threw leisurely to third. The runner had to be kept close to the base. Red glanced around the infield. They were playing back, hoping for a double-play.

Red stepped on the rubber and threw his knuckler, aiming it around the knees.

The batter swung viciously but hit on top of the ball. It bounced towards first at medium speed. The first baseman tore in swiftly, picked up the ball with his throwing hand and whipped it to the catcher. The ball beat the runner from third by about half a foot. There was no chance for a play at any other bag.

Now his infield was really whooping it up. The catcher was screaming wildly. The third baseman came over and slammed him on the back. There were two down now and just one more batter to get by. That batter needed a hit to drive in a run. Red wondered if the manager would be satisfied with just a good try.

The next batter was a right-hander. He kept his right foot up against the back line of the batter's box. Red recognized him too. He was hard to fool. He'd pull a pitch on the inside and push an outside throw into right field. He was even likelier to slam a slow pitch than the previous batter. Red figured his best hope was to get him to cut under a high pitch and hit it to the outfield.

The catcher called for the curve, but Red shook it off. He wanted to get the fast one in there first. The batter wouldn't be expecting a fast ball. Besides, he had lost the advantage the first two batters had. Red was on the spot while they were batting but now, with two out, the batter was on the spot too. The fast ball was a natural here.

Red ignored the runner on third. He threw with everything he had, aiming at the outside corner and high. The pitch was too high. The batter let it go. Red swore under his breath. He shouldn't have missed that one.

The next one had to be the curve. Red reached back, his eyes centered on the middle of the plate, and threw. The ball sailed down the middle and broke away perfectly. The batter swung, fouled it off to the right. They were even again.

The catcher called for a knuckler. Red nodded, glanced at the runner on third, and threw on the outside again. The ball missed the corner.

Red stepped off the mound, wiped his face, and studied a worn spot in his glove. This was going to be tough. He couldn't afford to miss those corners. Sooner or later he'd have to come in with a fast one and the game would be lost. He saw the manager staring at him from the dugout. His mouth tightened quickly.

He wouldn't miss again.

The catcher was calling for the curve. Red didn't want to throw it, but he didn't have much choice. He threw carefully and as hard as he dared, aiming again for the middle of the plate. The batter hit the pitch on the outside and lined it foul into the right field stands. The ball had been hit solidly. Red shrugged it off.

NOW he had the batter in a hole. He couldn't waste the next pitch but he could afford to play around with it. A change-of-pace curve this time, low and on the inside. If he hit it he'd probably top it to the infield. The catcher called for it. Red gripped the ball deliberately, stretched, and came down with his pitch carefully. As soon as it left his hand he knew it was bad. It bounced in front of the plate, forcing the catcher to fall on it to keep it from going past him.

Red felt the sweat running down his face. The pressure was beginning to tell. He couldn't spot his pitches. He wanted to ease up but couldn't. The manager was still on the dugout step, practically leering at him!

The catcher called for the curve again. It was all he had. It couldn't be anything else. With a 3-2 count his best bet would have been a fast ball, but that was out of the question. He took a deep breath to calm himself, gripped the ball carefully, and threw. The ball was thrown too far to the right. It broke over the inside corner. The batter swung quickly and pulled it far over the left field roof, foul by just about a foot. Red was sweating again.

The catcher wanted the knuckler. Red shook it off. He'd have to come in solid with it and this batter would murder it. There was only one pitch he could use, whether it worked or not. It had to be a fast ball. He couldn't take a chance on the curve again. The batter was looking for it. He'd straighten out the next one.

But he wouldn't be looking for speed. That was the only pitch that could upset him, the only pitch that Red could be sure of getting in there, the only pitch the batter might hit right at one of his fielders. He couldn't help himself. It had to be the fast one, and *fast!*

Red gripped the ball. His arm felt tired, even though he had only been working for a few minutes. The noise of the crowd came through for a moment

and it was deafening. Everybody, including the players, was screaming.

Red stretched, reached back and threw with all the strength he could command. As the ball left his hand he cursed desperately. It wasn't nearly fast enough, it had no zip, no hop, nothing! The batter lined it deep to right center. It would have been good for a double at least, but the batter stopped after he touched first. One run was all they needed.

Red didn't look at anybody as he walked swiftly to the dugout. He nodded absently as his teammates told him it was a good try. He was out of a job, but that didn't bother him nearly as much as the hatred and disgust he felt for the manager. He showered and dressed quickly, packed his bag and strode into the manager's cubbyhole office.

"Well!"

The manager looked up quickly.

"Hello Red. Sit down." He went on tying his shoes. "That was a mighty good try, Red. With a break you would have pulled us out of there."

"O.K., I didn't get the breaks and I didn't pull you out. What happens now?"

The manager stared at him queerly.

"How'd you like to coach for us, Red?"

He spoke slowly and quietly. Red gaped ludicrously, an astounded expression on his face. His mouth worked awkwardly.

"Are you kidding!" he croaked.

"I've got a bunch of green kids with speed to burn and practically nothing else. Nobody on the club knows enough about pitching to teach them everything they ought to know. Nobody, that is, except you. Now you ask me if I'm kidding!"

Red kept on staring.

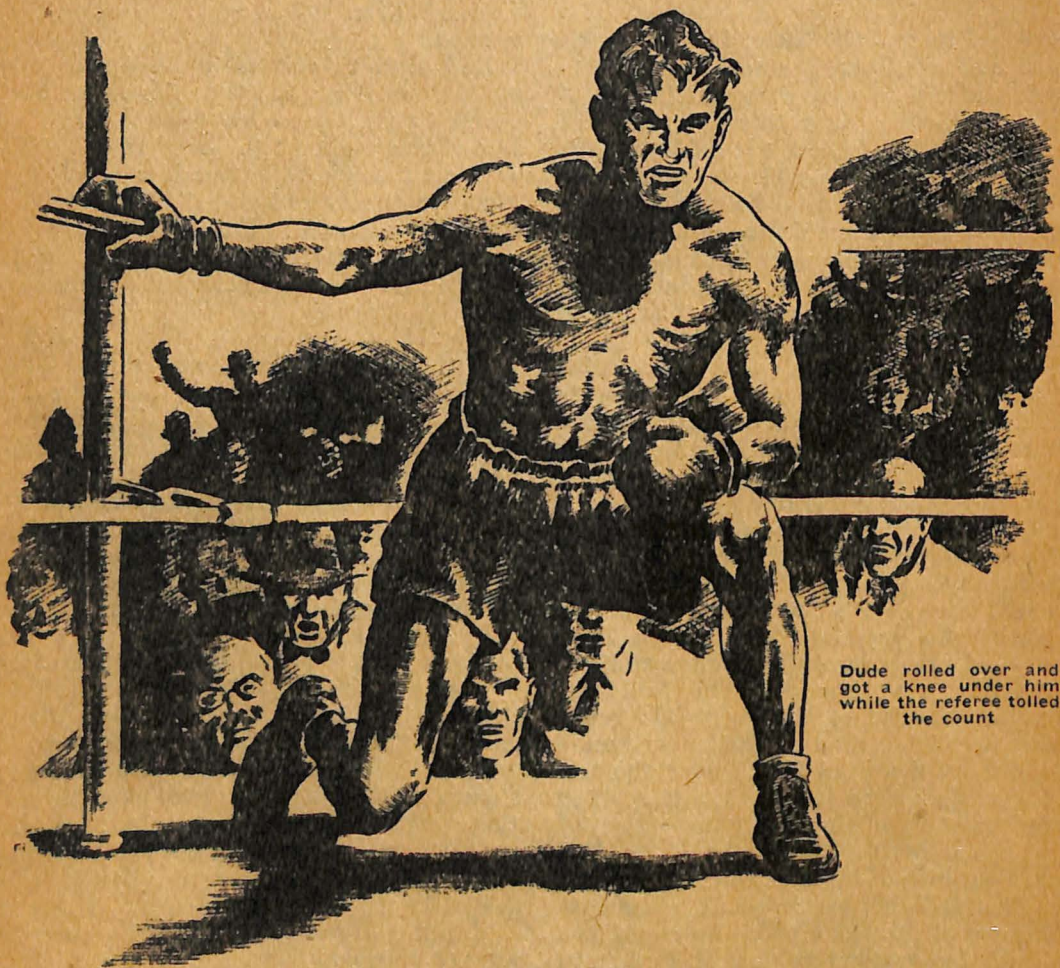
"I put you in there today because I wanted those kids to see how a smart pitcher would act in a spot like that. They took a good look and thought it was great, even if you did get hit. They're completely sold on you, so the job's yours if you want it."

Red shook his head slowly. His mind was still confused. It took time to make sense out of the manager's words.

"If only I could have gotten that fast one in there!" he whispered softly. "That would have made it perfect!" He looked up suddenly and grinned. "You can bet on one thing, Chief. Every one of those kids will have a good fast ball!"

The Look of

A COMPLETE BOXING NOVELET



Dude rolled over and got a knee under him while the referee tolled the count

CHAPTER I

Man With a Plan

THE voice of the crowd rolled like an angry surf and washed over the three figures in the Madison Square Garden ring, and the eddies of it seemed to disjoin the still-life pose of the referee. He jumped in and slapped his hands together.

"Okay, okay, let's have some action!"

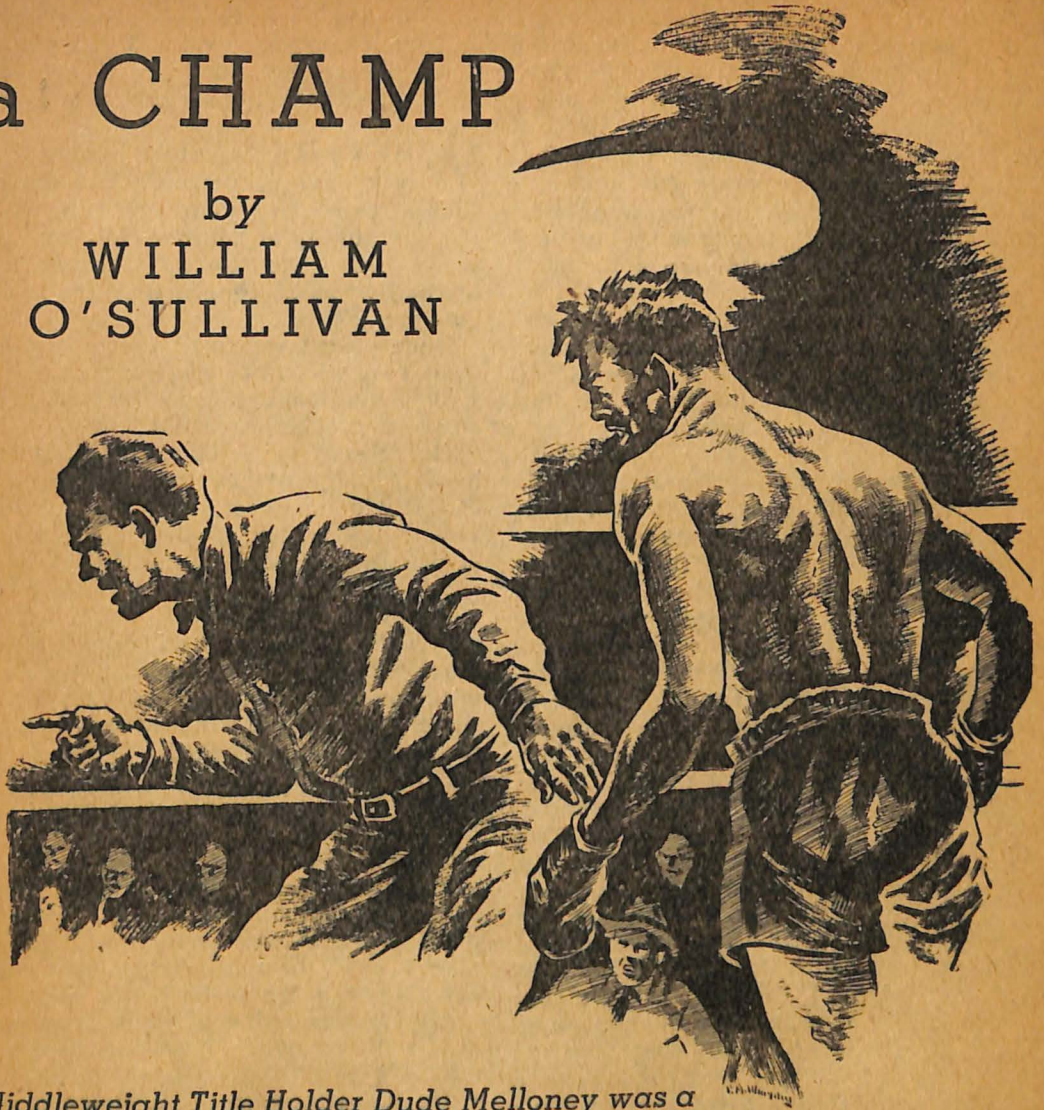
he shrilled. "This is a championship fight, not a waltz!"

The stockily-built man in the black trunks came out of his crouch and started a punch with his left, held it, cocked his gloved right and threw it—or started to throw it.

The rapier-like left of his opponent in the purple trunks stabbed through the smoke-laden glare of the ring and Black-trunks' head snapped back—once, twice. Purple-trunks shifted his feet so

a CHAMP

by
WILLIAM
O'SULLIVAN



*Middleweight Title Holder Dude Melloney was a
fighter with a plan — but the best-laid plan can
go astray when a championship is on the line!*

smoothly, swiftly, the change in stance was scarcely perceptible, and his right flowed with the movement like a piston-shaft moving with a locomotive wheel.

Clop!

Black-trunks danced backward, arms flailing the air, gloves opened in his desperate clawing at air. A small cloud of resin rose when he crashed onto his back on the canvas. The fireflies of cigar and cigarette tips fled before the full-throated roar of the crowd that had

crouched discontentedly in the gloom beyond the shining jewel that was the ring—had crouched and grouched through the seven cut-and-dried rounds of the Melloney-Kiley fight for the Middleweight Championship of the World.

That's what the posters had called this match—a fight. But the individual components that went to make up the crowd had called it many other things as it unfolded its calculated three-minute sections—mostly unprintable.

The crowd was as critical of the feature bout as it had been enthusiastic over the preliminary Bardski-Garr go, a savage, action-packed, bloody slugfest that had twitched itself out in tempo with the referee's count and Tom Garr's punch-paralyzed limbs.

"Dude" Melloney, looking more like an alert, if undressed, young business executive neatly closing up a financial deal than a singularly unscathed 160-pound champion engaged in an exchange of lethal punches, heard the jeering roar of the crowd and knew it for what it was—anger that he didn't step in and finish off "Toots" Kiley when the black-trunked fighter wobbled to his feet and covered desperately.

But Dude Malloney was a man with a plan. All his young life, he had a plan. And if his plans outside the ring were laid out for him by others they had proved good plans—just as Dude Melloney's ring-smart tactics, which were strictly his own, were good plans. They were still good enough to win.

The huge clock showed eleven seconds of the seventh round remaining. Not enough for a knockout, allowing several seconds to tag Kiley with his Sunday punch, a second for Kiley to go down and the ten-count. Not enough. Besides, Kiley was dangerous when he was hurt.

Dude noted the time, tasted the brown mood of the crowd that had been brutally pleased with the work of the Russian, "Butcher" Bardski, thought not even briefly about that misshapen zooming star of the middle division, who had the torso of a heavy and the legs of a lightweight. Dude's plans called for his retirement after one more bout and Bardski still had some distance to go. He moved in.

He was a surgeon performing a dangerous operation under the eyes of eighteen thousand critics. He was the preoccupied engineer, reading his blueprints while bedlam resounded—calm, wise-eyed, unruffled. He was a scientist working with a lethal explosive. He was Dude Melloney, Middleweight Champion of the World, the man whose fame was made with his earlier years' preflight jibe at veteran fighters.

"Don't cut my face or muss my hair and I might let you stay the limit."

The record books gave proof of the maddening power of that taunt. Men

who should have known better fought an idea instead of the two-fisted wraith that sidestepped, ducked, weaved, blocked, clinched, sparred and siugged.

WHEN you fight an idea you are likely to forget details. And details such as protecting your own chin when you are aiming at another chin can cost you a fight. As "Rocky" Harmon had learned when he fought the idea it can cost you a title.

