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**THRILLING**

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

ANC

# SPORTS



**AN OLD FASHIONED  
SINGLE**

*A Baseball Novelet by* **JOHN WILSON**

**JACK KOFOED • TOM TUCKER • JOE ARCHIBALD • NAT BENSON • M. M. TINNEY**

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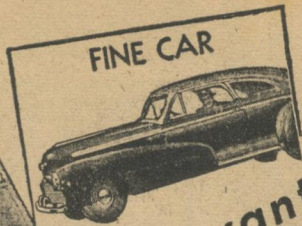
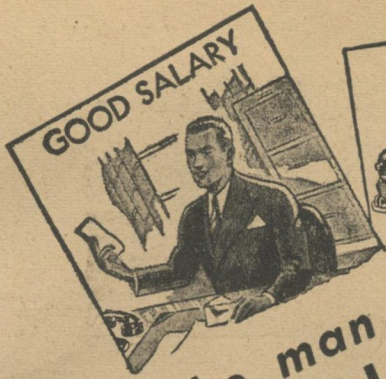
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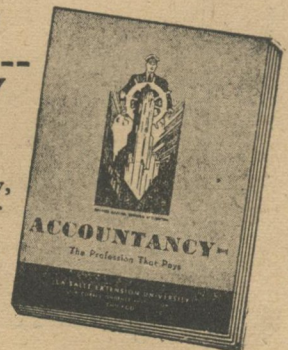
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# THRILLING SPORTS

Vol. 21, No. 2

A Thrilling Publication

September, 1948

Featured Baseball Novelet

## AN OLD-FASHIONED SINGLE

By JOHN WILSON



Duke Emory had the power and the eye to smack that pill like Babe Ruth, but he didn't rate until he finally got wise to himself! 11

### TWO OTHER COMPLETE NOVELETS

- GOLF IS A GENTLEMAN'S GAME**.....Tom Tucker 42  
Chip Dawson has the Indian sign on Johnny Trang, but Johnny comes right back at him with some surprising links logic!
- THE LONG WAY HOME**.....M. M. Tinney 66  
Abbey Harlowe, the chronic runner-up of the tennis courts, gets those fifth-set jitters—but keeps right on trying to bust through!

### SHORT STORIES

- MALLET MARAUDER**.....Robert Sidney Bowen 33  
Tommy Gladchuk only wanted the chance to play good polo
- THE EYES HAVE IT**.....Joe Gregg 58  
Cuthbert, the Strangler, learned wrestling science in college, but—
- CAULIFLOWER MUTUAL**.....Joe Archibald 84  
Rocky Rhodes returns to the ring to fix the fixers
- MATCH GAME**.....Roger Fuller 93  
Little Caspar, the shark with a bowling ball, loses his bite

### SPECIAL FEATURES

- THE SIDELINE**.....Cap Fanning 6
- THRILLS IN SPORTS**.....Jack Kofoed 89
- FELLER NEEDS NO FRIENDS**.....Nat Benson 103

THRILLING SPORTS, published every other month by Standard Magazines, Inc., at 16 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.00; single copies, \$.15. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Entered as second-class matter April 11, 1946, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright 1948, by Standard Magazines, Inc. In corresponding with this publication please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

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# The SIDELINE



A DEPARTMENT FOR SPORT FANS CONDUCTED BY CAP FANNING

**S**INCE baseball is a national game for Americans it is, in miniature, a sort of cross section of national foibles—among them sectional pride. A youngster from Arkansas or Texas will insist that the deftest fielders, the longest ball hitters and the swiftest and cunningest hurlers come from the Great Southwest.

A West Coast youngster of seven or seventy will put up just as hot an argument for his region and will have DiMaggios on top to prove his point. The same goes for the East, the South and the Midwest.

Having listened to many hundred such arguments, your Cap decided to break it down and see how things really shape up. Taking the most authoritative of the annual baseball listings, which gives each important big leaguer's birth place, he divided the country into five sections and added up the totals. The results are forthcoming below. Remember, we're going by birth places, not by current residence, if some of the players seem misplaced.

## The Northeast

The Northeast, which for our purposes includes the New England states plus New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, has 39 in and outfielders and an even score of hurlers. The best of them comprise a pretty formidable combination.

Catchers, Rosar, Tebbetts and Hegan. Infielders, Vernon, Fletcher, Greenberg, Stornweiss, Kerr, Rizzuto, Miller, Billy Johnson and Kurowski. Outfielders, Holmes, Mele, George Case, Del Ennis, McCosky and Jim Russell. Best of the northeastern pitchers are Spahn, Branca, Shea, Micky Harris, Lopat, McCahan, Page, Borowy, Masterson and VanderMeer. There are others—Syd Gordon, Hermanski and Bill Cox among them—but that's the cream of the crop. The effete East is okay.

## Stars of the Midwest

The Midwest has a comparable all-star

combination, perhaps even a better one, especially where pitchers are concerned. It includes—

Catchers, Walker Cooper, Masi, Berra, Edwards, Scheffing, Mueller and Swift. Infielders, Cavaretta, Binks, Schoeneinst, Don Johnson, Verban, Keltner, Boudreau, Sturgeon, Haas and Gustine. Outfielders, Reiser, Peck, Wakefield, Henrich, Evers, Heath and Pafko. Pitchers, Dickson, Feller, Fowler, Galehouse, Grove, Haefner, Hatten, Heintzelman, Houtteman, Koslo, Kush, Lade, Leonard, Marchildon, Newhouser, Ostermueller, Overmire, Potter, Schmitz, Strincevich, Taylor, Trinkle and Trout.

## Southeast Players

The Southeast has plenty to brag about as well—with a roster of 36 bat-and-field men and 19 throwers.

Best of them are—

Catchers, Evans, Kluttz, Robinson, Early, Howell, McCullough, Semenick and Padgett. Infielders, Mize, McQuinn, York, Robinson, Lewis, Outlaw, Reese, Ryan and Culler. Ace outfielders are Marshall, Slaughter, the Walker brothers, Keller, Spence and Wright. Pitchers include Hudson, Pollet, Trucks, Wynn, Haynes, Kramer, Hearn, Ferriss, Casey, Voiselle, Scarborough, Sewell, Higbe and Shoun.