Dude closed carefully, cautiously, his dark eyes intent on the injured Toots Kiley, his black hair unmussed. His chiseled profile unscarred.

He fainted with his right, dropping his left suggestively, leaving a segment of jaw wide open for Kiley to see. Kiley saw. Kiley struck. Dude struck. Kiley struck the canvas and the bell clanged round seven of the Melloney-Kiley fight.

"Very neat," Manager 'Pop' Layton said through the stub of his unlighted cigar when he looked up past the ring-apron at his champ. "This way, Toots don't have eight or nine seconds to start recovering, before the bell. I'm glad that wasn't your middle taking that punch, Dude! Even you would have caved under that one! The guy is still out! Well, when will it be?"

"Ninth round," Dude said, his eyes surveying the boxer in the opposite corner. Kiley's seconds were working frantically over the fish-mouthed man who lay back into the corner of the ropes. "I tagged him good but Kiley is no quitter. He's still dangerous. Another round and I'll have him."

He eased forward to let Meatball and Mopey, his handlers, work his back.

"What you worried about, Pop? Is 'Legs' riding you for a knockout again?"

Legs was "Legs" Layton—Eileen Layton—Pop's red-headed daughter, who had graduated from gingham and pig-tails and long, spindly-looking legs into silks and upswept hairdo and a job running Pop's affairs for him. The details of Pop Layton's stable of fighters, financial records, correspondence with clubs and matchmakers, 'scouting' the records for future prospects for the Layton Enterprises.

"Naw," Pop murmured, shifting his blue eyes away swiftly. "I'm not worried about anything. What I got to worry about?"

Dude, who had been smiling, sobered. "We're all set for tomorrow? Our meeting with Pat Michaels, McWebster, you, Van Tieth and me? The windup meeting?"

Pop Layton looked surprisingly unhappy for a manager who has a champion in his list of fighters.

"You just windup Toots Kiley, son," he said, with a wink that missed being hearty by a long count. "Everything is set. That is, almost. The brain trusters are all lined up for the meeting."

The "brain trusters" comprised a group of individuals who would have done credit to a Board of Directors of a bank, let alone the capable management of the important piece of athletic property known as Danny "Dude" Melloney.

The weazened, ferret-eyed, clever little man with the huge head had memorized most of the laws ever written—"Demosthenes" McWebster. If nobody knew where the astute and smooth little man came from, they knew where the copybook name came from—right out of that sagacious head.

But Demosthenes McWebster was a good man to have in your corner—in your legal corner, anyway. He kept things smooth and it was part of Dude Melloney's plan to keep everything as smooth as a coldly-calculated knockout.

Monnkay Van Tieth, the celebrated movie director, was another part of Dude's plan. Van Tieth was Tanya Garworth's director—Mary Ellen O'Toole, Tanya had been in her early Canarsie days, when Canarsie was the tough part of Brooklyn and Danny Melloney of the choir-boy voice and the angelic-face, was the toughest kid in Canarsie—and so got to carry Mary Ellen's books on numerous occasions.

That was usually when Mary Ellen wanted him to because Mary Ellen O'Toole—now the swoon-powered Tanya Garworth of Hollywood—had a way of doing things. Doing them her way, that is.

Pat Michaels was the rotund, smiling, affable, but sad-eyed impresario of Sport Spectacles who presided over the powerful setup known as Michaels' Beach. Michaels' Beach was that stretch of golden sands bounded on the lamp-posts of New York as Eighth Avenue, Forty-ninth Street, and Eighth Avenue, Fiftieth Street.

DUDE MELLONEY had plans. This Plan Board of Dude's met to discuss his plans several times a year and Dude followed these plans as religiously as a West Pointer follows regulations.

It hadn't been Dude's idea at the start. Partly it was Pop Layton's, because Pop loved Danny Melloney like a son—he'd known him since Danny was a smudge-faced toddler—and he feared he was too close to Danny Melloney for the lad's own good. He might unconsciously hold Danny back.

So Pop had asked his old neighbor, Demosthenes McWebster, who was just soaring from the ranks of very good lawyers into the ranks of very special lawyers, to sit in on his plans to make Dude Melloney the greatest of all Middleweight Champs.

Partly it was Tanya Garworth's idea, when the Melloney face became the Melloney Face, and a big after-the-fight-era idea was born in the shrewd Garworth-O'Toole cranium. So Monnkay Van Tieth came into the picture to advise on publicity.

And because it was good to have a matchmaker in your corner and because Pat Michaels saw, with respectful attention in his sad eyes, the truly large artillery that was gathered into the Melloney Planning Board, he came in.

All Dude had to do was follow their plans. The most important part of Dude's part in the plans was to keep the Melloney Face unscathed. Also, he had to win fights. This was important, too. But if Dude could get a draw with an unmassacred face, that was preferable to a win with a busted beak, a lop-sided ear or cut eyes.

There was no question of a loss, either by KO, TKO or D-15, as the record books were wont to list it but never would for Dude Melloney. Dude Melloney would retire undefeated.

That was part of the plan, too—that, and the sequel.

Dude Melloney would go as smoothly from the klieglights of Hollywood as Mrs. Van Astorgelt from her limousine to her yacht—over a carpeted gangplank.

Mike Donovan had gone from the lightweight ranks of the bare-knuckle days undefeated, to a job teaching boxing. A nice thing, but a step-down.

Gene Tunney had gone from the heavyweight ranks, undefeated, to a gen-

tleman's leisure on a Connecticut estate. A nice thing, but a step-out.

Dude Melloney would go from the Middleweight throne, unscarred and undefeated, straight into top Hollywood pay and top Hollywood work—opposite Tanya Garworth, directed by Monnkay Van Tieth. Nice work if he could get it and Dude could get it because his Plan Board had planned it that way.

It was that easy. It was no harder than taking Toots Kiley in the ninth canter of the so-called Melloney-Kiley Championship fight—or waltz. What you called it depended on where you sat. And those who sat in the pay seats called it plenty!

Dude Melloney's hair was smooth as black satin, his face as unscathed as a baby's cheek, when he thoughtfully cut Kiley's water off with two jabs, a rocketing hook and a right-uppercut.

Kiley was counted out in 2:04 of the ninth stanza.

The Champ came back up the aisle with the boeing of the blood-eager crowd etching a grin on his tanned young face. He paused only to add a Bronx cheer to the Manhattan jeers before he went on to his dressing room.

"Pop, what's wrong?" he asked again. "Come clean! What has you chewing your under lip like it tasted good?"

"Nothing," Pop Layton evaded, his eyes not convincing. "It is just that Van Tieth guy gets my goat. He left in the third with Mary Ellen." Pop never called Tanya Garworth anything but Mary Ellen—except to himself. And what he called her to himself wasn't Tanya, nor again Miss O'Toole. . . . "Right after Eileen and Pat Michaels walked out. We won, son, but we aren't popular."

Dude blinked. "Huh? What's biting them? I fought this like my others, didn't I?"

Pop Layton nodded at "Meatball" and "Mopey" to take over with his champ. "That's what they said," he sighed unhappily. "So did McWebster. But at least he sat it out. Stow it, son, and we'll iron it all out tomorrow."

Dude dressed slowly and thoughtfully, a frown on his face. What was wrong with them all?

He was doing what they had all planned for him to do, wasn't he? So why the frost?

"Aw, fooley!" Dude growled. But he didn't enjoy the rubdown.

CHAPTER II

New Fashion

IN HIS conservative suit and quiet accessories, Dude Melloney might have been a banker on the way to a board-meeting, instead of a fighter going to see his manager about the next match.

He swung into the building in the Broadway sector where Pop had his offices, apologized mildly when a man in a hurry bumped him roughly out of the way and soon was twisting the knob of the door that was lettered, LAYTON ENTERPRISES.

Voices reached him from beyond the door to Pop's private room. Pop's voice arguing heatedly. Another voice, suave and patient, cutting in to say, "Now, now, Layton, don't go popping off so quick. This is temporary, I tell you."

That would be Monnkay Van Tieth, the Hollywood director.

"Hi, Champ!" the freckled office-boy greeted him.

That was the usual greeting Dude got from everybody—"Champ."

The bellhops at his apartment hotel, the clerks, the waiters, the doormen, taxi-drivers, smiling fans who recognized him along the street, sparring-partners, other fighters of his own and all other weights, handlers—Champ. "Howzit, Champ?"

Eileen Layton looked up from some papers she had been studying. "Hello, Danny." She let her green eyes rest on his face a moment before she added up his clothes and his quiet manner. She smiled. "How's Danny?"

Dude frowned slightly. "I'm 'Champ' to everybody but you, kid. Not that I mind it, you know but—"

Eileen Layton's eyebrows mocked his seriousness. "I'm Eileen to everybody but you. But to you, I'm just a nickname. 'Legs!'"

He grinned, his face softening and shedding his worry of the last few hours, a worry that he couldn't tab as anything definite. Pop's manner after the fight last night—Pop was no gloomy character and Dude couldn't get it out

of his head that something was up, something in his plans, in his future. . . .

"Because of your gangling, young-girl legs," he chuckled.

Eileen Layton thrust forth a limb that would have drawn a ringing huzzah from baldhead row at the city's top musical, and regarded it judiciously. "Really? I don't notice that your old girl, waiting inside there with Pop and the others, is so much more grownup. However, have it your way—Danny."

Dude Melloney stared, blinked, then lifted his eyes to look into Eileen's. Mentally, he clicked the years off since he had first noticed Pop's red-headed daughter was humorously leggy. Two, since the war. Two years before the war. And the four war-years between. Eight years!

"Uh!" he grunted, his eyes seeing the girl again as she sat there, and seemingly for the first time. "Well!"

Jimmy, the office boy, snickered and fled out the door when Dude twisted his head to bend a hard look on him.

Eileen pointed with a well-manicured, shapely finger. "They are waiting, Danny. Remember? Want to look at my compact mirror before you go in?"

Dude said, "No, thanks, Legs," and was turning away when it hit him what the girl had said. "Whazzat?" he asked, whirling. "What do you mean by that crack?"

She met his gaze for a steady moment, then shrugged her shoulders. "They're in there. Tanya and Van Tieth. Don't all you actors sort of check your makeup before you go onstage?"

Dude wondered why a little funning like this should rile him as it did and tried to keep it out of his face when he grinned. But his voice gave him away:

"I'm a fighter, Legs." He waved his hand at the well-furnished office and knew he was a heel as he did. "It takes a whole lot of percentages of a whole lot of purses to buy stuff like this. I'm a fighter."

"Thanks for reminding me," Eileen murmured as she dropped her eyes to her papers again. "Maybe I'm absent-minded. And speaking of fighters, did you read what Cord Delman said in his column about Butcher Bardski? My, he does like that man, doesn't he?"

Dude turned away, this time making no effort to conceal his irritation.

"Bardski, the Russian, is pumping new life into the Middleweight Division, which can use it after two monotonous years of Dude Melloney's cold and calculating reign. Bardski may not be pretty when he is standing still but in motion in the squared-ring—ohhhhhhhh, Mama!"

HE WONDERED why he was angry, realizing he had been when he had first read Delman's column.

"Any lug can get his brains beat out," Dude told himself. "Any lug without a plan of how he is going to do. I know where I'm going. Like Tunney, I'm not contracting to spend my declining years cutting up paper-dolls and going into fighting crouches at the sound of a dinner-gong. I've got a plan. I'm doing what's smart. I'm happy with it."

For all of which he looked slightly grim when he went into Pop's office.

Nor did he cheer up with the delicate kiss Tanya Garworth blew him, nor the cheery greetings of the others.

"Hello, Champ!"

He noticed Pat Michaels wasn't present as he nodded to them all and pulled over a chair to sit close to Pop.

Pop told the how of it without any stalling, his eyes agatey and his mouth biting off his words.

"Van Tieth wants us to change our way of doing, son," he crisped. "It seems it isn't the way Hollywood would do it. I've been in the fight business all my life, one way and another. But it seems I've been all wrong. It—"

Monnkay Van Tieth spread his hands in a gesture that asked Dude, "Listen to him! Listen to the man!" His big blond good looks were dramatized by swank sports clothes, a black silk shirt, a tie by someone related to Rembrandt. "I didn't say—"

"I'm still talking," Pop Layton growled. "It seems, Dude, we've been all wrong. Van Tieth, too. Because he has been yapping louder than anyone what style of fighting you should do. Right, Van Tieth? Now he wants it should all be changed."

The Hollywood man fired a cigarette and settled back in his chair before he spoke. "We all know how it is, out in Hollywood. You know it too, here in the East. In the fight business and in every other business—styles and trends and likings change.

"The smart man anticipates these changes. I'm trying to be smart. I've got to be. 'The Lady And The Champ' was to have a million or so spent on it. That calls for smart handling, smart thinking. I am trying to be smart."

Dude stared around at the others. Pop met his gaze levelly. Tanya O'Toole-Garworth smiled her sweetest closeup smile that never yet had failed to trip a masculine pulse, Pop Layton excepted. Dude's eyes softened on her a brief moment before he moved along to Demosthenes McWebster.

The little lawyer was examining his fingernails closely. Dude faced Van Tieth. "You said our picture—Tanya's and mine—was to have a million spent on it? You mean it's off? But we made all the plans! We even signed contracts on it!"

"Tentative arrangements," Van Tieth said suavely. "As our learned barrister, Mr. McWebster, can tell you. There was no consideration passed, thus it is not binding—in that form, I mean. Now, mind you, this deal isn't off! It's just—changed. And not even that is sure."

He swivelled his lustrous eyes around at them all. "Have I your consent to go on? I do know the fight game. Lord, I bet enough to know it!"

Dude said flatly, "More than consent, Van Tieth. I'm telling you! Spill it and make it easy to follow!"

"The public pulse indicates that the tastes of the fight fans are changing," Van Tieth went on, thoughtfully hunching his chair into the lee of McWebster's. "What we were talking of was a story in which a phenomenally clever boxer defeats his opponents by skill and cool artistry.

"Horatius at the bridge stuff. David vs. Goliath. One against the world, and a tough world too! The cool scientist against the raging beast. Well—the public is changing its appetite. It wants what I bet on—killers!"

Tanya Garworth-O'Toole leaned forward, her blond loveliness heightened by her earnestness, an intensity which brought added sparkle to her already brilliant blue eyes and spots of color to her smooth ivory-rose cheeks. Her swank dunce-type hat looked swell despite the lie that Tanya's shrewd eyes gave it. The hat was the dunce type, not the girl. . .

"Dude, dear," she tinkled musically,

"what Monnkay is saying is, it isn't that you win, it's how you win—in the picture. The fight-world is leaning away from the scientific boxer. And so is the world, the rest of the world.

"What clicks now is the killer type. The caveman who slugs his way to victory over the smarter boxer, the more scientific fighter. It is—er—psychological. It is man the muscular resenting the atom bomb. It is man's wish to believe he can and shall prevail over the terrors of science."

Van Tieth, not used to being interrupted nor interpreted, shoved his big face into Dude's focus ahead of Tanya's. "What we want in the story now is a slugger type, a killer type, slam-bang action, quick decision, bloom-boom-boom-bang! The hero triumphs, hairy chest quivering, head bloody but unbowed."

"Corn," Dude said derisively. "Pure corn and ham with it."

VAN TIETH said airily, "My dear chap, corn and ham, as you term them, are the selling staples of the entertainment business. Intelligence stops with the direction. The director's part is to know how to flavor the corn and the ham to the taste of John M. Public."

"John Q. Public," McWebster corrected.

"M' for Moron," Van Tieth said. "John Moron Public. We know what we want, in our story. A scientific fighter, yes—but to lose." He added quickly, when Dude sought to speak, "It's not my idea, old boy. I am merely the translator, the medium which records the public pulse."

Dude said crisply, "There were eighteen thousand pulses in the Garden last night, I think? Not that the baloney you have been slicing means anything. You've got your champs and your chumps confoosed, Van Tieth."

"Clever," the movie-executive said dryly. "But you'd be more clever if you had realized something. Those eighteen thousand, Melloney, weren't there to see you. They were drawn by Butcher Bardski, the unlettered Russky of the hair-chest, the bent features and the murderous attacks.