## Southwestern Talent

Moving to the Southwest and Rocky Mountain districts (here lumped together) we find a somewhat lighter roster, which is due probably to the fact that population runs thinner.

But, save in the catching department, its 14 fielders and 17 hurlers are promise of plenty of trouble.

Catcher, Frank Mancuso. Infielders, Fain, Philley, Kell, Stephens, Hatton, Fleming and Bill Robinson. Outfielders, Kiner, Buster Adams, Lindell, Seerey, Mitchell and Tucker. Pitchers, Brazle, Brecheen, Dobson, Hartung,

(Continued on page 8)

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\*J. T., Mancelona, Mich.



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\*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.



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\*D. E. G., Wausau, Wisc.



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I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.  
\*C. S. Lucien, Okla.



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I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.  
\*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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## THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 6)

Hugson, Kinder, Muncrief, Munger, Papish, Reynolds, Roe, Rowe, Sain and Wyse.

## The West Coast

There is of course no shortage of talent on the West Coast—not with that famous climate. All in all 29 batters and an even dozen pitchers are represented. They are—

Catchers, Partee and Lamanno. Infielders, Torgeson, Joost, Bernardino, Doerr, Gordon, Pesky, Lake, Dillinger, Elliott, Jorgensen and Lohrke. Outfielders, Ted Williams, the DiMaggio brothers, Sam Chapman, Westlake, Jurdnich, Metkovitch, Galan and Mike McCormick. Pitchers include Red Barrett, Bevins, Blackwell, Bonham, Christopher, Embree, Gregg, Jansen, Earl Johnson, Lem-on, Lombardi and Schanz.

If you read these results as carefully as the Cap you'll be convinced more than ever that baseball is our national game. Ball players are where you find them and you're apt to find them anywhere in the United States.

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

**F**OOTBALL with its thrilling plays and stirring cheers and rock 'em, sock 'em body contact is to be with us soon, so, in the October issue of **THRILLING SPORTS**, the autumn classic has the lead spot with a grand novelet by Joe Archibald, **A COACH FOR CINDERELLA**.

Wally Cade is young for a football coach, even for a minor league football college like Durham. He is not only young but none too sure of himself or of his ability to get the most out of his players. He is, in short, far removed from the traditional autocrat of the gridiron and blackboard, a role which his former rival, "Parson" Kinsey, plays to the hilt at powerful Southern.

Not only is Cade worried about his team, especially a potentially great back named Jorgensen, who can't seem to go all out on the field, but he is the victim of a romance tangled by his own self doubt.

But his very humanness wins the boys under him and he turns out to be a better psychologist than he realizes. So, when his



little team takes the field against Southern, things are ripe for an upset. This is one of the warmest as well as most exciting novelets we have ever printed.

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A series of bad breaks doesn't help matters any and it looks, for awhile, as if the youngster is going to get the dirty end of the stick and be labeled an all-time goat. But anything can happen in baseball and usually does—as readers of Mr. Lopez' stirring novelet will have to discover for themselves.

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(Continued on page 111)

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LET'S TRY THAT HIGH  
GROUND YONDER...  
WHAT'S THAT?

H-HELP!

JACK ROSS AND HIS GROUP OF STATE FORESTRY STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE AT THE END OF A DAY-LONG HIKE WHEN...



SIT TIGHT, MISS.  
HANK, LEND ME  
YOUR AIR PISTOL

CHASE HIM  
AWAY!



WAIT 'TILL HE STARTS  
FOR ME, THEN RUN  
LIKE BLAZES!



DAD AND HIS  
NICE TAME BULL!  
IF YOU HADN'T  
COME ALONG...

IT WAS NOTHING.  
SAY, MAYBE  
YOU KNOW  
A GOOD  
CAMPSITE



UNLESS YOUR MEAL'S  
TOO FAR ALONG, WE'D  
LIKE YOU TO JOIN  
US FOR SUPPER

SOUNDS  
WONDERFUL!  
WE CAN CLEAN  
UP IN A FEW  
MINUTES



WOW!  
THIS BLADE  
PULLS!

TRY  
ATHIN  
GILLETTE



SAY! I GO FOR  
THIS BLADE!  
NEVER ENJOYED  
A MORE  
REFRESHING  
SHAVE

THIN GILLETES  
ARE MIGHTY  
POPULAR ON THE  
CAMPUS. THEY'RE  
REALLY KEEN AND  
LONG LASTING



SHUCKS, YOU LADS  
CAN CAMP THERE  
ANY TIME

GREAT! YOU'LL  
BE SEEING A LOT  
OF US

I HOPE SO...  
YOU'RE MY IDEA OF  
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WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET FAST, SMOOTH, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES... AND SAVE MONEY, TOO... USE **THIN GILLETES**. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING AND EASIEST-SHAVING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. WHAT'S MORE, THIN GILLETES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A "T"... PROTECT YOU FROM THE SMART AND SCRAPE OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR **THIN GILLETES**

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Duke Emory had the power and the eye to smack that pill like a Babe Ruth, but he didn't rate till he got wise to himself!

a novelet by JOHN WILSON



# AN OLD-FASHIONED SINGLE

## CHAPTER I

### *The Game in His Stick*

**D**UKE EMORY stood in right field where the sun was fierce and challenging. The Stadium sun field was the toughest garden spot in the league to play, and many were the Titans who had found it to be an exit to the minors, or to other ball clubs. Duke Emory was an exception. He had the knack a-field, and with the stick. He was good.

He smiled slightly, watching the chunky, deep-chested Eagle hitter stepping in on the portside of the rectangle. Duke began shifting toward the foul marker, aware of the man's penchant for pulling the leather down the line. There were two away and the Eagles had the tie-making tallies on second and third bases. Top half of the eighth and "Whip" Morse hadn't given the Eagles a

taste of a run since the opening frame. The big guy, ace of a rather shabby mound corps, was pitching his heart out to hold onto his 3-1 margin.

Duke noticed "Hub" Willis, the Titan manager, motioning that he had gone too far. Hub wanted him to lay back deeper. Duke shrugged, and obeyed. It was Hub's ball club and he could call his shots any way he saw fit. But it didn't quite make sense, going against the percentage on the Eagle hitter. The guy could really hook the pill into the right field corner.