"Don't take my word for it. Consider—Pat Michaels is absent only because he is after Bardski for a series of consecu-

tive bouts at leading clubs in the East, with a finale at the Garden. He isn't here with you, the scientific champion. He is with Bardski, the cave-man killer. Ask Pop if you think I'm drawing a long bow."

Dude flushed when Pop didn't meet his gaze of inquiry. He growled, "So what? Any lug can work that 'killer' act. And any lug can get his brains beat out and end up walking on his heels! So long as it is only for the movies, okay. But in the ring, it smells on two tons of dry ice.

"Most of my fights I've won by bringing the lads to me, so burned up over the idea that they couldn't tag my jaw that they lost their head—and their fights! So you write a rough part into our movie story and I act it. Okay. Where's the rub?"

Van Tieth stared. "You still don't get it, man? I—"

Tanya moved her voice in with the savvy of a smooth bouncer working a punk out of a classy night-spot. "You've explained everything quite clearly, Monnkay," she said. "What Dude does not understand is the public's stupidity. I can explain it if you will kindly leave it to me?"

Van Tieth grunted, shrugged and let the automatic ash tray swallow his cigarette. "Just so it is clear," he murmured. He surged to his feet. "Well—toodle-oo, chaps. Coming, Tanya?"

The girl shook her head. "I'll walk along with Dude."

Pop said, "I wouldn't wait if I were you, Mary Ellen. Dude and I will be tied up for a bit. Business. Mac?" The little lawyer opened his eyes wide in attention. "Mac, I'll talk that new—er—contract over with you later. All those ifs and ands and buts. I want to be sure everything is ethical and right."

Demosthenes McWebster's eyes were innocent as a clear sky—but a clear sky in the cyclone corner of Kansas.

"I'll fix it so you and Bardski both can read it and understand it," he said. "Call me when you're ready, Pop. Well, Champ—be seein' you. Good-by, everybody."

Pop got very busy seeing the others out, eyes averted, face red.

Dude stood stunned for a long minute, drinking in the significance of what McWebster had said. "I'll fix it so you

and Bardski both can understand it."

He stood alone in the private office of his manager a full minute, his brain spinning. An hour ago, he'd been World's Middleweight Champion, with a faithful and astute manager, an assured future in the movies, and a plan that was unfolding like a sweetly-played accordion.

Now his manager had arrangements to take on another fighter in his division. The movie-deal was in the air. A rough, tough unknown, Butcher Bardski, was the rage of the fight world—and sought after by the very men who had planned Dude Melloney's scientific campaign for the Middleweight crown, his retirement as undefeated champion and his instant stardom in Hollywood in fight-pictures opposite the glamorous and brilliant Tanya Garworth!

The door to the outer office opened. Dude swung around to make his squawk to Pop Layton but held it. It was Eileen who stood there, looking at him with a quizzical smile.

"Oh, it's you, Legs."

"It's me, Danny." The girl looked at him closely. "You are sort of pale around the gills. Can I lend you my mirror and a spot of coloring matter?"

Dude's hand closed into savage fists and his eyes blazed at his manager's red-headed daughter. "You, too! *You!* Here I spend my life in the ring doing what other people want me to—and what do I get for it? A runaround as if I were a jerk who was trying to muscle in on a party where he wasn't wanted! Legs, I wish you were a man!"

The girl's eyes were bright with anger when she said, "And don't I wish you were, too, Danny! But it's an idle wish for both of us. Here, you must comb your hair smooth. My, my, if only your opponents could see you now! Scientific Danny Melloney, who might let them stay the limit if they didn't muss his hair or cut his face up! Tsk, tsk."

Her lips trembled violently but she held her eyes hard and bright on his. Then Dude swung away from her, walked to the mirror above the wash-basin in a corner of the room and smoothed his hair with shaking hands. He turned toward the private exit.

"Danny." Eileen Layton said, her voice breaking. "Danny!"

"Aw, shaddup!" the usually suave

Middleweight Champ growled, out of character, as he slammed the door viciously after him.

CHAPTER III

The Pocket

WHEN Dude had cooled off enough so that he wouldn't lose his temper and further complicate things—he had an itch to stand Van Tieth up and belt him bow-legged—he had a sober session, examining things mentally.

He started with his early days, his life in the rough, tough Canarsie section where fights were a daily occurrence for kids little Danny Melloney's age.

He grinned when he recalled his mother—"the Widow" Melloney, she was known to the neighborhood—telling him, "Oi can't stop ye from fightin', havin' me own work to attend to. Me washin' an' ironin'. An' I'll not ask ye have ye been fightin', because it's nayther coward nor liar I'll countenance! But I'll raise ye to look like a gentleman an' not like some lop-eared, flat-nosed thug! Listen well while I tell, ye, Danny. Danny, are ye listenin'?"

Smudge-faced little Danny was listening. Well did little Danny know the punishing power of those hands which could stroke the seat of his pants as hard in righteous wrath as they could soothe tearful young cheeks in tender affection.

"I'll ask ye nothin', Danny, me boy. But if I see so much as wan little mark on the face of ye—a black eye, a swollen ear, a bruised nose—unless it be in a game ye acquire such, the beatin' ye've had will be as nothing to the beatin' ye'll get from me! An' faith, if it is foolin' ye think I am, just bring me home th' first black eye."

So little Danny Melloney had guarded his eager young face with scrupulous care. He had started then to study the art of boxing, rather than throw himself wholeheartedly into the love of fighting.

But once he had slipped. He had taken on a bully-boy some fifteen pounds heavier in weight and inches taller. The black eyes which he carried home earned him a hiding with a brush. And then his mother comforted the bruised little warrior in her ample arms while she crooned

to him of ancient heroes who had withstood terrific odds by their agility and cleverness.

Little Danny worked harder at his task of protecting his face, knowing the double penalty that awaited any slip on his part.

As his technique improved he worked even harder.

Hours at a time he would practise ducking, weaving, and then his own mates would stand and try to tag little Danny's chin while little Danny stood on a handkerchief and moved his chin this way and that to escape the blows thrown at him until his chin moved like an orchestra director's baton.

Then Danny had an inspiration and spoke to the parish priest about boxing in his annex-gymnasium. Soon a small club was organized of neighborhood lads and the Widow Melloney watched her son go unscathed through fights which now had the authority of supervision and control.

Came Amateur Fight-Nite at athletic clubs, came the Golden Gloves, and came the Widow Melloney's death. Danny, a lightweight now and growing fast, started in on the small-purse circuit. Neighbor Layton, whose eyes had thirsted for the clever lad with the magical footwork and the power-laden fists even while he kept his mouth resolutely shut, was asked if he would manage Danny Melloney.

Pop Layton inculcated in the lad a deportment for the street that would be in keeping with his reputation for skill in the ring—conservative, well-behaved, polite.

So the sobriquet of "Dude" was tied to Danny Melloney. With his fostered quietness and conservativeness, Dude Melloney also absorbed ideas of others who were older and sager than he in the business of the world.

"Take your life out of the ring with you and live it—like Tunney and a few others. Don't leave it wrecked on the canvas. Retire early, undefeated if you can, but—retire!"

His half-joking crack to an old-timer, "Don't muss my hair and I may let you stay the limit," got the ear of the verbally sagacious Cord Delman, sports columnist. Delman played it on the keys of his battered typewriter to make the cash jingle in his pockets and the dollars crackle in Dude's—and his mana-

ger's and his handlers' and his match-makers'.

CAME the championship go with "Rocky" Harmon, and the oldster's losing his head when he thought he saw a chance at the legendary jaw. Nobody had ever mussed up the Melloney face, other than to burn it with a close punch or, perhaps, work a slight discoloration on a cheek bone.

Harmon didn't muss the Melloney face either—nor did any of those who followed Harmon.

And now, with the string running out and with his plans calling for retirement from the ring and a zooming start in the movies opposite smart, luscious Mary Ellen O'Toole, otherwise Tanya Garworth, something had happened.

A Neanderthal-type with the body of a gorilla set on pipe-stem legs, had come roaring into the middle division and, with laughs for the punches of his opponents and dynamite-fists for their jaws and midribs, had upset the apple cart that Dude Melloney had built by following his Plan Board's orders.

Dude thought about it morosely in the days that followed Monnkay Van Tieth's sudden reversal of the studied order of things, keeping strictly to himself in the small resort town he had retired to.

"Nobody is to blame," he told himself. But as the days wore on he couldn't deny the small voice within him which clamored for expression. "Well," he amended his earlier appraisal, "I guess somebody is to blame, after all. And I know who it is!"

Butcher Bardski knocked out "Hooks" Raymond in the second round of their fight, as Dude Melloney was starting his grind for what was billed as "The Wonder Man's Farewell Appearance"—the Champ's go against K. O. Harrigan.

Meatball Poppalopulus and Mopey Daitz, Dude's sparring-mates and fight-handlers, spoke in glowing terms of the accomplishments of Bardski. "Boy, wotta scrapper! Jeez! Dat guy can go!"

"Kiley had him down twice," Dude pointed out, as he prepared for a workout. "For a count of eight one time."

When they were sparring, with Dude's face protected by a baseball-catcher's mask, the champ sunk a probing right into Meatball's middle. The Greek

laughed and said, "Boy, I'm glad dat wasn't Butcher Bardski gettin' dat shot at me!"

Dude grunted, did some magic with his feet, and unleashed a savage punch with the big pillow. Meatball had nothing more to be glad about.

Mopey Daitz blinked, his eyes wise, and suddenly felt too ill to take his turn.

Then, in a few days, the story got around. "The Champ is jealous of Butcher. Don't even mention his name when he is around!"

Dude was trying to laugh that one off when he walked into a midtown restaurant and ran squarely into Tanya Garworth and Monnkay Van Tieth and their luncheon-guest—Butcher Bardski!

"Hello, Bardski." Dude nodded to the fighter. "Howzit?"

"How are you, beautiful?" Bardski grinned. "I'm sure glad to run inta ya here. I guess it's the only way I'd ever get to meet ya, hey?"

Dude ignored him and only half-saw Tanya. He elbowed Van Tieth aside neatly and asked quietly, "What's the idea? Is the Hollywood double-cross building up?"

The suave director blinked. "What double-cross? Oh, you mean the picture? My dear man, it takes more than one fighter to make a fight. In the movies, that is. You seem to have different ideas here in the East. Or had you planned to go through some shadow-boxing for your part in the picture?"

"You mean you are going to use Bardski, too? I see! Just where does he fit into it?"

"The script isn't completed and approved," Van Tieth told him icily. "And when it is I do not expect it will be submitted to you for your approval. Look, old man—do yourself and us a favor. Go see McWebster. I hired him to draw up the contract. He can explain a lot to you."

DUDE was swinging for the door to prevent himself from swinging on Van Tieth. Tanya Garworth-O'Toole stopped him.

"Dude, dear, don't be so impulsive! What do you care if the script has you being knocked out by the new champion, Butcher Bardski? It isn't *real*, you know. You are still undefeated champion. Your face will still be unmarked."

The star paused, her eyes reading Dude's expression. "Oh, he didn't tell you? Well, you might as well know. I thought Monnkay had told you. Not, my dear, that there is anything you can do about it. Not with the contract you signed. Now be a good boy and don't act up. It's all coming out just as you wanted it to. You are retiring undefeated. You aren't scarred up. You'll be playing with me in the movies."

Dude's face was white. "But Van Tieth said the contract wasn't binding, that it was off?"

Tanya O'Toole shook her head. "Not exactly," she smiled. "It is written so he has some leeway in the interpretation of it."

"And I haven't?" Dude asked.

"I didn't say that, Dude."

"And it wouldn't make any difference if you did," Dude snapped. "I guess I know where to find out all about it." He swung on a heel and left, Bardski's taunting, shrill laugh following him and the man's words rankling.

"Take care of ya'self, beautiful! Don't run into nothing that would sperl up yer looks!"

Dude nodded silently to Eileen Layton when the girl repeated his request. "You want the copy of your Van Tieth contract, Danny?" When she'd got it out of the files for him, she asked, "Something wrong? You seem upset."

His eyes noted the girl's un-schoolgirl legs, touched on her hairdo by Ritz, saw that she out-fashioned Tanya Garworth-O'Toole.

"Aren't you going to offer me your compact, so I can get prettied up?"

The manager's daughter reached for her pocketbook, plucked out the item in question and passed it to him. "I thought you worried about your beauty only when you were in the ring?"

A welling rage overflowed Dude and he fired the compact out of the window, ignoring the fact that the window wasn't open at the time. He snatched up the contract and went out, unaware that the girl followed him as far as the stairs door, which she entered, while he waited for the elevator.

Near McWebster's office, he stopped and stared sheepishly into a jeweler's window, went in to order an expensive ladies' compact sent to Eileen Layton. He sent a card with it.

"I'm sorry, Legs. From—Danny."

Demosthenes McWebster puffed his perfecto and waited until Dude had finished. Then he brushed the contract aside with the back of a negligent hand.

"I don't need to read it again, my boy. I drew it up. I remember word for word, every contract I ever drew up." He grinned, looking like a sunburned, impish Buddha. "I can even remember what I was thinking of when I wrote in this or that, or any contract I ever drew up."

Dude stared. "But Van Tieth said it wasn't binding. Not on him. So how can it be on me?"

McWebster said softly, "It is binding on you, my boy. You have agreed to deliver yourself to Mammoth Productions—the Van Tieth company—with your title. Also, with your face unmarked. Also, to do whatever they ask you to do."

Dude asked, "Even if they ask me to fake losing my title to Bardski in the picture?"

MCWEBSTER said, "Even if they ask you to slug it out with Butcher, for nothing but them and their customers. Even if they ask you to stand there with your hands in your pockets and let Butcher cut you up into little pieces! They've spent money on the strength of your signature. Right? Right. So that a consideration *has* passed, in your case."

"But none has passed to me?" Dude asked. "They can do anything they want to me for breach of contract? But I can't touch them?"

"The court or a jury decides," Demosthenes McWebster murmured. "I don't give free legal advice, so I won't amplify that."

The possibilities opened up to Dude as he thought about it. "Hey!" he exclaimed. "You mean that Van Tieth can make me fight that goon, Bardski in his movie for nothing but my movie pay? And order me to get beaten to a pulp by him?"

Demosthenes McWebster said, "By the terms of the contract, they can ask that. Yes. But—I repeat—I do not give free legal advice. No more than you fight for nothing."

Dude snapped his fingers! "Ha! All I got to do to get out of that is to let K. O. Harrigan bop me a good one!! Or I could take on Bardski myself and let him work on me. That way I'd be out of my contract."

McWebster squinted his eyes. "Do that again?"

"I let Harrigan bust my nose up," Dude argued it. "So I am marked up. That voids my contract. Or I take on Bardski for a title go, instead of quitting with Harrigan, and beat his ears off!"

"The contract," McWebster murmured, "specifies that you retire after the Harrigan fight. Michaels wanted a Bardski fight. But Pop Layton was afraid you'd get marked up." He cleared his throat. "Or worse. So when they decided you should retire after the Harrigan fight, Michaels started then to arrange a round robin that would bring Bardski to the top for a title match to take over your vacated crown."

Dude's face cleared suddenly. "Ohhh! And Pop signed Bardski into his string, as a fighter, *after* I retired? I see! Well, makes me feel a little better. But I guess I'm in sort of a pocket."

McWebster nodded. "You and Michaels and Pop are all in a pocket," he agreed. "And the pocket is held shut by Van Tieth. He can sue you for damages if you lose to Harrigan. He can sue you for damages if you get marked up badly. He can sue you for damages if you don't retire after the Harrigan fight. And just to make sure he can hurt you he has already applied for a court order to tie up your funds on suspicion of a conspiracy on your part to walk out on your contract."

Dude sat stunned a long moment. Then he startled Demosthenes McWebster by chuckling deep in his throat. The little lawyer sat straighter when the fighter laughed. He moved quickly to the door when Dude rocked with laughter and pounded the desk.

"I'm not punchy. Take it easy," Dude said, when he could. "I just got to laugh when I think how I got in this pocket through trying to be smart! I did everything everybody told me to do—my mother, Pop, Mary Ellen, Van Tieth, Pat Michaels, Cord Delman, all of them.

"Me and my Plan Board! It was the sure way to make the top with all my marbles and all my folding-money left! Now look at me! I not only can't fight if I want to but I got to lose if they say so. In the movies! For nothing! You know where my mistake was, Mr. McWebster?"