The Titan infielders were yipping it up plenty, in support of the big hurler. They had the spirit and hustle of a first place outfit, but unfortunately stood no better than fourth in the league standings. The breaks had been against them all the way. Injuries and sore flippers and plain bad luck had conspired to keep them off stride. They were losing those one-run ball games, and nothing could make a club more bitter than to drop tight ones. The fans and sports writers were kicking the spurs into the team, beginning to clamor for a shake-up, and mostly for the ouster of Hub Willis. The customers were not interested in alibis. Just in the win or lose ledger.

**T**HE Eagle hitter dug in, making with menacing gestures of the wood. Whip Morse fireballed for all he was worth. The big guy had a real stinger and a fine hook to mate with the speedball. A money chucker, this Whip Morse.

Duke tensed a bit, relaxed as the batter swung savagely and spun to the ground. Morse threw again and this time there was a sharp click of the hickory meeting the pitch. Duke was whirling with an intuitive sense, racing across the turf toward the foul line. He ran with a nice, smooth stride, yet the stride was deceptive in its wide coverage of territory. He muttered bitterly that Hub Willis had miscalculated in not allowing him to shift closer to the foul marker. That shot was going to be in there for extra bases. He saw the ball strike the turf, and suddenly expelled a breath of relief. It had dropped foul. Only inches had separated the blow from bringing home the Eagle base runners.

Duke strode back across the turf and watched the Eagles scramble out of their

dugout, hounding the ump and screaming their objections to the injustice of the call. When the rhubarb ended, Duke was closer to the foul line, where he'd played the hitter in the past. Well, that's one time Hub had been wrong and it didn't cost him.

There was a sudden clash of voices sounding in his ear and Duke abruptly woke up. The ball was sailing high and deep almost into right-center. He sprang into swift motion, and tried to line up the smash. He got a glimpse of Roy Warren on the other side of him, running desperately. Roy could hook 'em out of the sky as pretty as any leather-chaser in the loop. But Roy wasn't going to get more than close to this one. This shot was for Duke to handle.

There was a concrete wall not many yards away, and Duke could almost smell the thing. He was hoofing at top speed, but realized it would take a miraculous catch to haul the hoist down.

Duke lurched, but did not leave his feet. He felt the leather flick off his fingertips, then strike against the wall.

Duke pulled up, and it was both beautiful and lucky, the way he handled the carom. He straightened and simultaneously got the ball away, a terrific peg that traveled like a projectile into third base. "Bosh" Novack, crouching there, took the throw and slapped it on the hitter, trying to take three bases on the blow. The Eagle was out. But the runs were across, and the score was knotted, 3-all.

Applause spilled into the afternoon as Duke jogged toward the dugout. He was the one big bright spot in the Titan line-up and the fans cheered him mightily. Sometimes it got a bit embarrassing because most of his teammates were collecting ripe chunks of Bronx chorus. But he had earned the acclaim of the fans, had given them plenty to cheer about since joining the outfit three seasons ago.

In his first season, he had copped the outstanding rookie award, and the next trip around had just missed taking the batting crown. Nineteen four-masters in that first season and twenty-four during his sophomore year in the big time. Now with about ten weeks of the race finished, he had already cracked twenty-six four-base blasts. They were calling Duke Emory another Bambino and the guy liked the idea. He was definitely

leveling at that fabulous, sixty home-run record.

He ducked into the dugout, aware of Hub Willis' stare on him. Hub was a bulky, red-faced man, mild in his treatment of players and intense in his love of the game.

"Duke," Hub said almost gently, "you get your signals tangled out there? I tell you not to play that foul line too close on Murdock and the next time I look you're sittin' on that chalk again. That hurt us, kid. You know that, huh?"

"I got your sign," Duke said evenly. "I was playing right where you tell me when Murdock slaps that thing into the corner foul. Then I just sorta stick around there outa habit. The guy just loves to punch 'em into that slot."

"He didn't hit down the line driving those two runs across," Hub said, a sterner note in his voice. "He hit to right-center—just where we had him tabbed."

**D**UKE peeled a glance down the wood, and grim-jawed Titans were staring at him. They couldn't hear what Hub was saying, but they knew, because they'd all seen Hub give him the sign to move over toward center.

"All right, I looked bad on that one," Duke said tightly. "Just like I did cutting that guy down at third."

"No, I looked bad, kid," Hub said drily. "Very bad." He turned away.

Duke's eye scanned the bench, and he could feel a tight, twisting knot rising in him. It was all there, the dark rebellion, their odd resentment of him. They had never cared much for him, but not until this season had it been so undisguised. They recognized his ability, but off the diamond they wanted none of him. His glance settled a moment on Whip Morse, hulked on the bench, his jaw line taut. Whip just shook his head a little.

The knot jumped another notch in Duke. He had saved the guy's neck cutting down the base-runner at third. So what if he hadn't gone along with Hub's sign? It hadn't really been intentional. Who could say that if he had shifted according to Hub the hitter wouldn't have hit down the line?

There was a sudden surge of voices in the Titan dugout. One down, Nap Comstock, the left-fielder, had rifled a double against the score board. The

Titans were off the wood with the blow, hollering themselves hoarse for Mike Lindsey, their stocky second-sacker, to paddle home the tie-breaking run. Mike, who had never hit below .290 in six Titan seasons, was down to a miserable .201 mark. He seemed to be tagging the apple as hard as ever, but the fielders were getting in front of his shots.

Duke picked out his willow and strode to the on-deck circle, carefully observing the Eagle hurler's motion.

Mike Lindsey took a ball, then whistled a screaming shot into the left field stands, which drew a gasp from the crowd. The ball sliced foul. Lindsey belted a couple more solid whacks, but couldn't get one into fair territory. The count rode the full route and Lindsey exploded a savage belt through the middle. The Eagle shortstopper, running with the crack of the bat, swooped behind the bag, digging the ball out of the dirt. He submarined the pellet toward first without breaking stride, and Mike Lindsey's bad luck streak continued to plague him. Nap Comstock advanced to third.

Heavy-shouldered, black-haired "Biff" Kern, at Duke's elbow, slapped him encouragingly on the arm.

"Bust it up, kid," Biff said. "Make it Number Twenty-seven."

Duke grinned. "We'll see what we can do about that, Biff."

Kern, the first-sacker, was the one Titan who did not treat him as some sort of outcast. It was Kern, in fact, who had helped him develop the home-run knack.

"Keep swinging," Biff said. "Swing for the jackpot, kid."

Duke stepped in there, wagging the yellow ash, but the Eagle hurler walked off the mound. There was a call of time and the infield huddled around the Eagle left-hander. Duke moved back and saw Hub Willis coming toward him.

"Just bring 'im home," Hub said. "Slap one over the infield, and let Whip worry about next inning."

"If he lays one in there it'll be over the infield, Hub—maybe over the fence."

"We'll be satisfied with just a good old-fashioned single," Hub said evenly.

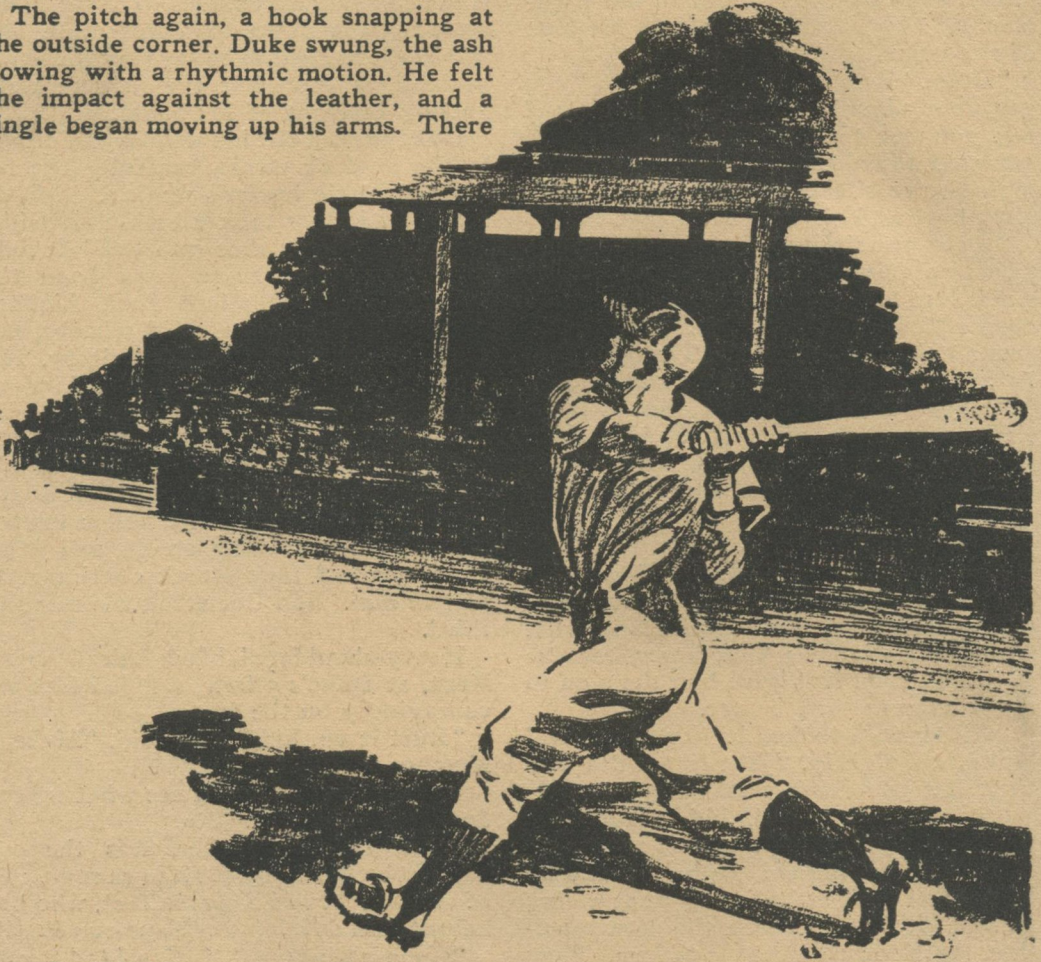
The Eagle chucker eased a half-speed ball through. It was low and outside, obviously intended to make him fluke into the dirt. A hook flashed in, again low-breaking and missing the target range.

Duke waited, big, loose-muscled. He was on his own, the sign from the dug-out having given him the option of taking or hitting away. The ball game was wrapped up in his stick, and they knew it.

The pitch again, a hook snapping at the outside corner. Duke swung, the ash flowing with a rhythmic motion. He felt the impact against the leather, and a tingle began moving up his arms. There

batter when the guy caught hold of a big, fast one and belted it into the left field stands.

The Eagles came in for their final licks, 4-3. Biff Kern drilled a single to



was a sudden, wild burst of sound mushrooming from the stands.

As Duke started down the base path, the cheers stopped abruptly, turned to groans.

The Eagle picketman in left was scurrying deep into left-center brushing his shoulders against the fence.

He leaped, pulling a spectacular one-handed stab of the pellet, and the Titan threat was broken. Duke shook his head. He'd got plenty of depth and leverage, but he'd ridden the ball into left center instead of down the line. Even so, it had taken a brilliant play to retire him.

They played the ninth. Whip Morse put the first pair of Eagles down with ease. He had two strikes on the third

left. Frankie Nichols sacrificed him along the keystone.

Then an infield bingle off the stick of Roy Warren, and the Eagles had base runners on first and third. Bosh Novack cracked into a double-play and the game was over. The Titans had dropped another heartbreaker.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Bonus Promise*

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**D**UKE went to the dressing room. The Titans were still wallowing in their slump, but he himself hadn't had

too rough an afternoon. Somewhere in the headlines would be the words, "Duke Emory Hits Number Twenty-six." He'd been robbed of a second four-master.

Whip Morse came into the dressing room, his face savage. The sting of the defeat was everywhere in the room. Hub Willis was the last to enter, and he bolted the door. He said nothing, though. He walked to his office on the other side of the dressing room.

Duke was pulling an arm out of his shirt when he suddenly stopped, Whip Morse's voice in his ear.

"Never had more stuff on the pill," Whip was saying. "I win twenty ball games with less stuff than I'm puttin' on

dle of it I'll stick a certain manager's name."

"No," Whip Morse said. "Hub is okay. We just ain't winnin' for him the way we ought to be doing."

"You'll find out differently," Kern said. "Much differently."

"Look," the hurler said abruptly. "You and Hub never did care much for each other, but some of us think he's a pretty good manager."