"Getting born?" the little lawyer asked.

"Trying to please everybody," Dude said. "You just can't please everybody! So you might as well please yourself. If you do your way a lot of people may like it, in addition to yourself liking it. If you try to do what everybody else says, you won't like it yourself, and neither will anybody else. Oh, well. At least I'm wised up now. Some guys go to their graves still trying to please everybody." He got to his feet.

"So you are going to do what?" McWebster asked.

"None of your fouled-up business!" Dude blared, as he reached for his hat. "G'by, now!"

CHAPTER IV

The Showdown

WHEN Dude Melloney's Plan Board met again it was not for long. Dude strode in, thumbed toward the door when he looked at Van Tieth and said, "Out. And quick!"

The movie executive smiled and said, "Don't be primitive, old boy. I'm merely protecting my interests in tying up your funds. I—"

"What's this?" Pop exclaimed, sitting up in his chair.

"Nothing to concern you," Dude said flatly. "The guy has put a clamp on my bank account in case I don't do everything like he says. Out, Van Tieth!" He looked at Tanya Garworth-O'Toole. "You, too, Honey. A fight-office is no place for a woman. Beat it." He looked around at Pat Michaels.

"You are here because you were forced to be here to protect your interests. With me not attending to my own affairs any matchmaker might have got the nod from my lovely board. I'm not blaming you, Mr. Michaels. But I'm not asking your advice, either. When and if I want another match I'll look you up."

He didn't notice Demosthenes McWebster until the others had gone. "I don't need Van Tieth's lawyer to kibitz, either," he snapped. "But I don't know as I mind you, because what I got to say might as well go to Van Tieth.

"From now on, I'm running my own business. Such as it is, what I've got left after Van Tieth is through with me.

And another thing—I'll get Van Tieth at his own game. I don't know how. I just know I will."

Demosthenes McWebster stroked his blued jaws thoughtfully. "Interesting conclusion, I must say. May I ask on what you base it, my friend?"

"Yes. He's a chiseler. His way of doing proves it. And a chiseler always leaves a loop-hole. The trick is to find it. The chiseler leaves a loop-hole because he is too cheap to make everything safe. That requires money. A chiseler won't spend it, he'd rather risk that he won't need to spend it. I'll get him!"

Demosthenes McWebster was smiling when he left.

Dude swung to Pop. "I know you've got Bardski on the dotted line," he said. "I don't blame you. It's my fault. You were losing me. Why not pick up another Middle? The trouble is, I'm asking myself am I really ready to quit, and the answer is, *No! No! NO!* My lovely plan board figured it all up for me. I was willing to do it because I thought it was right.

"Well—now I don't see it. A fight crown belongs in the ring, right where you picked it up from the guy who wore it ahead of you! A fight crown, if it is worth fighting to get, is worth fighting to lose. If it is won it also should be lost—in the same way. Sure, Van Tieth has me hamstrung. If I cross him he may be able to take away my dough. If I get past K. O., then I want—Bardski."

Pop sighed. "I was afraid of this," he admitted. "That Bardski is tough, son. His build makes him a favorite over any middle who ever stepped in the one-sixty class. He's a freak. Also, he is a killer."

Dude smiled without mirth. "And also, if I stay on in the game, you won't get to manage him?"

Pop Layton, his eyes savage, blared, "Now, you get out!! You been pushing people all around here for the last twenty minutes. Now I'm pushing you! Get out and don't come back until you are ready to apologize!"

Dude said contritely, "Sorry, Pop. I—I had to know. I don't blame you. I blame myself. I take it back. I just wanted to know if I was still—your boy."

Pop's glistening eyes didn't need any words to tell him. "Get to work, you

dope," he growled. "You aren't going to get anywhere talking! But what about Mary Ellen? How will she take this?"

Dude shrugged unhappily. "I don't know." He looked in the outer office a moment, then came back in. "Where is Legs?"

"Van Tieth is giving her a screen test," Pop said. "Over on the West Side somewhere." He grinned. "You kept calling Eileen 'Legs' so much that I guess Van Tieth started to take notice of them. *Hey!* Gee whiz, Champ—be careful of my doors. They're only glass!"

DUDE stood wrapped in towel and bathrobe when Bardski went into the ring for his fight with Toots Kiley.

The crowd tore the roof off with the ovation it gave the sensational scrapper. Butcher Bardski swaggered around the square in an awkward, rolling prow, his long, powerful arms raised in greeting, his ugly, flat-nosed, thick-lipped face twisted in a grimace of a grin.

When the bell rang Toots Kiley danced out carefully, stabbed the glowering, hairy man with his educated left and looked for an opening. He found an opening—between the middle and top ropes. He found it when Butcher Bardski, with a snarl of rage, threw a flurry of overhand punches at him and rushed him back by sheer bull strength against the strands, then slammed him through them with a zooming left uppercut and a right-hand wallop.

Blood spurted from Kiley's smashed face and splashed on the apron of the ring and, after a startled look over the top rope, the referee started counting. But it was perfunctory. Toots Kiley was colder than the arena in hockey season.

The crowd stood and roared its approval until it was hoarse and Bardski, grinning like a Cheshire cat, prowled back down the aisle to the ramp, disdainful bathrobe or towel, blood spattered on the hairy chest of him.

"Hello, beautiful!" he cracked at Dude as he went by. "Too bad you ain't gonna be around a while. Well, I'll see ya in the movies, keed."

Some onlookers laughed when Dude walked silently back into his dressing-room to get ready for the feature bout. Bardski had put the crusher on Kiley

so fast that the Michaels men would have to run another set of prelims until it was time for the main bout.

Dude was glad of the respite. He had a lot of thinking to do and a decision to make. Dude Melloney was no fool and he was no youth just coming up. Bardski was still very young but he was no longer coming up. He had arrived. . .

By being reasonable Dude could smooth out his difficulties with Van Tieth, get a fast start in the movies and go on from there. By being bull-headed, he could maybe lose a legal decision to Van Tieth and end up with Bardski beating him to a bloody pulp and maybe taking the title, too.

There was no getting around it, this Butcher Bardski was a rough baby. Even if you decided him you might not enjoy it much, because you perhaps wouldn't be in the right physical shape to enjoy anything very much.

As for taking him over the knockout-route—

"He'd have to leave himself open like the Public Library, and for all his murderous swings, he keeps a close guard over that stomach of his."

He was still thinking about it when the call came.

"You're on, Champ!"

Dude fought K. O. Harrigan thoughtfully, even for him a bit too thoughtfully. The crowd booed through the first six stanzas, during which Harrigan tried to tag Dude's jaw. The referee, breaking a clinch, was angry.

"Step it up or I'll call it a no-contest. What is this, a jig or a fight?"

"I should stick my puss out and let him massage me, maybe?" Dude snorted, his teeth relaxing on his mouth-grip. "Just to please you? And lose my title, too?"

The lights winked and winked again and Dude thought the electric power was somehow failing—until he realized he was on his back, looking up at the lights, and they were still again.

He blinked, twisted his head, saw the referee's arm rising and falling, heard the count.

". . . four—five—six—seven . . ."

He rolled over, got a knee under his body, spat out blood. At nine, he was up and back-pedaling from the anxious Harrigan, the roar of the crowd coming in rolling waves.

again! . . . Make him fight, make him fight! . . . Bust that pretty kisser of his! . . ."

Cord Delman was to say in his column, "Harrigan lost his chance in his anxiety to connect with the haymaker. He was careless. It slid around the so-called Champ's neck, that lethal punch, and

Dude got on his bicycle until he got his strength back."

AS it was, Dude knew what he was doing from the moment he got his knee under him and pushed up. He sighted the clock, saw he had less than a minute of the sixth to ride out and back-tracked from the desperately-swinging Harrigan, bobbing, weaving, ducking, parrying, as Harrigan's fists swooshed dangerously close to Dude's bloody mouth and jaw.

The bell pulled a roar of rage and disappointment from the crowd when the champ dropped his hands to start for his corner. Harrigan, in his eagerness, didn't hear the bell. He swung from the toes.

Dude flicked his head to one side and the tearing uppercut by-passed his jaw harmlessly. The ref came in yelling at Harrigan, but Dude shook his head.

"No harm done. He didn't mean it, Artie. Skip it."

Dude's handlers worked on their man frantically. It was a new thing to them, this blood on their man. But Pop Layton stood below the apron, his eyes hard and accusing.

"Whatcha think you're doing?"

Dude looked his innocence. "Meaning what?"

Pop came closer. "Thought you had it figured how to beat the rap? You lost your nerve?"

Dude grinned broadly, despite the smart of the colloid on his split lips. "You're wrong. I had the nerve!" he said. "Relax, Pop, it's in the bag. He won't answer the bell for the thirteenth."

For five rounds thereafter, Dude gave the enraged Harrigan a boxing lesson, and treated the crowd to an exhibition of footwork it didn't want to see. But as the lesson went on, the jolting power of Dude's smashes increased.

Harrigan went down from a right to the mid-section in 2:09 of the twelfth. Dude went out of the ring with the jeers

of the crowd washing him along the ramp.

Among his loudest detractors was Monnkay Van Tieth. And at the head of the ramp Butcher Bardski was waiting. He opened his mouth but Dude beat him to the crack: "Hello, beautiful!"

It took five uniformed policemen to hold Butcher off Dude as the unpopular Champ made his way to the dressing room. He avoided Pop Layton's eyes when he lay back for the rub. Pop chewed his stub of a cigar thoughtfully, then asked:

"Is this—it? You going to be smart?"

Dude said, "I'll let you know in a few days, Pop. I'm waiting for something." After a moment, he asked, "What did Van Tieth win, do you know—on Bardski?"

Pop shrugged. "Dunno. He's a plunger, though. Likes to bet on long odds, they tell me. Doesn't make too much but it's surer." Dude nodded and closed his eyes while they sewed up the cut inside his mouth.

Three days later, he was still waiting. Twice, he tried to contact Van Tieth. Twice, he was told Van Tieth was out, though he knew him to be in his offices, had watched him, from a hidden vantage-point, go into his offices.

Cord Delman had bemoaned the fact that Dude's retirement undefeated would not bring the scientific fighter up against the natural slugger.

"Dude Melloney was never suspected of dumbness—and that tag on the mouth by Harrigan showed him how far he had slipped from the old Dude, how old he was getting. If Harrigan could tag him what wouldn't Butcher do to him?"

Delman was able to say it the same way four different days, while the elimination series to bring the two top middles together for the title was being discussed. But the fourth day, Delman added further words.

"It would be the first time in years that a champ went into the ring with the odds against him, as they naturally would be. But the odds are still higher that Dude Melloney is too bright a boy to meet Butcher Bardski, even at an afternoon social, let alone for his precious title."

Dude was stretching out for an afternoon sleep when his phone clamored. It was Monnkay Van Tieth.

"Well, old boy!" The director greeted

him cheerily. "Sorry I was out of town when you tried to see me. What's up?"

"Are we all set?" Dude asked, casually. "I guess you know you've got me. What do we do now?"

Van Tieth laughed heartily. "As a matter of fact, my boy, I was on the point of getting in touch with you. I've come to the conclusion that I've been acting too harshly in this matter. Selfishly, too. I mean—why should I reserve for Mammoth Pictures something which John Q. Public should be entitled to view? The struggle between science and man!"

"John M. Public," Dude reminded him. "Moron. Remember?"

VAN TIETH didn't laugh. "I'll agree to an amendment to the contract to permit you to meet Bardski," he said. "If you really want Bardski. Well?"

"Gee, I dunno," Dude stalled. "This is sorta sudden, isn't it? And—well, suppose I get marked up?"

Van Tieth's voice walked on surer ground. "Oh, come, man, that smash of Harrigan's was luck! You know it!"

"Harrigan's luck, not mine."

"You are backing out on Bardski? Is that it? Man, it won't sit well with my people. Bad publicity, you know! Not at all a good drawing power for the B-O. That's short for box-office, old man. B-O."

"You should know," Dude said casually, "what B-O means, Mr. Van Tieth. After all, you are so close to it."

"What?"

"You are so close to the movie business, I guess you know all that lingo. Well, no, I don't want to seem to be backing out, see? But—well—"

"Okay, old man! You drop around to McWebster's office and sign the amending stipulation that you may fight Bardski. That if you are marked up we'll not hold you to the contract. But I'm sure you won't be. Bardski isn't too bright, you know, Dude."

Dude grinned, but kept the laugh out of it when he said into the mouthpiece, "A lot of us are suckers, Mr. Van Tieth."

Pop looked worried while Dude signed. Dude put the pen down and said, "Gee, I wish you weren't Van Tieth's lawyer, Mr. McWebster. I need advice."

Demosthenes McWebster said, "I never give it free."

"Oh, I'd pay. But being Van Tieth's

on this deal, you can't give me any advice."

McWebster said, "You'd pay? Well, well, my boy! You've got yourself a lawyer! I was Van Tieth's only for this particular signing—and this amendment, of course. You see, you were right about the man that day in Pop's office. He wouldn't retain me. Just paid for this one deal. He's—er—careful, as you suggested. Now, as to a fee—you'd be reasonable?"

Dude nodded. "Yes. Reasonable. But—well, please don't burn me too deep."

Demosthenes McWebster grinned widely. "Would two ringsides for the Melloney-Bardski go be too much to ask?" He closed his eye significantly. "I have my ideas about that smash on the mouth Harrigan gave you. I've done similarly myself in court battles. Let my opponent punch at something, so he will think he has me. Eh? Eh, my boy? Now, what is it you wanted to know?"

"There are a few loopholes in that contract. A lawyer I talked to said there were—but not if you were opposing him. At least, he couldn't guarantee to go through those holes."

Demosthenes McWebster chuckled deep in his small frame. "My boy, perhaps you would like to own a part of Mammoth Pictures? I think perhaps I can let you have a little stock. *After*, of course, I get what I want! Whenever I do business with a rat, my boy, I always leave myself the same protection he has—a hole through which to go, should I want it." He sobered suddenly. "But you think you can take Bardski?"

"Don't you?" Dude countered.

McWebster shook his head. "It will be the first even-money fight I've looked at in ages. It tickles me to think Van Tieth will be giving odds, though."

Pop cut in. "What are you two talking about? Let me in on this!"

"Tut, tut," McWebster chuckled. "Innocent men like fight-managers should not be witness to things such as this. Pop—Dude and I have just thimble-rigged something to catch a sucker!"

"Look out it isn't *two* suckers," Pop gloomed. "Gee," he said, a moment later, "I hope this doesn't hurt Eileen! Van Tieth said she was the best screen bet he'd seen since Mary Ellen. She's signed up and set to go to Hollywood."

Dude wondered where all his fun had gone to suddenly.

CHAPTER V

The Look of a Champ

DUDE stopped on his way from the dressing-room, when he saw Eileen. She hadn't been around the office since the screen test.

"Hi, Legs!"

"Hello, Danny." She looked at him intently, then away. She fumbled in her bag for something—a compact. She worked it open with difficulty and started to rub the shine off her nose. "I'm pulling for you, Danny."

He said, "Gee, what happened to the compact? I sent you a nice one. Didn't you get it?"

She nodded. "I like this one better. The one you threw out the window that time. I ran down and got it after a lot of traffic had run over it."

He stared. "Why?"

Eileen's eyes tried to stay away from his but couldn't. "It was the first uncalculated thing I ever saw you do," she said. "It was—you! It wasn't your Plan Board that told you to do that."

A broad grin spread on his face, and he said, "It wasn't my Plan Board that told me to do this, either." He tipped his head toward the hidden ring. "I guess that was you. Well, wish me luck!"

He didn't see her bury her face in her hands and cry with shaking shoulders as he turned and went away with his handlers. The roaring boo of the crowd made him laugh. He stopped midway down the ramp to yell back at some of his hecklers. "I hope you bums can afford what you're going to lose!"

The yells and jeers and booing came again and Dude shouted at the ringside gang, "Three-to-one against me, huh? My, my! And Cord Delman says *I* was suckered? Whatta laugh!"

He swarmed up through the ropes, and yelled, "Hello, beautiful!" at Butcher. He stopped near the swinging mike and said loudly and clearly, "If you don't muss my hair or try to cut me up, I may let you stay around awhile."

The crowd went crazy and Butcher jumped up and down on his stern in rage, finally upsetting the stool, wanting to rush out and start the fight then and there. His handlers held him back.

Then the ref was waiting for the an-

nouncer to finish his introductions:

"In this corner—wearing black trunks and weighing one-fifty-nine—Butcher—Bardski!"

Roars of approval jittered the lights.

"... wearing purple trunks and weighing one fifty-eight—the Middleweight Champion of the World"—he waited for the Bronx-cheers to subside—"Dude—MELLONEY!"

The boing was so staggering that even Pop had to laugh. But he sobered when he said, "Don't give him a shot at your jaw. Don't be foolish, boy! Remember—this isn't some punk. This is a killer! Watch that jaw!"

Dude nodded grimly, all business now, flexing his muscles on the ropes. He turned to meet Bardski's charge at the bell. Ready as he was for that berserk, fist-flailing rush he wasn't ready for what followed.

He sidestepped Bardski and punished him with a rocketing left as he went by. The Russian slid to a stop, his face a fury, and came back in, swinging like a windmill.

Once, twice, Dude poled him, with his lethal left hook. But the Russky laughed and caught himself up from a stumble and came on again, swinging uppercuts that Dude stepped in to smother.

He gasped with pain when one, then another of those powerhouse blows smashed into his left side, into the ribs, and beyond.

The pain was so terrific he thought he was going to faint. Then his head cleared and he started to hook again—and sobbed into his mouth-grip.

His left arm was up in a threatening posture but he could scarcely move it. He couldn't budge it an inch without a stabbing pain that cut his breath short. He clubbed with his right for the jaw, staggered Bardski again, then started to back track.

The crowd boomed deafeningly at the sight of the fast-stepping Dude skipping back, back, always back, then to the side and away—of Butcher Bardski, his eyes savage, his fists cocked, prowling in like a huge cat for the kill.

THE first round ended with Dude smartly near his corner. He sank down on the stool quickly, then snapped at Meatball.

"No rub! And let that left hand and arm alone! Remember that! Keep your

mouth shut, or I'll personally strangle you when I get out of this ring!"

Mopey caught it, blinked, looked at Meatball and shrugged his shoulders. "He's th' boss."

Pop was staring up. "What's wrong? You trying to impress that human ape with that left? Let it go, let it go!"

Dude looked at Mopey and Meatball quickly, then nodded. "At the right time. But it'll go close to the limit, Pop." He thought to himself, "I hope! I hope I can last that long. That rat broke a few of my ribs with that smash, maybe more than a few! Yi, what do I do now but try to stay on my bike. For at least seven-eight rounds?"

For he knew that if he tried to slug with Bardski before the man was tired he would be murdered.

The card said it was the ninth round, the clock said it was ten seconds old and Dude was climbing up from the canvas in an agony of pain, where Bardski's roundhouse right to the body had dumped him.

The time had come for Dude to make his bid. He could make one—but at terrific cost. He might try to clinch and ride it through and trust the judges to leave him his crown for anything short of a knockout. But he wouldn't—and they couldn't.

Bardski, his eyes bright with suspicion on Dude's reddened ribs, where an angry bruise was puffing the flesh and spreading, stepped in again, fists cocked.

Then Dude's left arm seemed to come unhooked from his side. But not to hit—to drop down, so that the jaw was unprotected. Bardski peered through swollen eyes, licked his split lips, ducked his head to staunch a trickle of blood from his left ear.

Dude's right had lived in that face for eight rounds and Dude guessed that perhaps his fist was sorer than Butcher's face. If Butcher had a weakness, it wasn't in his head. Not that kind of weakness.

Butcher squinted his eyes at Dude again, started a left for the body, then stopped suddenly and jolted a right. The crowd roared when Dude danced back, half-stumbling, half-backing up. Butcher came tearing in, unholy joy in his eyes.

"I've tagged that untaggable jaw!" his glee said loudly. "I am getting to him! I got his jaw! I'll get it again!"

He crept close, cornered Dude, then

struck again. The huge crowd screamed its joy when Dude went back into the ropes—but stilled somewhat when he bounced back out to dig a terrific right hand to Butcher's breadbasket. Butcher shook his head, roared his rage, and clubbed for the face again.

This time, his right speared through, slapped sickeningly against Dude's nose and a torrent of red started and flowed down over the champ's chest.

Dude breathed a prayer of thanks when he realized, with Butcher's second smash to the face, that his nose was numb. His mouth was numb. But his eyes weren't. Butcher, disregarding the jolting smashes that Dude was sinking to his midriff, went crazy and went also for Dude's head with both hands.

The hitherto well-protected stomach of the slam-bang fighter was bared now in the man's anxiety to be the first to smash this dancing-man's face to a pulp, to mess his straight features, to lay low the legend of the Melloney magic and the Melloney Face.

Two smashes opened a cut over Dude's right eye. But he rode with the punches each time, came back to sink his hand to the right wrist in that wide-open area. Once, twice, three times—Dude drew a whistling, sobbing breath and struck again. Four times, five times—he put all his power into another.

Butcher seemed to go into slow-motion, midway in another smashing right to the face. He paused, his eyes glazed, his mouth slackened to drop the bloodied white grip out.

Dude thought he'd been hit again until he realized it was the sudden silence of the packed house. Butcher stumbled, caught himself up again, peered for that face. But he couldn't know that the red mask that stared back at him was a man's face—or what was left of a man's face.

Dude pushed him two steps away, cocked his right for the convincer, then dropped his hand, opened his fist, stretched his arm out—and pushed.

BUTCHER BARDSKI went down for the count from a right-forefinger on his left chest.

Pop Layton, openly crying, threw a towel over his boy's head as he started him back along the ramp. "You crazy fool!" he said, brokenly. "You fool! No title is worth that! Why didn't you use your left?"

Dude pushed the towel away with a glove. "Pop, he broke some of my ribs the very first punch. I couldn't use my left. I had to use my face for bait, to sucker him. I got to thinking no guy could have a face busted up like Butcher's and have a weak jaw. So if I was to get him it had to be his tummy. I baited him with my face and when he went for it—Pop! Catch me, Pop, I'm drawing a blank!"

He was sitting on the bench, dressed, his side plastered up, the cuts over his eyes stitched, his nose a flat, splinted mass that some day might have a nose shape again—but not the unscathed nose of old.

Demosthenes McWebster wagged his head, still drunk with the thrill of the savage battle. "Yi, yi, yi!" the lawyer yelped. "I knew you had suckered Van Tieth by letting Harrigan hit you in the mouth."

"No," Dude shook his head. "I couldn't. I tried, but my chin ducked even when I didn't want it to, it's been doing it so long. So when Artie gave me the chance, I started to talk to him. But this was different. Nobody but a fool would bait Butcher Bardski with his face."

"Or a champ," a new voice put in. It was Eileen. "Hi, Champ!"

Dude said, "Well, for the first time—"

The girl said, "For the first time, you look like a champ. But you should see Monnkay Van Tieth. Or 'Monkey Teeth.' as Butcher called him, when he teed off on him. Oh, yes—Butcher is very angry with Monkey Teeth. He says he suckered him into the fight, telling him how easy you'd be. Van Tieth isn't saying anything. He can't. He's got to get some new teeth, first."

"He should be hit again," Demosthenes McWebster said. "Imagine, double-crossing his own employers by signing a stipulation which let a valuable bit of property—you, Dude—get ruined! Tsk, tsk!"

"He sent you a message, though. If you want the lead in that picture—The Lady And The Beast—you can have it. He says you look worse for the part, or better, than Butcher. Come on out, you and Eileen, the crowd is still waiting. Nobody has left. Aw, give her th' kiss now! I know about that, too!"

"Come on, Champ," Eileen murmured. "Gee, you even look like one!"



Bid welcomed the shock of contact for he knew, from the other man's grunt, that the spill had hurt him

Flash Your Skates, Rookie

By KENNY KENMARE

Speed — that's all Bid Barrett knows about hockey and he plays the game as if he doesn't need his teammates!

CHARLES "BID" BARRETT was nervous, so he leaned over, deliberately untied a skate lace, and then the other, and started to do the job over. For the tenth time since he had been ready, there in the dressing-rooms of the New York Rangers, in Madison Square Garden.

His hands shook noticeably, and he looked up quickly, flushing when he saw that the big, veteran goalie, "Toots"

Moranz, was looking him over with his wise, dark eyes missing nothing.

"Relax," Toots said, out of the corner of his scarred mouth. "We all got it to do the first time. Just make out like you are playing shinny back in Maine, against the Midget Terrors instead of breaking in with us against the Boston Bruins."

"Me, relax?" Bid forced what he thought would be a laugh, but the way it came squeaking out of his young

throat was not as ordered. "I'm always faster when I am — keyed-up, if you know what I mean."

"Muddy" Rivers, the star forward, laughed. "We know what you mean. Yeah, keyed-up. Like your feet belonged to another guy, your stick is a twenty-pound iron bar, your knees are synthetic rubber, and the rink is a mile long and filled with homicidal maniacs and a blind ref. Keyed-up and *locked!* The Bostons are good, but we aren't the worst bums going. We'll spell you until you get your wind."

"Me get my wind?" The kid didn't realize that more of them were listening. "Ho! I'm just telling myself not to try and burn the ice up with speed. I just keep telling myself to slow down to the team pace. I'll be okay, don't you worry!"

Rivers blinked and shot a surprised look at Moranz, but the goalie was keeping his eyes studiously on the rookie who had all the fans talking. Because the Ranger publicity-man knew how to get them talking.

What Charles Bid Barrett had was blinding speed and an eager heart and great hopes, when the Rangers found him — via a harried scout — doing jet-job tricks on his native ice up in northern Maine.

And because the Rangers needed something to bolster the team and draw the fans until its hospital-list grew thin, and because nobody was giving anything away with the chips down and the play-offs in prospect, it had contracted for that speed of Bid's with cash which it hoped would impress the youngster.

And it had impressed Bid Barrett, as had the newspaper versions of his blinding speed.

"I don't know all I could about hockey," Bid had admitted, but exclusively to himself—"but I have my speed until I can pick up the points I need brushing-up on—the one or two little details I maybe should know."

HIS TACTICS, until then, were indicated as clearly as a punch in the nose. And Bid, no dumber than any other shining young star, was smart enough to see the role he had to play, and shrewd enough not to discuss it with anyone, not even with other more seasoned rookies than himself. Nor with the veterans like Muddy Rivers and

Toots Moranz and "Baldy" Stuart. Nor even with anxious-eyed, patient, battle-wise Turkey Durkin, the Ranger coach.

"Durkin has his troubles trying to stay up in play-off position," Bid had seen it. "He doesn't want me barking into his ear about this and that. He thinks I already know this and that, and even those, or I wouldn't be here getting all this dough."

But it had him nervous. Practise-sessions were bad enough. But still, they were practise, and the fate of the team didn't depend on how Bid would do in practise.

"Just another shinny-game!" he thought to himself, as he tied the second lace and tucked it neatly in. He hooked his thumbs in the belt-line of his shorts so he wouldn't do it all over again. "I've got to make good! I've got to really flash my skates to-night!"

The Ranger best-line took the ice after five minutes, with the Bostons out in front 1-to-0. A roar of anticipation built up when the New York first-stringers pushed out from the boards and lazed to their positions, their expressions showing no more of excitement than a carpenter would when he picked up a hammer to take a lick at a nail.

Bid noticed this with some surprise and looked around at the near-crowd behind the nets. A bulbous-nosed, pudgy, pop-eyed fan in an easily-distinguishable checked suit winked at Bid and cupped a hand to a moist-lipped, cavernous mouth to yell:

"Put some pep into these dubs, Buddy! Holy mackerel, give us some action! Maybe if they see some speed they will shake out the lead and give us our money's worth! Show 'em, boy!"

Bid couldn't help but grin. It wasn't *exactly* what he had been thinking, but it was close enough to it to pull a grin of sympathy from him.

"The fan is the backbone of the game," the Ranger press relations word-slinger had greased his readers. "In getting the speedy young Barrett, Turkey Durkin and the Ranger owners have acknowledged their understanding of this simple fact: The fan is the backbone of the game."

"That's my real boss," Bid thought, as he chewed on a wad of gum and readied himself for the start of play. "The fan."

He looked around and swallowed hard when he saw Muddy Rivers bending a calculating eye on him.

Moranz was looking on from the nets, and when he caught Bid's eye, he jerked his head toward the big-mouthed fan and pantomimed a giant *Braaaaaack* with his lips.

"Oh, yeah?" Bid thought. But he forced that wobbly grin again and raised his hand to give his mates the thumb-and-index-finger "Okay!" signal. "Don't worry about me," he was trying to say. But his hand shook so he dropped it to grip his stick again.

Then the ref was holding things up again. One of the Bruins really had a loose lace, no kidding, and the official gave him a referee's time-out while he fixed it.

Bid groaned inwardly and skated around in a small circle. He stopped it again when he saw the Boston wingman near him eyeing him with a hard grin.

"Hold your hat, kid, the rink is about to blow up," the cynical-eyed opponent jibed. "In case you look too bad, just turn on that blistering speed and race around. You know?"

Bid flushed angrily. "Don't be too jealous, Pop," he jeered. "You got a good record behind you. It ought to carry you another season, anyway. Don't be too jealous!"

THIS man was Wolf Carrahan, the so-called "Gray Wolf of Quebec," and high-scorer in the National Hockey League for two years running. This "Pop" was the man who had the Bruins at the top of the puck-chasing pack and almost a sure thing to cop first place, if not just about single handedly win the play-offs for the Stanley Cup.

The veteran jerked his head around to glower evilly at the wise-cracking kid, and the Rangers who heard the exchange laughed out loud, and even a few of Carrahan's own mates grinned.

"Pour it on him, kid!" the check-suited fan yelled. "Pour it on him! With your skates, though! Make the old goat look silly when you go past him! Pour it on, kid!"

The ref voiced a warning to them all, his eyes on the clock. Bid felt better, with some of the steam let off by the distraction of his tiff with Wolf Carrahan.

Only the steam in his feet worked at him now, the steam he had in his legs and that he could transmit to his blades in an even flow of terrific power that had

got him this job with the big-time Rangers.

The puck was dropping.

Chin Deland, the Ranger center, slyly snared the disc from the Bruin face-off man, and slapped it in a hard pass to Rivers, and Carrahan, with a grunt of annoyance, stepped around to cover Bid.

But Bid was in high gear and going away, the roar of the crowd racking up and swirling the rafter smoke as the Ranger attack struck for the Bruin blue-line.

The Boston defense closed to trap Rivers, and Bid, moving like a wraith, darted in fast to pick up the drop-pass at which they had practised so long. Chin would sprint to the left as Bid picked up the puck, ready to hit across the Blue and make his try, or to waft it back to Bid and Muddy if the Boston guardians blocked him.

Bid, the puck riding gently on the end of his club, moved effortlessly down the middle, cut to his right when the Boston sentinel dropped back to make a first-line for his net-minder, and then swerved in a beautiful arc to scud, low and fast, diagonally in front of the net and not twenty feet out.

He didn't realize his own speed until he looked quickly for Chin Deland, and saw him out of position, coming up. But —out of position. Muddy was out of the play for now, checked into the far boards.

Bid suddenly realized his predicament, alone with the puck, too far out to shoot, too fast up to work the teamplay they had practised so long and so patiently, and he felt a sickening *tunk* in his chest when the Bruin guard, aware of the situation even before Bid had been, sprinted in to body-check the rookie and poke-check the disc away and clear it up ice.

Bid turned, felt a moment of panic in his overpowering desire to get the puck away. To Chin, to Muddy, to—to anywhere. Anywhere but where it was. *Anywhere . . . !*

He made a flashing turn, started his pass to Chin, held it when he saw how ridiculous it would look, with Chin covered. How ridiculous he, Bid, would look, that is. His instinctive draw to rifle the puck to Chin, checked at the very last possible moment, had the appearance of a gorgeous feint.

"Get it away!" he told himself, frantically, as he paused.

His stick whipped for the wrist-snap, but held it, jumped the puck, and desperation lent power to his backward shot that he elected, toward the Bruin goal, when the Boston guard rocketed in.