"It's no secret that me and Hub don't hit it off," Kern said. "But I play ball for him. I give everything I got on that ball field and I like to win games just as much as you guys."

"That you do," Whip conceded. "At



Duke punched the apple toward right

the thing now. It beats me what's happening."

"You're as good as they got in this league, Whip," Biff Kern said. "But you can't keep the pressure on the hitters the whole way like you once did. You're older, and we're not hitting for you, and a lot of other things are mixed up on this ball club."

"Like what?" the hurler demanded.

Kern laughed. "I'll draw you a nice big blueprint, Whip. Right in the mid-

least you don't cross him up on the field like our hero centerfielder. He sure paid us off good today."

Duke put his shirt down and walked over to Whip Morse.

"Get smart, fella," Duke said. "I didn't throw that home-run ball in the ninth. I didn't give that guy Murdock something pretty to hit so that he could ram

the thing against the wall in the eighth. Be a bit more careful about your lip."

Whip laughed. "That thing Murdock belted would have been a putout if you'd played where Hub stuck you."

"Second-guessing," Duke scoffed. "He might have poked down the line if I'd moved over."

The hurler shook his head. "No, I was pitchin' him to hit to left or center. I missed on one shot and he rapped it down the line foul." An odd grin slid across his lips. "Maybe if you wasn't so busy trying to knock every ball out of the lot, you'd know Hub had the business on the guy."

"Yeah," Duke said. "You know what you can do with that alibi, Whip. Frame it."

It was then that Duke noticed Hub Willis standing in the doorway. He didn't know how much Hub had heard. But apparently it was a lot, because his face was pale and he seemed to be straining for control. He strode up to Biff Kern.

"I'll take the blame for what's happening to this ball club, Kern," he said tensely. "I fired you once and I'll do it again, if necessary."

"Maybe," Kern said evenly. "Maybe you can make it stick. But you won't be any more popular for getting rid of a three-hundred hitter. You'll need a better excuse than an old grudge."

"We'll see," Hub said. He turned to Duke. "I wanna see you before you leave, kid."

**D**UKE took his shower and while he was dressing somebody unlocked the door and the newspapermen came in. Leading the pack was a burly, red-faced man—George Stevens, the owner of the ball club.

Stevens singled Duke out.

"There's the boy who's going to put a new home-run record in the book," he said to the reporters. "He's got the power and the eye to turn the trick." He slapped Duke on the shoulder. "A ten-thousand-dollar bonus if you can do it, kid. And a hundred bucks for every shot you knock outa the ball yard."

"That's sure worth shooting for," Duke said.

"Leave it to ole Georgie to take care of his ball players who can handle the wood. He pays for value received."

"I'll try and keep right on giving you

a full measure of value, Mr. Stevens," Duke said.

The owner gave him a satisfied grin. He motioned to a lanky, dark-browed reporter, whom Duke recognized—Lou Shaw, a columnist.

"Lou here wants to do a story on you, Duke," Stevens said. "Suppose you and him fix up an appointment."

"Any time," Duke said. "Any time at all."

The newspaperman nodded. "Suppose we have dinner tomorrow and sorta mull things over."

"Good enough."

Duke saw an odd little grin flicker across the newspaperman's lips, as though he sensed the dislike of the other Titans for him and the bonus arrangement.

"They're jealous," Duke thought. "It's hurtin' them something awful because they figure I've got one terrific chance of busting that home-run record."

Hub Willis came on the scene again. "Who unlocked that door?" he asked.

The air was electric. "I ordered it unlocked," George Stevens said briskly. "A ball club is news, and the fans have a right to read about their team."

Hub Willis stood staring at the club owner. When he spoke, his voice was surprisingly quiet.

"You'll have to leave and take your reporters with you, Stevens," he said. "I don't think most of the boys are in any mood to do much talking."

Stevens eyed Hub a moment and every man in the room knew that the owner was serving notice that Hub's hitch as manager was about finished. Hub won his point, though, and the Titan owner and reporters filed out, but he had probably lost his job, too.

When Duke went into Hub's office, the little manager looked tired and beaten. The guy somehow seemed a lot older than he had at the beginning of the season.

"Sit down, Duke," Hub said quietly. "There's a thing or two on my mind."

"You gonna start blaming me all over again for losing the game?" Duke said. "I pull maybe one slight blunder and I'm the biggest heel that ever lived. But let them"—he pointed toward the dressing room—"kick the apple around and hit into doubleplays and that's okay."

"No, it isn't okay," Hub said. "Those guys are knocking themselves out trying



to turn the breaks in their favor." He smiled faintly. "You're the only really relaxed player on this club."

Duke shrugged. "I play each ball game as it comes along. I let yesterday's game alone."

"That's partly because you've never been in a real slump, Duke. Sure, you've had it rough for spells, but nothing like what Mike Lindsey is experiencing. That guy hasn't been able to buy a base hit most of the way. It's almost as bad with some of the other boys. There's Whip Morse, pitching great ball and losing games that should be in his win column."

"What's it going to get me worrying about those guys?" Duke said drily.

"Nothing," Hub said. "Nothing that you'd care about."

"Then why the sermon?"

"I thought perhaps I could make you understand why you don't rate too highly with the guys. But I was mistaken. You're stubborn."

"Maybe stubborn, but not altogether wrong, Hub. They hate me and I know it. They don't like the idea of me pulling down the kind of dough the club is paying me. Now it's tearing their insides loose that I've a chance to crack the home-run mark."

"Maybe a little," Hub said. "And maybe because you're strictly for yourself. And that's too bad, Duke. You could easily be one of the game's real greats except for that hard streak. That sorta kicks team play out of the window."

"I'm doing okay," Duke said. "I clout that apple okay and nobody has ever said I was a mope in the field."

**H**UB took a deep breath.

"Yeah, you're good—almost great. Sometimes I think I'm screwy, arguing with a guy who can play your brand of ball. I should get along with you fine, and maybe the other fellows are wrong, too."

"I could holler real loud and the fans would be on my side, Hub. You know what would happen then, huh?"

"It'd be a wonderful excuse for Stevens to fire me. The fans would believe there's something wrong with a manager who can't get along with your batting average."

Duke nodded. "I'm not a squawker, Hub. There'll be none of that from me."

"Don't go out of your way for me,

Duke. If I thought benching you was best for the gang, I'd do it. Even if my job depended on it. That's the way I am, Duke."

"Kind of stubborn yourself."

"Only where it'd do some good for the team as a whole. No matter how good you are, you still aren't worth the rest of the team put together. Remember that."

Duke straightened. "You bet I'll remember."

"Tell me one thing," Hub said slowly. "Just how much does it mean to you if you hit more than sixty homers?"

"It means everything to me to crack the record," Duke said, at length. "Everything any ball player could ever want."

The Titan manager nodded. "I suppose it does." He looked straight at Duke. "This may sound odd, but somehow I've got the impression that you can hit more than sixty."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Duke said, surprised. "Here's hoping I can pole a couple tomorrow."

"Here's hoping we win the ball game," Hub said tonelessly.

## CHAPTER III

### *Not Wanted*

**T**HE next day the Titans played the getaway game with the Eagles. They had dropped both tilts of the series, and that hurt all the more because the Eagles were a sixth-place outfit.

In the dressing room, Frankie Nichols, the backstop, said:

"This is a fine new afternoon. Leave us take one ball game from these tramps, and get rolling, gang."

They ran out there, full of spirit and with such enthusiasm that Duke was startled. Apparently, they had talked things over and decided to make one all-out bid to launch a winning streak. Whip Morse touched Duke on the shoulder.

"C'mon, fella, pour those runs across the plate. The knocks don't have to be round-trippers, kid. Any kind with the guys on the sacks."

"Yeah, any kind," Duke said confidently.

It was a Sunday afternoon crowd, large and noisy. They kept shouting for

Duke to find the home-run range. Duke didn't disappoint them. He put on a Show. He walloped three in succession into the left field stands, then switched to right and pounded a tremendous poke beyond the barrier. On his last trip to the batting cage, he was feeling good and somehow knowing he was going to belt a couple. He saw Biff Kern looking at him, and an odd smile was on the big first-sacker's face.

"Atta way to hit 'em, Duke."

"What's this peace movement all about, Biff?" Duke asked. "A little while ago, Whip was waving the mistletoe over my head."

Biff shrugged. "The guys had a little meeting last night. They decided to forget their dislike of you in the interest of the team. They decided they'd make you give up the idea of clubbing home runs and go in for singles and doubles."

"Nice of them to make up my mind," Duke said flatly. "And what's the matter with home runs?"

Kern's eyes mocked him. "Maybe a ten-thousand-dollar bonus that Stevens offered you."

Duke swallowed hard. Imagine wanting him to ease up on the long ball hitting deliberately. Nobody had stopped the Babe when he was socking home-runs.

The Eagles pitched a right-hander, "Buck" Marvin. He was big and swift and the kind of chucker Duke liked to hit against. Duke had always been able to murder speedball hurling, and Marvin had never been much of a puzzle to him. Hub gave the assignment to "Red" Jensen, a broad-shouldered vet who had every kind of pitch in his assortment. But mostly a head full of savvy and a tab on every hitter in the loop.

Jensen put the Eagles down in order in the first frame, and the Titans were stopped just as cold in their half. It was scoreless in the second when Duke dug in at the platter. The roar that always greeted his appearance in a hitting rôle boomed into the afternoon. Duke watched a couple of tricky deliveries sail past him. He wasn't a guess-hitter, Duke, but alert for a curve that would try to take a piece of the plate with it.

The delivery slashed in—higher, perhaps, than Buck Marvin meant it to be. Duke stepped forward, swinging just a little under the pitch. The ball soared and kept rising, and there wasn't a doubt

that it was a four-bagger. It went into the second tier. Number Twenty-Seven.

Duke made his circuit of the base paths, and disappeared into the dugout.

"That was a nice one, Duke," Hub Willis said.

Duke looked at him curiously. "I dunno what makes. One minute you're telling me what a bum I am pulling for the fence. Now I bop one and I'm a great guy. Kinda beats me."

"I wish I could explain it," Hub said. "But you'll have to get the slant on things yourself."

**T**HE Titans held onto their one tally margin, and seemed on the verge of busting the game wide open in the fourth. Iffy Martin, leading off, drew a pass. He hiked to second on a slashing single that Nap Comstack delivered into short straightaway center. Two aboard, and Duke was up, and the Titan fans were hollering themselves hoarse for him to unload another shot into the stands.

He wanted to belt one this trip something awful. So they wanted him to ease up on the home-run hitting, huh? Just throw away that ten-grand bonus, the hundred bucks per home-run knock.

He gripped the wood and waited for the delivery. It came, spinning out of that whirling, fast ball motion. He started his swing, suddenly tried to cut it, but too late. The Eagle slabster had pulled the string, curving him low and on the outside. The ball plopped dully off the wood, rolling to the mound.

Buck Marvin pounced on the ball and set a double-play in motion. What had appeared likely to be a big inning became a one-run frame. The Titans led, 2-0.

Red Jensen hurled superb one-hit ball for five innings. The Eagles began to open up on him in the sixth. He had one down, and the hitter caught hold of a delivery and smashed it into the left-field stands. A double and a single followed. The sacks were loaded.

The Titans knotted around Red Jensen, and Hub Willis bounced out and they mulled over the situation. Jensen stayed in and prepared to face the next Eagle hitter. The count leveled at two-two and Jensen pitched again. Duke took one look at the pill riding deep into right-center and began running. But even as he traveled at top speed, he knew

this shot was ticketed to land against the wall. He would have to turn on some fancy acrobatics to snag the hoist.

He decided to play the carom. It was smarter baseball than to risk his neck on a catch that was impossible. He slowed perceptibly, maneuvering for the carom off the wall.

Just about then he noticed Roy Warren's spikes let loose in an all-out burst of speed. Duke knew what was going to happen even before Warren leaped. There was a sickening thud as Roy smacked against the concrete, and dropped to the turf.

The base runners who had started burning the paths, now were furiously retracing their steps. For Roy Warren was miraculously clutching the leather! Duke, racing to his side, jerked it from his hand and let loose a bulletlike heave to the plate. The Eagle on third just did make it home.

Confusion broke out all over the field. Titans were rushing toward Roy Warren, sprawled on the turf. Doc Arlen, the team trainer, bent over the stricken centerfielder, and was calling for the stretcher.