Maybe, somehow, Muddy had got loose, had got up there. Maybe, somehow, he himself could swing back, slam onto the puck before the smooth Bruin goalie cleared it to a mate or rifled it back up ice for a Boston attack.

MAYBE—maybe anything, just so long as he got rid of it, didn't take the onus for losing the puck, for messing up the attack!

A roar broke from the crowd and then Bid's face was crimsoning. He guessed he looked as silly as he felt, doing a boob thing like that.

But more crimson yet was the red scoring-light that flashed behind the Bruin nets.

"Maybe anything" had won!

Bid's panic had paid off.

The back-handed stab to get rid of the puck had wafted it between the skates of the Bruin goalie who had seen the action going away, and had relaxed a breath of a second to straighten up and ease the tension in him ere the attack could hit again.

Bid looked, managed to choke off the startled exclamation that bubbled to his lips, and skated back up ice again in the benediction of whistles and screams and shouts that poured down on his young and curly-dark head from the fans.

"Horseshoes!" Wolf Carrahan griped. "Sweet Joe, what luck!"

Bid grinned broadly. "Oh, hello, Pop! Where you been? Gee, did I run off and leave you all alone? I'm sorry, Pop. I'll try to remember, next time. Hey, whyncha hold my hand and we'll skate together?"

He looked around just before the face-off.

The fan in the checked-suit was easily discernible. The fan was shouting and pointing at Wolf, and yelling:

"He's awful! He's awful!"

With the next face-off, Bid was off with ringing skates to follow the play when the Boston center got the puck and whirled with it. He braked hard when the man, after his feint to the other forward, shuttled the puck to Wolf.

The Boston star quick-stepped past Bid's second-guessing move, scraping

the boards with his tan-canvas hips, and angled for the middle, his mates slamming along only a little in his wake.

Bid tried to body-check the man instead of poke-checking, and Wolf eeled his hips to let him by, sprawling hard. Wolf's taunting yell haunted Bid as he went down; and he rolled over and up on his knees in time to see the Boston man make a drop-pass, step around Jimmy Dale, and get the puck again on a teasing set-up.

The smooth Boston star fainted once, twice, then blasted a low, hard drive from the penalty-shot line, and Toots Moranz made a skate-save, fainted a pass to Dale, swept the puck in a small arc while his eyes sized things up. They came to rest, those eyes, on Bid, now up from his abortive attempt to check Carrahan, and now going away, uncovered.

Toots rifled the puck past Carrahan, hard, his teeth showing his distaste of the gamble, and then showing a lot more when the gamble won.

The crowd barked its pleasure when the wing-bladed Ranger rookie took the puck on the end of his club and wafted along cautiously, his anxious eyes looking for help. They found it.

The Boston center body-checked hard, and Bid bent his shoulder into it in the same motion with which he let the puck go to Muddy. He welcomed the shock of the contact even though it slammed him into the boards. He knew from the other man's grunt that it had hurt him more than Bid, that vicious check.

He laughed mockingly and went away fast, crossing to the open and taking the puck from Muddy again, and dropping it for Chin to pick up when another Bostonian closed with the speedy newcomer.

Chin rifled it over to Muddy, and made a try to beat the goalie; but the man blocked expertly and eased the puck to a mate when Muddy tried to follow-up.

Bid turned and headed back up the ice, for no reason other than his own feeling for the need of it spurring him into a scorching pace. It wasn't hockey, it wasn't even shinny, and it wasn't what the methodical Boston defense-man expected.

AND so it was that Bid was flashing along, going nowhere in particular but at a terrific rate, when the Bostonian let the puck go in a long shot to one of his forwards, in the hope of catching the

New York defenders asleep.

It was working beautifully when Bid twisted in to his left, looked over his shoulder casually, and then jumped in hard, his stick shooting out.

He let the puck ride out there a few feet from him as he fast-stepped his way in a circle, and broke into a scorching pace down the right-hand boards.

The roar of the fans matched him, step for step, and the Ranger attack spread, the defense lured into leaping forward to try and stop this wild-skating kid before he got up another head of steam.

Bid felt that if he were to close his eyes and just skate on until something told him to shoot, that he would score. It was like it is when you have something happening to you for the first time, and realize that it has happened to you before, and you know exactly how it is going to come out.

It was like dropping a quarter into a one-armed bandit and hitting jackpot with a single coin.

Wolf Carrahan bounced in, and Bid made use of his spectacular jumping turn which, if it missed, would trip him and slam him down on the ice, the biggest nut of the eighteen thousand nuts who were screaming their heads off from the pay section.

He came down again in full stride, and with the vision of Wolf doubling up on the boards in his terrific miss.

Muddy was right there where Bid's dream-sight had told him he would be. He back-handed a pass to him as he streamed by, angled out to take the return, drop-passed it to Chin, swirled through the defense, twisted, took the pass, faced, and fired.

He didn't see the red light flash. The roar of the crowd died in his ears. He didn't hear the mocking laughter of the Boston players as they skated slowly around him, telling him to wait. Just wait. "Just—wait!"

He didn't even see the score blink into place:

Rangers, 2; Visitors, 1.

He skated like a fury throughout the rest of the game, when he was in there. When he was being spelled, he sat alone in quiet, disdainful silence while his own mates snickered over the luck that had brought him two goals in nearly as many minutes.

"Fast? Sure. Jet-skates, that's him! Well, just wait. This is a six-man game.

not a solo-sprint. Yeah, it looks swell to the gallery. Just wait, he'll get his lumps."

When he came out again, with the score still 2 to 1 in favor of the Rangers, the leather-voiced, liver-lipped fan shouted:

"Turn on the smoke, kid. Turn it on! Shows these bums up! They're awful! Give the Gray Wolf something that'll really turn him gray! He's awful!"

And he learned what his mates meant by him getting his lumps.

Alone, out in front where his speed put him, he was wide open for the sly, vicious blocks that the seasoned and burly Boston defense threw at him. They were bruising and slowing him. Grimly and scientifically, they were slowing him. You can't get a bad muscle or bone-bruise and make like it was funny, and turn on the steam all over again. Not and be the same. Not for long, and be the same.

But when you had practically nothing but luck and speed, you didn't exactly have much choice. So Bid jumped ahead at the drop of the puck, raced around both teams making them look like they were posts and he Superman crossing the Pacific in five frozen minutes.

And it happened again. But not quite so quick, nor so easy. It happened again, and he had a stray puck on a buggy ride down ice that had the rubber burning and the New York crowd up and screaming its lungs out.

MUDDY crossed over, working desperately to keep up to his rookie mate, and just barely did get the drop-pass before Wolf did. Chin was covered, so Muddy took it along across the Blue, and snapped it hard to Bid once more. The rookie shot, hard and too fast. If he'd waited, it would have been all right, for Chin was coming in. . . .

The puck would have been smothered by the Boston baloonman in the nets, but it was slightly wide. It struck a post and bounded away. But straight out in front!

Bid pounced, snapped his wrists, and the lights flashed again.

Rangers 3, Boston 1. Or wouldn't Barrett 3 have been a truer account of the thing?

Then, after a bit, a new set of players was coming in, and Bid was starting out for his rest, when he saw that there

wasn't a spare for him. Turkey Durkin was watching him with hard, impersonal gaze. The other Rangers were looking at one another and saying something. Not out loud. But Bid knew what it was, just the same.

"Just wait. Old Hotshot Charlie from Maine will learn!"

Bid's resentful flare-up, deep inside him, answered, "Oh, yeah? We'll see who will learn. I'm young. I can take it."

He took it.

The Rangers took the game, *Barrett 4, Bruins 2*. Bid took the bumps that the Bostons passed out with never-increasing force, but never-remitting vigor and accuracy. Also, they had wised up to that trick jumping turn, and Wolf had twice dropped back and to the side to rock Bid into the boards with a crashing, stunning upset. It was one of those times that Wolf took the puck for a cool, teamed-up raid that racked up Boston's second score. But the checked-suit shouter and the newsmen loved it. It was copy for the newsmen. It filled up space without having to work. It was grist for the Ranger Press-Relations, too. For the same reason.

"Just wait!" the wise-eyed veterans were looking at him, when they went off ice in the thunderous ovation that New York gave its flashing comet of the rink game. "Just wait!"

Other hockey names, names that lived in the sports headlines when Winter breathed the early lights abloom along the Main Stems throughout Hockeydom, faded to a shadow of their former substance in the wilting glare of Bid Barrett's publicity.

Puck-loving Montreal turned out to watch the speed-marvel with Gallic eyes on cheeks, and tongues in cheeks, too.

"Fast? But of a certainty! Just wait!"

Boston could forget, for the time being, the only slightly slower, if infinitely more polished, streak who had been when the Gray Wolf had been younger.

Chicago, Toronto, Detroit could shake their heads in wonder at the visiting forward and chuckle at their own discomfited men who waited but for New York to move on; or . . . for incident and accident, mis-chance or planned-chance, to work its shroud of doom on those youthful legs.

"Just wait! Sure, he has speed. He has a few tricks. Had a few tricks, rath-

er. The tricks are known, the speed is slowing. Then what?"

The sore leg from the game in Detroit. The broken ankle he picked up in Chicago. The concussion that he suffered in Boston in that headlong smash with Wolf Carrahan, when a bit of caution, a spot of savvy, would have turned it into merely a going-away block, with Bid going away.

But how could you go away when all you had was speed, and you hadn't had time to pick up anything else? How could you develop caution, sensible caution, when all you offered was speed, and all the fans wanted to see was speed?

For a season or two, Speed King Bid Barrett had his life and was gone, as a flash-bulb has its life for a purpose and is gone. The flash-bulb is gone, but the image it recorded remained. Remained in some dusty newspaper-morgue files.

"Huh? Who? Barrett? Oh, yeah, I remember. He was fast, sure. But Wolf Carrahan, now, there's a player!"

BACK in Maine you could sit bitter-eyed and read of Wolf Carrahan and listen to talk of Wolf Carrahan and what a wonder he was. What a smart, shrewd, lasting wonder he was. Smart for his team, smart for his fans, smart for himself.

"Barrett? How do I know what became of him. Now, Toots Moranz is one sweet player."

Someone had him by the arm, was pushing him. Bid pushed back. . . .

"What the devil? Oh, huh? Gee, Muddy, guess I was asleep."

He looked around and a bowl of faces floated all around his look, like countless little moons following a larger moon around.

The red-flight behind the net of the Boston Bruins was just dying in the roaring sea of sound. Bid twisted his head slowly to look up at the scoreboard: *Rangers 2, Visitors 1*.

"Whatsa matter, Jet-Job?" Muddy was yelling into his ear. "You waiting for the Mayor to come with a band and escort you to your position? Come on, everybody is waiting to see you rack up another. We'll get out of your way this time. Sure sorry if we slowed you up, standing around doing nothing the way we do."

Bid had read somewhere that scientists had established that a sleeping man

can dream an entire lifetime of action in five brief seconds. He was beginning to believe what he had read.

Slowly, he skated back to his position. Wolf Carrahan jeered, "Just try that whirling-Dervish deal again, Junior. Just try it again. And wait!"

"Aw, I was lucky," Bid grinned shyly.

Wolf's mouth fell open. Muddy stared. The ref blinked, turned back to his job, faced the puck off in a drop-in.

And then Bid was moving as if in a trance, but a trance taking place at blinding speed. It was happening—just as he had visioned it in that vision he'd had after the last Ranger score he'd made, and had gone into his stupor.

There was a furious shinny in center ice, and then Bid had the stray-skidding puck, was gentling it on the end of his stick for the ride back, back and through and to and *in!*

He grinned slightly when he thought what a clean-up he could make, financially, if he could lay the bookies a bet on this particular score. On the game, even. The odds he'd get if he said he could call who would score when, what time, and assists. Assists for Boston, of course. Bid didn't need assists. Bid didn't need anything but his speed and to do it all just as he had seen it was going to happen. He burned along the ice, the New York crowd coming up and screaming its lungs out.

Muddy crossed over, working desperately to keep up to his rookie mate, and just barely did get the drop-pass before Wolf did. Chin was covered, so Muddy took it along across the Blue, and snapped it hard to Bid once more. The rookie readied his wrists for the shot.

The way it went, the puck would bound back from the post. Straight out in front!

Bid would pounce, snap his wrists, the light would flash, and it would be *Barrett 3, Boston 1.*

If he waited, Chin was coming in.

He snapped his wrists, the Boston balloon-man in the nets could have smothered, but it was wide. It struck the post and bounded away, straight out in front!

Bid pounced, set his wrists, and drew a deep breath. Something struck him hard, in that fraction of a moment, and he was going away, but stabbing the puck clear and setting it up for Chin.

But it wasn't Chin who got it. It was

Wolf, holding his skates smartly under him as he caromed Bid into the boards in a stunning smash, and then Wolf was going away, was racing away from the five-deep New York attack that had been fouled-up by Bid Barrett's stunning stupidity in standing there with the puck, waiting, instead of firing again before the goalie could get set.

SLOWLY Bid got up in the boozing zoo of sound that greeted his boner. The light was flashing behind Toots Moranz' broad and undejected shoulders.

Meekly, he skated back to his position. He looked at Wolf as he wiped a fleck of blood from his lips.

"Gee, nice going, Wolf," Bid said.

Wolf stared for the joker, his eyes flinty. "You bet, nice going, Junior. For me, not you! You and your horseshoes!"

Bid was weak on his pins, and acted it. Muddy and Chin skated over.

"Okay, Jet-Job?" Muddy asked.

"Aw, gee, Muddy." He looked at the big veteran. "What do you want? What have I got but speed? Jeepers, but I took a beating on that body-check. If it wasn't for the dough—and the chance that maybe I might learn something if I can stay around long enough, I'd quit. I dunno. I'm sorta out of my class. I think I'm okay to go on, though. I don't know, but I think so."

Muddy skated closer, stared incredulously for the catch, and when he saw there wasn't one, he grinned.

"I sort of thought you were out of your class, too, Jet-Job—I mean Bid. But now I don't know." He looked at Wolf Carrahan. "What do you think, Wolf? He reminds me of another goon, a long time back, who came up with nothing but speed. What was his name?"

Carrahan laughed. "Go to blazes!" He looked at Bid again, respect as well as amusement coming into his eyes. "You'll do, Bub. If you cut the fancy-Dan racket and learn something about five other guys dressed like you are. Hey, who is your pal over there? The boob in the Old Granddad-nose and the horse-blanket suit? Looks like you lost your only friend."

Bid looked. The liver-lipped, bug-eyed leather-lunged oracle of hockey wisdom had looked upon Bid Barrett and had made a judgment. Even now, he was yelling that judgment:

"Take the twerp out! He's awful!"

TRACK TRICK

By TED STRATTON

McSweeney needed a crack half-miler, and Jeff was it!

A CAR gunned along the street. Some college squirrel pressed a horn button. It blared: "Tah, dah, dee, dah!" I stirred in the chair and opened my eyes. That's how I spotted old Dan McSweeney, the track coach, coming up the sidewalk to the Lambda Chi House. I knew what he was after. This year, for the first time in a decade, old Dan thought he had a chance to beat State in the annual dual meet, and he needed a crack half miler to round out his Colburn College track team.

I couldn't run. What I mean is, he'd spotted me and I couldn't slip through

the house and hide in the nearby barn. The half-miler he wanted was none other than me, Jefferson Sprague Smith, late of the Army Air Corps, now back at Colburn to complete my education. My fiancée, Ellen Riley, had been after me to run for the team.

"Not me," I'd told her firmly. "This spring I'll sit in the sun."

By way of opening hostilities, I called out, "It was nice here, Dan, until you walked up the steps!"

He owns two legitimate degrees from colleges, but he has never been able to shave all the brogue off his tongue. "Did



Reynolds gave every ounce of strength he had

I mention track, Jeff, b'y?" he asked.

"But you will!"

He grinned, squatted in the chair next to mine, and hoisted a pair of long legs on top of the railing that circled the open porch. Those had been good legs in his youth, I recalled. A half-miler, one of the best in the business, old Dan had copped the intercollegiate title at Cambridge his senior year in 1:58, sparkling time in those days.

"Still I haven't mentioned track," he said.

"A new world's record for you!"

"And I won't mention it," he added firmly.