Duke felt a bewildered sick wave surge through him. It could have been him, instead of the centerfielder, who was being carried off the field. It had been crazy, Warren trying to make that catch. It would have been smarter to have left it alone. And yet, Duke felt an odd sense of guilt. That ball had been more in his territory and the plucky centerfielder appeared to have made his bid on realizing that he, Duke, had quit.

Red Jensen retired the next batter. The score was tied, 2-2. But the Titans had lost their centerfielder, and how badly Roy Warren had been hurt, they did not know.

There was gloom in the dugout. Every eye was focused on Duke when he came in.

"They know Roy got hurt trying to make a play that was mine," Duke thought.

In the sixth he smashed his second home run of the game. But even that did not relieve the savage fury inside him. It did not change the grim stares of the Titans.

The Eagles banged across a pair of runs in the seventh and went ahead, 4-3. But the Titans did some clubbing on their own account and knocked Buck

Marvin out with a three-run blast. What had started as a hurling duel became a battle of roaring base hits. The Eagles fought back in the eighth, tagging Red Jensen hard and sending him to the showers. They scored five times, going ahead, 9-6.

**D**UKE almost got the Titans back in the game in the lower half of the inning. He stepped to the plate with a full quota of runners on the sacks. He whaled a tremendous sock into the deepest section of left-center. They were laying back deep for him and the Eagle picketman stabbed the leather on the dead-run.

In the ninth, Duke stopped another budding Eagle rally, whirling in to pick a low liner off his shoestrings. He nailed the base runner on second.

There were two down and one on first when Duke pumped his third home run into the stands. The quiet following Roy Warren's crack-up, was suddenly shattered. The ball park rocked under the ear-splitting roar. Duke had socked three home runs in a single game! They were still cheering him when Biff Kern almost duplicated the home-run, sending the Eagle fielder to the deepest corner of left to snare his vicious belt. The Titans lost, 9-8.

Duke showered and dressed as quickly as possible. The Titans were in a sullen mood. They sat around waiting for some word on Roy Warren. Now and then, Duke caught a sharp remark aimed at him. They were pinning the guilt on him for what had happened in the outfield. His own throat was lumpy.

He saw Hub Willis as he was leaving. "Any word on Warren?" Duke asked. "He's going to be okay, I hope."

The manager eyed him. "G'wan and keep that appointment with the newspaperman," Hub said sharply. "Maybe if you were really worried the thing wouldn't have happened in the first place."

"I see," Duke said. "I shoved Warren into the concrete, according to how you guys look at it."

"I'd rather have one guy named Roy Warren on my club than nine like you," Hub said.

Duke turned and went outside. The autograph bugs were waiting for him at the players' exit, shouting his name, pushing score cards in front of him.

Before, this kind of thing had put a warm tingle in his blood. There was none now. And that was odd because in this game had been his biggest moment of glory. Never before had he hit three home runs in a single game.

An awful ache was burning in him. His thoughts were with the others in the locker room, waiting for news on Roy Warren. But he wasn't one of them. He wasn't wanted. That was the worst of all.

He went back to the hotel where the Titans were staying. He almost wanted to cry. What did they want from him, he asked himself over and over again. And the pain was all the greater because he knew he could not give the hunk of his heart that the game demanded.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Loyalty*

**S**LOUCHED down on his bed in his hotel room, Duke thought back to when he'd been a little shaver and his old man a ball player. Never good enough to make the big time, his dad. Always a bush leaguer. So there had been dusty roads and shabby hotels and never enough money.

And there had been heartbreak. The heartbreak of a man who had set the big leagues as his goal, then realized that the goal was beyond his limitations. He remembered his father's struggle to survive in the game, the shattering of the dream to which his dad and his mother had clung for so many seasons. And after a while, his dad had not even been good enough to play in organized baseball. Then the semi-pros.

Somewhere during the years, Duke's pride in his father had slipped away. He had not been able to help feeling a sort of resentment toward his father for not providing better for his family. He had seen his mother's beauty fade, and finally the hope in her dark eyes. But the day Duke entered organized baseball himself, he had seen hope in her eyes again.

"You're good," his dad had said, "and you'll be a better ball player than I ever could have hoped to be."

"I'll be a big leaguer, Dad," he'd said.

"I'll make it or get out of the game."

"I tried, Duke," his father had said wistfully. "I tried awfully hard for you and Mom."

Duke had seen the hurt in his dad's eyes, and had felt ashamed for losing pride in him.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he said. "Somehow I'm going to make up for all those tough seasons you and Mom have known."

His father had taught him the game, and it was in his blood. He had taken less than three seasons to move upon the big league horizon. But he was grimly determined never to be without money again. He built his parents a home, bought them all they had given up hope of ever owning. No son could have been more devoted.

Duke Emory fell asleep. . . . The jangle of the phone awoke him. He picked up the receiver and a voice said: "Hey, fella, what's happened to that dinner deal we fixed up yesterday?"

"Look," Duke said, "I'd rather make it another time."

There was a laugh. "I'm on a bit of a schedule myself, old man, but if you want to skip dinner, I'll drop by a little later."

"All right," Duke said. "I'll see you here."

He had no appetite, and no desire to see a newspaperman. They were always too personal.

Biff Kern, his roommate, came in and Duke asked about Roy Warren.

"He's got a concussion," Kern said. "He'll be okay, but he's finished for the season."

"That's bum luck, but I'm glad he's going to be okay."

"He practically asked for it," Kern said. "He's been around long enough to know that you can't mix with concrete and stay healthy. But sometimes Warren forgets he's not the whole outfield. He forgets that the Titans have a pretty good rightfielder."

Duke looked at him. "The guys hate me, and you know it. They're blaming me for what hapened to Warren."

"They'd use anything to pin a rap on you," Kern said. "There's too much jealousy about the way you've stolen the show. What the Titans need is a few trades and sales to make 'em realize the score."

"You've stood up for me, Biff," Duke said. "I owe you plenty."

"Forget it," Biff said. He looked curiously at Duke. "Just one thing you can do for me, though. Kinda put in a nice word for ole Biff with the newspapermen. You know—give 'em that stuff about me helping to make a home-run hitter outa you."

"That'll be easy," Duke said. "You did put the bug in my stick." But he thought Biff's remark odd.

It was about eight o'clock when Lou Shaw arrived. He nodded to Biff, then suggested to Duke:

"Maybe we can go down to the bar and have a beer, Duke." Plainly he didn't want a third party in on the interview.