"Then all the shamrocks in the old sod will wither and die! Dan, honestly, don't you ever get tired of coaching track every year, and—ooooh!" I shuddered mightily, began laying it on thick. "I remember the spring I almost got speared when one of your boys loosed a wild javelin! As a matter of personal protection—" oh, he wouldn't get me out for track!—"I won't even attend the meets. Some goon might let slip a hammer into the grandstand and—"

"Still I don't mention track," he repeated.

Four times he'd spoken and not mentioned the subject. But the oiled gears in his wise, old head must have meshed. He hadn't forgotten that I'd set the college half-mile record my last spring in college. One minute, fifty-four seconds had been the time. Then the war.

"Talking to Ellen Riley yesterday," he continued. "Happened to meet the dear girl in the street." He screwed a serious expression on his face that was colored like an old saddle, and added, "She's worried about you."

"Worried I may not marry her in June?"

"Tish, that girl can have her pick of a hundred men."

"Undergraduates," I scoffed. "Kids that are still wet behind the ears like that Buzz Durner you got trying to run the half mile!"

"Ellen says that all you do is loaf on this porch and stuff yourself at the trough." He lowered his voice. "How old are you, Jeff?"

"Twenty-four."

"Is that a fact, now? One of the track b'ys was saying only yesterday he thought you was a grandfather!"

"If any of those squirrels" I flared,

"had seen what I'd seen from a cockpit, they'd be cracked up in an ash can! So this spring I'm entitled to a long vacation. The government is paying me good money to sit in this chair. Why should I run around a track in my underpants, eh? A trackster's only like a shuttle train. Always on the go, Dan, but never going any place!"

"At sitting down, b'y, you certainly look good." Keen eyes ran over me. "I can see you ten years from now, perfectly equipped to sit out life on a divan! Look at your flabby muscles, double chin! And fat as a pig's carcass!"

ANGRILY I swung both legs off the railing, jumped up. I hammered my stomach with both fists. "Look, Dan McSweeney!"

"You'll knock yourself out, b'y. Tish, if you was to run twice round this house now, you'd keel over!"

"Me keel over? Why—"

"Twice around in, say, twenty seconds?"

"It's less than a hundred yards," I scoffed. "Fifteen seconds!"

"Fifteen you said and I doubt it," he said, and hauled out the watch he used to time his runners.

We went down the steps. "Jeff," he said, "what about a side bet to make it interesting, eh?"

"How much?"

"Say you don't make the trip in fifteen seconds. Then you report for—uh, to me this afternoon."

"Sure. If I lose, I come out for track."

Me out of shape, I thought angrily. Hard as nails, I was. And I'd show Ellen Riley, too! What right did she have trying to get me to go out for track when I could sit in that soft chair on the porch?

"Ready?" Dan asked, forefinger on the stem of the turnip.

"Sure, and I won't take a crouch-start!"

"Set . . . go!"

I loped off. Time passed. I completed one lap around the Lambda Chi House. "Hurry," Dan warned, as I galloped past.

I knew I could make it, but I slammed into the second circuit . . . there he was again! He thumbed the stem, wordlessly offered me the watch. I checked the time. "Forty-two—seconds!"

I was panting and blowing like a sperm whale.

"You're a physical wreck," old Dan said cheerfully. "I'm doing you a favor when I get you into condition. Practice is at three o'clock, Jeff. Come early and get a set of—" he chuckled—"of red underpants!"

With that, he strolled off with a new half-miler in his pocket.

When I got my lungs shifted back into place, I stormed around the house to the back. You should have seen the narrow space between the barn and the house! Somebody had strung miles of clothes line in the way. A veritable network as thick and impassable as barbed wire on the English beaches during the war. And barrels and step ladders and old gates and boxes and lawn mowers.

I'd had to run clear around the barn and into the marsh in order to run twice around the house. I'd been tricked!

I shuddered at the thought of all the expended energy I'd have to make at track practice. Walk, walk, walk for conditioning. Jog, jog, jog for strengthening the striated muscles. Sprint, sprint, sprint.

"If I'd only kept my big mouth shut, not lost my temper," I moaned. "But no, he needled me into it. Tricked me, he did, and—"

Hindsight didn't help. Walk, jog, sprint, Jefferson Sprague Smith.

Ahead of me at three o'clock the next day, five flimsily clad runners jogged around the cinder oval. One complete lap, and old Dan yelled, "Once more, b'ys, then sprint home."

We paced it, even and smooth. On the final turn we bunched for the first speed test. I'd show these kids how to run. My famous stretch kick would mow 'em down!

Crack, Dan's pistol said.

I gunned my personal motor. Ten yards, twenty, thirty—my leg muscles began to numb. The kids moved out in front. A stitch developed in my side. Okay, I couldn't catch them. But what did it matter? A bunch of silly kids. If they had any sense, they'd be off with the girls. And that Buzz Durner up ahead, the one with love sick eyes for my Ellen Riley. He couldn't run off with my girl!

The kids turned around and danced back. Durner grinned, said, "What kept you, pop?"

I sputtered, "I'll pop you, you—you—" Breath left me. I clung to the iron

finish post while I waited for the world to stop spinning. And I wasn't in good shape for track. Those leaden pancakes I'd had for breakfast. That spice cake, those five dishes of fish-eye pudding I'd wolfed at lunch!

"When you get those inner tubes off your stomach," old Dan offered, "you might run a half mile—in a week!"

"I'd rather ride in a plane," I gulped.

"How come they let you get soft in the wild blue yonder?"

I couldn't waste any more breath. As I stumbled toward the showers, I heard him chuckle, "Why, the poor b'y won't be able to walk to the altar in June with that fine girl!"

Oh, yeah?

ELLEN RILEY said, "No, Jeff," and grabbed my wrist just as I dipped the spoon into the double-special, tutti-frutti sundae. "It will upset your stomach."

"Nonsense," I protested.

"You must begin to check your diet," she went on firmly. "You didn't do well in the time trials today, I hear. Besides, I will not be seen on the campus with a— a fat, lazy man!"

"I'm not fat or lazy! Just because there's no sense to running yourself dizzy, you call me fat and lazy!"

She dipped a spoon into the frothy concoction. "Good, um-um. I'll eat it for you, Jeff, dear. You may drink your glass of water. Yes, and you may eat one soda cracker."

"Nobody loves me," I moaned. "With that cluttered backyard, old Dan tricks me out for track, and now my girl deprives me of necessary calories that will keep me alive!"

But she ate the sundae steadily, while my mouth watered and my muscles ached from the past week's steady diet of track. Grind, grind, grind, it had been. Walking, jogging, sprinting! What kind of glory was in that when a guy has flown P-47's? Ah, skimming the cream off the wild blue yonder, not churning the dirt on a track!

Sure, Buzz Durner had beaten me today in the half mile time trials. And in two minutes flat, too. Very, very slow time.

"Until after the important State U meet," Ellen was saying, "you are to eat no heavy, fried foods. No cake or pie or sweets. No eating between meals.

Lots of toast and light foods. You must train the way you did before you went off to the war. Early to bed and up with the robins, Jeff. I refuse to marry a fat, lazy man!"

"You'll kill me," I complained. "You and that Dan McSweeney."

"I'd rather you were dead, than fat," she said cheerfully.

I stared hungrily at her. Hair like the wing of a raven. Blue eyes like cornflowers. A wonderful figure. Maybe I was lucky.

She patted my hand. We walked to the front of the Greek's store. As we stepped outside, a horn on a curbed roadster sang, "Tah, dah, dee, dah!" From the seat, Buzz Durner called out, "Want to go for a ride, Ellen?"

"Sure, Buzz." She slid in, with a flash of long legs, and closed the door. "See you tomorrow, Jeff, dear."

"That squirrel," I said, "goes right past the house and—"

"Walking is best for you, Jeff. Strengthens the leg muscles."

"So long, pop," Durner called.

Before I could twist his silly neck off, the roadster gunned away.

A couple of light-years later, we had the first dual track meet with Albert University, a setup. When it came time for the half mile race, it was up to Durner and me and a squirrel named Lansing from Albert. We hit the home stretch together. Durner won by five yards. I made it home in third place. One point scored by Jefferson Sprague Smith. So what? Five more weeks, thirty more days of this grind, and I'd have run my last race and it would be over.

The announcer gave the time. "—one-fifty-nine and four-tenths."

Very, very amateurish.

"Reynolds that State runner," old Dan moaned. "Does one-fifty-six! I hope Durner picks up some more speed."

"What about me?" I wanted to know.

"You don't worry me, Jeff. Just so you get into shape so you can walk to the altar in June."

"I can lick Durner whenever I want to!"

"Tish, you couldn't lick a snail."

"Give me something to eat and I'll improve. Ellen's got me on a diet of toothpicks and water! I'm starved thin and weak!"

"Can't lick a snail," old Dan repeated, and moved off with unhurried steps to

watch the high jumpers.

After I had showered and dressed, I came out into the sunshine. Ellen Riley sat in Durner's chromium-laden, blue roadster. I leaned over the door. "I'm getting better," I said.

"Oh," she said casually, "it's you."

"Sure, remember? Your fiancee."

"I seem to remember that I don't like lazy men."

"Now wait a second! I'm—"

"Lazy men who trot home third in a half-mile! You could have won, but you dogged it up to the stretch! Please go away from me!"

"You handing me the brush-off?"

"Losers," she said, "just fall off, Mr. Smith."

Then Buzz Durner came out, vaulted into the car. "How'd you like my track dust today, pop?" he asked.

That did it. I went around that roadster on wings. I grabbed his shoulders, shook him. "Call me pop, will you? Why, you nut-eating squirrel, I'll—"

Ellen said sharply, "Take your lazy hands off him!"

I stared at her. Cold fury in her voice now. "You're a fat, slow-motion, imitation of a man, Jeff Smith!" She laid one hand on Durner's arm, turned on her slow, easy smile. "Please, Buzzy, take me for a long drive in the country."

Off went the roadster. Okay, my girl had given me the brush-off. Maybe I had figured her wrong. She liked guys with new roadsters. Getting excited over a half-mile race! So we were quits.

THAT week I settled down to some serious training. I'd show Ellen Riley something. She'd been riding around in that roadster with Durner all week.

The meet was against Tech Institute. At the crack of the gun in the half-mile race, I jumped into the lead. Around the first turn, down the long back stretch with wings on my feet, desire in my heart. So Durner thought he could run off with my girl, eh?

I rode the long curve, stormed the stretch past the banked crowd. Old Dan warned at the post, "Slower, b'y! Fifty-six!"

He meant that I'd run the first quarter in fifty-six seconds, entirely too fast. Too fast? Not today. I'd show 'em. So they wanted me to win. Long strides to the accompaniment of mounting roars from the crowd. The final curve, the

beckoning home stretch. Kick it!

My legs were sticks of wood from the fast pace, my lungs on fire. Maybe the pace had been too fast. And listen! Coming up from behind slowly. Clop-clop. The pound of pursuing spikes. Drive it!

Not much drive left in my body. Stumble, Smith. You've got to win to show 'em. CLOP-CLOP. I wobbled in stride, the tape five yards ahead. Now one last drive—the tape broke against my chest.

I slowed, turned back. There was Durner, white-faced, panting. "Nice—race—pop!" he gasped, and stumbled into the green infield.

Then old Dan strode over. I stuck out my hand. "Congratulate the winner," I said.

His voice was scornful. "What a stubborn fool you are, b'y! You ran worse than a green high school kid!"

"And I won!"

"Won! You think that kind of a dumb race can beat Reynolds of State? You've got to match your strength against proper pace. You died on that last lap. Wait'll you get the time."

The mechanical, monotonous voice over the loud speaker. "Time of the half-mile—one minute, fifty-eight seconds."

Okay, I'd lost and they hadn't liked it. Today I'd won and they hadn't liked it. What did they want, a gold mine with their half-mile? Sure, it hadn't been smart, brainy running, the kind I'd used in my youth. Maybe these squirrels were right. I was pop, old Pop Smith.

But that night, I swallowed my pride, phoned the Tau Delt House. "Jeff," I said. "Look, Ellen, I was thinking. Maybe we can take in the dance out at the lake, eh?"

Her answer burned in my brain. "No slow, dumb fat man can dance with me, Mr. Smith, and no thank you." And the line had gone dead.

I don't remember much about what happened during the next two weeks. I won two half-mile races. Only the State U meet was left on the schedule. In between, I'd trained hard. As if I were preparing for some great event. Maybe a date with my pride against Reynolds of State U.

My speed came back gradually, and once, I'd pushed Cameron, our best quarter miler. And I'd been careful of

my diet. Tracksters aren't heavy eaters. They train best on a diet of toast and thin soups and chops.

Early to bed, up with the robin for walks over the hills. Sure, I was in shape. Legs strong, eyes clear. The lonely hills. The birds singing. The chapel tower rising above the morning mists. Funny, I never seemed to be alone.

Someone by my side. A long-legged, loose striding girl. I could dream, couldn't I?

Buzz Durner seemed to have the inside track on her. I'd see them every day in his car. Going to classes, parked in front of the Tau Delt House. Funny, Ellen and I had had so many plans a million years before a track meet had interfered. But that would soon be over. One more race and I was loose.

STATE University on Saturday. The campus alive with talk, with confidence. Sure, we'd wallop State. This was Colburn's year. Sure, run your heart out, I thought, for a felt letter-C and a pat on the back.

Once old Dan told me in the dressing room, "Jeff, stop fighting yourself when you run. Let the track work for you. Relax, float more. You've got your old kick back. Save that drive for the stretch. And this Reynolds—you've got to beat him! For Colburn and—"

"Don't hand me the rah-rah stuff," I said, and yawned.

I looked around the suddenly stilled dressing room. A dozen Colburn tracksters, clad in their red regimentals, stared at me. Wonder on their faces. A thousand years ago I'd been like that. Eager, enthusiastic, spirited, and running had been a winged joy. But it was a sad, bitter business now. Me, an old man at twenty-four. And the derisive nickname, "Pop" Smith. Okay, two more days of practice, then one more race.

A blue-gold day, the Saturday afternoon of the State U meet.

"Jeff, b'y," old Dan pleaded, "get wise to yourself. You've lost your perspective. These youngsters aren't kids, like you say. They're you before the war! If you'd change your attitude, I'd—I'd—Jeff, I'd be willing to lose the State meet!"

"You won't lose it," I said, and moved off.

The warm, spiced air. The smell of

the cinders. On my legs, wintergreen from a rubdown. And I had one more race to run. A half-mile, 880 yards, 2640 feet—how many inches was that?

From the infield inside the freshly rolled track, I spotted a bright, red sweater on a girl in the first row of the stands near the finish post. A stranger, that girl. Weeks had passed. The only times I'd seen her she'd been riding with Buzz Durner. Going to dances out at the lake. Watching the moon—in somebody else's arms.

We got off to a fine start when Colburn men copped six points in the high hurdles. Then Olds, a crack sprinter, won the hundred. Yes, things on the track were fine. We were taking the tricks.

Events moved fast after that. Tension mounted as State U drew closer in the point column. State 29, Colburn 32. A couple of field events. State 38, Colburn 43. Old Dan would be happy with the win. Then State swept the pole vault. State 47, Colburn 43.

The call came for the half-milers.

Reynolds, State U's runner. A broad-chested, chunky young fellow with knobby calves and knees. Packed plenty of power. He grinned at me, stuck out a hand. "Feel good to be back on a track?" he asked.

"Sure, sure," I said.

"Good luck, fellow."

Good luck? What was good about it? Just my last race.

"The same to you," I heard myself saying.

I loosened my leg muscles, then pulled off my heavies and got down to flimsy working clothes. Buzz Durner came around. "You've got to take him," he told me.

"Why don't you take him?" I asked.

"Because you're a better runner than I am." He stuck out his hand. Warm, firm, friendly grasp. "Good luck, pop," and he grinned.

Good luck, pop.

"Well, good luck to you, kid. Stick with me."

Six runners toed the line. The directions from the starter. I don't remember all he said. No elbowing, no pushing, get a yard in front before cutting in—my eyes found Ellen Riley. Oh, she knew I was looking at her. If she'd give me one sign—she turned away.

The half-crouch for the start. The

tense wait, left hand on left knee.

"Set . . . Bang!"

Reynolds was off in front. That was his style of race. Plenty of power to burn. One more race, I thought. Two laps, pop, and it's over!

I stepped up the pace, crawled to Reynolds' shoulder, and let him do the work. He could run, a peculiar, flailing sort of stride. Elbows jabbing outward, a bounce to his stride. We came down the home stretch, a yard apart, to the roar of the crowd.

One lap more, I told myself. One more lap. Only four-hundred and forty yards and you are through, pop. Back to the easy chair on the Lambda Chi porch. No, make it the swing. And a whole coconut cake! No worries about an altar trip. That was over, too. One more lap, pop.

AROUND the turn, stride matching his stride. Down the long, straight back stretch, with Reynolds hitting up the pace. Into the last turn. A hundred-fifty yards more, pop. Got one last kick?

Off the turn, almost together. He started his stretch-spurt. I caught him fifty yards from the tape. He hung there for a second, giving it every ounce of strength he had. It wasn't enough. I inched past him, pulled away and hit the tape. So you can't run, eh? I thought.

It was over—the long punishing grind that is the basis of sound track, all over. I slackened speed, but I did not stop. What was the use? I had forever in front of me. Across the grass to the gym, the cheers fading behind me. What did cheers matter? I'd won a race and lost a girl.

Inside the cool, echoing gym. No more grind. The last race. Sort of like a business deal. Cold, calculated. I undressed slowly. Jake, the grinning rubber, laid me on the slippery table and massaged my tired muscles.

"We win this meet now," he was saying, his fingers probing deep for the soreness and tiredness. "Win her sure for old Dan! Two events left and she's all over. The 220-yard dash and we got Cameron to win that. And the relay is in the bag, yeah, in the bag. On your back, sir!"

I rolled over on my back. His hands went to work. "It was a nice race, Mr. Pop. Good time, one-fifty-five. Say, that Mr. Buzz Durner, he come in with third

place. Says you pulled him home! Okay, we gonna beat 'em sure, Mr. Pop! Now take that shower—"

So I slid from the table, went into the shower stalls, turned on the needle points. A long, relaxing shower, then—"Pop, hey, pop!" somebody called from the lockers.

I stepped from the warm spray. Buzz Durner stuck his head inside. "Things went wrong!" he shouted, white-faced. "Cameron won the 220 and pulled a tendon. He's out! Pop, you gotta run the relay!"

"Not me," I said.

"You don't understand," he said, grabbing my arm. "Cameron is finished. We've only got three men for the relay. Dan said to get you!"

"I ran my last race. This place can freeze over and melt."

"Pop, to win the meet we've got to win the relay!"

"Let old Dan think up something. I'm finished."

"But you've got to—"

"Shove off," I said bitterly. "Go to the dance tonight with my girl!"

He stared. "Don't talk crazy like that! Ellen never went out with me, not once! She said, well, she had made you go into training and so she went into training, too. She hasn't danced in four weeks. She won't even eat cake. She won't—"

"Say that again!" I shouted.

"Like I said she's been in training just like you and—"

The sun came out. One more race, eh? Didn't a man ever get time to see his best girl? To take her to the dances, eh?

I climbed into the scanty, red regimentals. On with the smooth chamois pushers. Lace the long-spiked shoes on tight. One more race, pop. We went upstairs, outside. The packed stands, alive with sound. Cheerleaders pranced in front of the crowd. The long Colburn fight yell and, listen to that. "—Pop, pop, pop!" tacked on the end.

A knot in my throat. For me, the old man. And all along I'd thought I hadn't cared.

Runners danced near the finish line. Four men in the blue shirts of State U. And Boggs, Vadney, Templestone, my teammates.

[Turn page]

CRACKS, ITCHING between TOES?

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"Jeff, b'y," old Dan said. "I don't know what to say! You got to run the anchor-leg. Oh, my Lord, you can do it?"

"Sure."

"You've got quarter-mile speed in your long legs!"

"Sure."

"We've got to win it, Jeff, b'y! We've got—"

"Stop whistling in the dark."

Boggs led off. A sprinter, he lanced out fast and copped the lead. He passed the baton on to Vadney along with a five-yard lead. Vadney took it from there. State's second leg-man caught him at the end of the back-stretch, clung like a leech around the turn. Vadney grew wings down the home stretch, regained the five yards. Templestone shoved off.

No worries about Templestone. A good man. He'd pile on the pace, add to the lead. A victory breeze for you, pop. Templestone hit the stretch with a ten-yard lead. I walked up the track to the white line that marked the start of the last quarter. I danced lightly, felt the song in my legs. Different, this race would be. Winged joy.

Templestone driving. Chin too high, I noted. Straining too much. Not necessary, fellow. Give me that baton and—

He stumbled five yards from the box where I waited. Time seemed to stand still while he tumbled to the cinders and lay still. The State runner came on like the wind. I didn't dare step outside that box. Track rules are strict. Disqualified if you step out of the box. But I had to get my hand on that baton!

"Roll, roll!" I screeched.

TEMPLESTONE rolled once, lifted his hand weakly. I snatched the baton, turned. Nothing to do but run—and pray. One more race and a fifteen-yard deficit to overcome. Remember the time you limped home over the Channel with the engine shot up? Just run.

Maybe I gained a couple of yards around the first turn. The long back-stretch opened up. Steady, steady. Stride it. Relax a bit and float. Don't try to catch him too quickly. Only a fool does that and you've been a fool long enough. Draw closer by degrees. Five yards between us as we came off the last turn.

The first feeling of numbness stole up my legs. The first, premonitory warn-

ings in lungs and chest. Four yards behind, then three. The numbed feeling grew. Hot daggers of pain in my lungs. The film across my eyes, the tape seeming to fade, then to recede.

Twenty yards from the tape and I climbed to his shoulder. I tucked in my chin, glued my eyes on the tape. We ran tandem-fashion. Then it came, high and shrill, above the crowd's hysteria.

"Jeff, come on!"

Only one voice could thrill me like that.

A man always withholds a little bit of steam in his system. A last ounce of strength, of will to go a little bit farther, a little bit faster. Like setting that overtired fighter plane down, setting it down by a super-human strength. The tape.

I lunged. I sensed the blue shirt beside me fading. My arms whirled forward, yanking my body forward in one, final effort. The little world stopped spinning.

Never tell anybody that the finish tape at the end of the home stretch is made of soft yarn. When my chest pressed against it, it was as strong as a hemp rope, barring the way. I couldn't seem to get through it. And then it parted to let me through.

The stars were out. The breeze was soft. There was melody in the air. The front porch of the Lambda Chi House was quiet. "Look," I said sleepily, "I want to lie here forever."

"Of course, Jeff."

"I don't ever want to move. If anyone suggests exercise—"

"No one will, Jeff."

"I think I'll take a nap."

"Yes, Jeff."

Her hand was soft and warm on my face.

Somewhere, not too far off, somebody drummed on a piano. Then a tenor voice began to sing. "The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi." Why not the sweetheart of Lambda Chi? Wonderful words in the hushed night.

"Jeff!"

I stirred. "I'm tired, Ellen. Had a tough day at the office."

"You will walk with me to the altar next week?"

"I'll tell you next week."

"You're not mad, Jeff?"

"I'm tired, see?"

"I meant about that—that time old

Dan bet you couldn't run twice around this house in—in twenty seconds! It was my idea. I knew you were stubborn, but if we could get you mad—

"Oh, that."

"—you get mad so easily, Jeff! It was easy to trick you into going out for the track team because old Dan needed a half-miler! I—I strung all those clothes lines between the house and the barn! I—I got blisters on my palms when I lugged those boxes and barrels and step ladders and—"

"Let's get one thing straight," I interrupted. "Am I fat?"

"No, Jeff."

"Am I lazy?"

"No, Jeff."

"Then wake me up in about two weeks!"

A car gunned past the house. The music blared: "Tah, dah, dee, dah!"

Just some college squirrel full of pep, I thought, and yawned.

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THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 8)

with American League hurlers riding the crest and National Leaguers plagued with the sore shoulders, elbow chips and aching backs that have become so frequent among their rivals. Or perhaps both leagues will get superb pitching. As you well know, anything can happen and probably will.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

BASEBALL will be in its early-season heyday when THRILLING SPORTS next appears on the stands and it is eminently fitting that our next novelet should be about the great American summer pastime. And John Wilson's fine story of what can happen to a talented small-town youngster—A HICK IN TIME—before he has a real chance to make good, is as typical of the game as any story can be.

When Trigger Hanlon, ex-big leaguer and chief promoter for a baseball school, gets the little community of Crabb's Corners to put up a purse to give star local athlete Homer Stack a chance to learn the subtleties of his trade and win a spot in professional ball, it looks as if Homer is on the highroad to success.

But the highroad turns into a dead end when Homer finds that he has been bilked, buncoed and bewildered and is not only no nearer a job in the game he loves than before, but is broke and far from a home he dares not return to. He is really in a spot as well as on one.

But Homer wouldn't quit—he couldn't and confess to his home-town supporters that he was letting them down. He has determination, ability to do almost anything on the diamond and finally, from the least expected source, he finds he has a friend. This man, a broken down pro who has served as instructor in Trigger's school, doesn't like the

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deal Homer got and resolves to give him a boost.

The results of his offer are not immediately apparent—but when they do begin to show they are as surprising to Homer and his helper as they will be to all of you. A HICK IN TIME is a real baseball story to lead off a real sports fiction magazine.

Second on our novelet list for next issue is a story of the most dangerous of recognized sports, cross-country horse racing. In A MAN'S GOTTA RIDE, Roger Fuller manages to make plain to the doubting Thomases that stud the nation just what is so compelling about a sport that, for no reward except the glory of winning, offers broken bones and ever-present death to man and beast alike.

To Rickey Phillips, of course, the idea that anyone, man or boy, would not rather be risking his neck taking the jumps than not taking such chances would have seemed too absurd for words. For Rickey, though still an undergrown kid, comes from a long line of Maryland racing forebears and cross country running is in his blood.

Not only does his father, Blair Phillips, own Juniper, favorite in the soon-to-be-held cup race, but Rickey has a fine pair of hands and a way with the high-strung racing steeds. His mother, however, feels differently about cross country jump races and has forced his father to forbid him to ride the horse in the Blair stable.

So a conflict develops when young Rickey gets a chance to ride an entry in the biggest of hunt cup races—an entry from another stable. His happiness and that of his mother and father are at stake in a story so human and so naturally exciting that it will pull many a reader up on the edge of his saddle—er—chair. Get acquainted with A MAN'S GOTTA RIDE for a different story about a different sport. It's a lulu.

[Turn page]

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Other stories about other sports will be present in shorter lengths—all of them carefully selected for sound background, color, excitement and the "feel" of the game they represent. Also present, of course, will be Jack Kofoed with his classic true feature **THRILLS IN SPORTS**, along with this department and other brand new short features. July will be a **THRILLING** month.

LETTERS FROM READERS

WELL, the Cap has done it again—that is, he has taken another sideswipe at basketball and must now pay the penalty. A regular clutch, swivet or covey of mail has descended upon us, some endorsing our stand, others calling us a unmitigated blackguard, liar, cheat and no gentleman at all.

Since we took the pro side—that ice hockey is a much better game than basketball—we'll give the cream of the intelligent opposition the floor first. To wit—

HE IS NOT ALONE

by Ethelbert Ryan

Dear Cap: I have just finished reading the January issue of **THRILLING SPORTS** and, as usual, enjoyed it immensely. Hats off to John Wilson for his spine-tingling novelet, **SAY IT WITH BASKETS**. I have one gripe, however.

When you answered that letter on hockey, you said that ice hockey "sometimes outdraws basketball as it should, for it is a far better game." Is this remark based upon the age of the game or on your own personal opinion? I don't imagine mine will be the only letter defending basketball. Thanks again for a swell magazine.—*8227 Cadwalader Avenue, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.*

P.S. I'm only sixteen but I've been reading your magazine for about six years. I have every copy put out in that time.

Well, you're certainly entitled to the best answer we can give you, Bert, but first may the Cap venture a query? When you ask if the statement we made is based upon our own personal opinion or upon the age of the game, you have us baffled.

Of course it is based upon our own personal opinion—an opinion backed, by the way, by such veteran sports writing aces as Stanley Woodward and Red Smith, sports editor and columnist, respectively, of the New York Herald Tribune—and by just about every other authority who knows both games and is not, through the exigencies of his job, committed to the court game.

But when you ask if our judgment is based

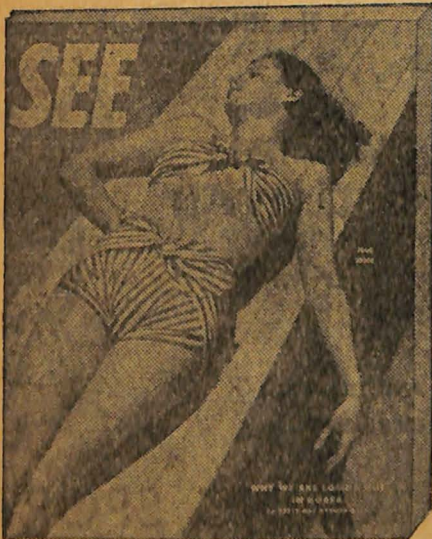
on the age of the game you have us stopped. What on earth has the age of the game got to do with its merit? If this were so, some of the ancient sports—say that of the Cretans of 1500 and more B.C., who baited bulls stark naked by seizing their horns from dead in front and vaulting onto their backs with a half twist—would be considered far better than, say, baseball.

Actually, basketball as we know it today, was invented in 1892 by Dr. James Naismith of the Springfield (Mass.) YMCA so that his charges would have a competitive game they could play upon a gymnasium floor. Ice hockey in its modern form was first played in Halifax about 70-odd years ago, when it was taken up by the students at McGill University and rapidly developed into the high-speed game it now is.

This would give hockey about 15 years in the seniority department—but actually it makes them about even. Hockey probably dates back hundreds or even thousands of years in primitive form to the first time man donned crude runners to speed his progress on ice. And basketball has its remote origins

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in ball games of an equally or even more distant past.

While both games, as played under modern high-pressure conditions, have developed trends toward universal fisticuffs, slackening of rule enforcement to please untrained spectators and loss of true tactics in favor of all-out attack, yet our preference for hockey has other and definite bases in fact.

First, basketball is such a high scoring game that an individual score, no matter how skillfully executed, means little or nothing. This is not true of proven games such as football, big league baseball or ice hockey, in all of which a single score may be surrounded with suspense even if it does not occur in the last second of play.

Secondly, basketball, like no other sport, has come to put a premium on physical freaks—super-tall young men of otherwise shaming characteristics, usually called "goons" by discerning sports writers—who can simply stand under the enemy's basket, catch skyscraper passes and drop them in.

This is not so in hockey, where speed, shiftness and ability to handle a puck unerringly are all important. Eddy Shore, famed defense man of the Boston Bruins for years,

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was a man of medium height and slight build. But he could body check with the best of them. Howie Morenz, Cooney Weiland and scores of other great forwards have been small.

There have been plenty of big men too—among them Dit Clapper, Taffy Abel, Ching Johnson and the like. But they have to catch up to the smaller, speedier specimens to employ their superior size and weight and that is often impossible. No, we'll still take hockey.

LENGTHY LETTER

by Frank A. Sears

Dear Cap: Before you have Roger Fuller write another story about swimming, why don't you make sure he knows what he is talking about? Whether you know it or not, swimming is not measured like horse racing. In swimming the term "a length" means the length of the pool. Therefore, if the pool were 25 yards long, a length would mean 25 yards.

During the relay race in Mr. Fuller's ORRIN NEEDS A NURSE in the January issue of THRILLING SPORTS, Watts was supposed to have hit the water a length behind everyone else. That means, just as they had reached the opposite end of the pool and were turning, he dived.

In the picture on page 61 it shows him finishing about a yard or two in front of Murphy. That's no length, brother.—2114½ North Kedzie Avenue, Chicago 47, Illinois.

Hereafter we'll try to confine Mr. Fuller's extra-curricular activities to the swimming pool instead of the race track. But in view of his A MAN'S GOTTA RIDE, already previewed for our next issue, it may prove difficult.

Thanks, everybody, for your enthusiastic postcards and letters about our next issues. Wish we could print them all, but there'll be a sampling of them in a coming issue. Meanwhile, keep on writing. Kindly address The Editor, THRILLING SPORTS, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Be seen' you!

—CAP FANNING.

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