"I don't drink," Duke said.

**B**IFF shrugged.

"Okay, so I'll go have a beer and you two characters can holler yourselves hoarse." He strolled out.

"That guy can't wait for Hub to be bounced," Lou Shaw said. "He figures he's got Hub's job wrapped up, and it could be he's right."

Duke shot a questioning glance at the columnist. "Biff's never mentioned anything like that to me." He paused thoughtfully. "But Biff would do okay as a manager, I guess."

"Yeah, I'd expect you to be his Number One fan. You and Biff are palsy, huh? He showed you a thing or two about getting more wrist action into your swing than you had when you first came up."

"You don't like the guy, do you, Shaw?"

Lou Shaw laughed a little, ignoring the direct query. "Your batting average is about twenty points below the mark you were hitting this time last season. Of course, you're on quite a home-run tear, and that excuses your slump in the

other departments."

Duke didn't like Shaw's grin or the tone of his voice. "If you've come here to make with wisecracks you can find your hat and the door, Shaw. I'm not in the mood."

"Now you're being Duke Emory, the hard guy." The grin was still there, but it was not defiant. "There's a Duke Emory that I like better—the nice kid who is buying his folks a home and taking care of them."

He drew a sharp breath. "Where'd you find out about that?"

"It's a newspaperman's business to poke around," Shaw said drily. "I was curious because you're a hard, cold player. I wondered what made you that way."

"Just because you're a newspaperman, do you have to snoop into a guy's private life?" Duke asked evenly. "Can't you just stick to batting averages and base hits?"

"I could, but I don't wanna," Shaw said, smiling. "No more than I want to see a great ball player ruin himself."

"I'm doing all right."

"Not as good as you might think, Duke. You're letting Biff Kern kid you along. Kern is a clubhouse lawyer, and plenty ambitious. He wants to be manager something awful, and at Hub Willis' expense."

"Some interview," Duke said. "I ask the questions and you give me the answers."

"I wish I could give you all the answers," Shaw said quietly.

"Maybe the answer to this grudge between Kern and Hub?"

"That's easy, Duke. Your pal Biff Kern played for the Lions when Hub managed the club. Biff figured he was

[Turn page]

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bigger than the manager, with an eye to Hub's job, of course. Hub got rid of him and there was quite a howl from the fans. They said the deal cost the club the pennant, and maybe it did. Hub didn't stay with the Lions much longer."

Duke was puzzled. "How does Biff get back on one of Hub's ball clubs? It was Hub who hired Biff."

"No, it wasn't," Shaw said. "The guy who hired Biff was George Stevens. And Stevens made some sort of deal with Biff about the managing job. He knew if there was one guy who could make things miserable for Hub and possibly force him to resign, it's Biff Kern."

"It seems to me that it would be a lot simpler for Stevens to fire Hub."

Lou Shaw laughed. "What with Hub's contract having two more seasons to run, and having to pay him off in full? No, he'd rather have Hub resign and accept a small settlement. Stevens has lost plenty of dough on the Titans, and unless there's a sudden spurt in the turnstiles, he's going to be forced to sell."

"He offered me a ten-grand bonus if I crack the sixty home-run mark," Duke said. "That doesn't sound as though the sheriff is breathing on his neck."

"It'll be worth all of that, and more," Shaw said. "Right now your four-basers are pulling the crowds. The more you bang, the bigger the crowds. It won't make too much difference what happens to the rest of the ball club. Stevens will hang on, and possibly force Hub out. You can see the feeling there is between Stevens and Hub. Look what happened when Stevens ordered that dressing room door unlocked."

**D**UKE nodded. "I had an idea that you and Stevens were pals."

"I'm a newspaperman," Shaw said, his grin returning. "Stevens hasn't got any strings on me."

"Look," Duke said abruptly, "I'm in this game to make a buck, see? I intend to keep stepping up there and shaking the base knocks outa my stick. It just happens that my bat can buy that home for my folks. It can buy a lot of things we never had. This is my chance at the big brass ring, and I'm not going to miss it, Shaw. I want those home runs and I want that ten-grand bonus."

Lou Shaw nodded. "I don't expect to change your attitude in ten minutes, kid. You've been kicked around, and so has

your old man. Maybe I don't blame you for wanting to wring every dime you can outa your stick." He shook his head. "But keep an eye on this guy Kern."

Duke's mouth tightened. "The one guy on the club who hasn't treated me like I had the measles! Brother, you're crazy if you think I'd cross Biff."

"Go ahead and continue to rip the heart out of a good team," Shaw said slowly. "Keep shooting for the stands, and never mind how many times you miss. The longer you keep the Titans in an uproar, the better for Kern landing Hub's job."

"You stick to batting out words, pal-sy," Duke said. "The base-hitting department is mine."

## CHAPTER V

### *Benched*

**N**EXT day the Rams came in for a set of three games. They were a hard-driving and surprising outfit. None of the experts had given them better than a fourth-place finish. But they had got off to a whirlwind beginning and, with the Blues, had drawn away from the pack. They were giving the favored Blues an awful scrap for the loop's top rung, and showing no sign of weakening.

Titan fans were plenty excited about Duke's home-run hitting splurge. For a Monday crowd it was surprisingly large and they screamed for a home-run on each of Duke's appearances at the dish. The fans also got a look-see at Ed Orlich, a rookie who had made the overnight hop from a farm club, and taken over Roy Warren's centerfield patrol. Hub probably had a hunch the rookie might turn in one of those miraculous efforts which occasionally crown a rookie's debut.

Orlich, hitting in the third spot, got his first taste of big league hurling in the opening frame. One down, and a base runner on second, he stood and watched a third strike slice away a piece of the plate.

The groan of the fans quickly surged into a roar as Duke strode to the square. The Ram chucker slow-balled him, and twice chipped the corners. The next delivery had the earmark of a sneak third

strike and Duke leveled on it. He realized when it was too late that he'd gone for the bait, and popped to the Ram third-sacker.

He trotted to his picket-post, eying the rookie on the other side of him. The kid seemed too tense. Duke knew the feeling. He thought of giving the rookie a few rah-rah words, then shrugged. Hub had rushed the guy into the game, so let Hub worry. The old hard-boiled attitude blotted out what he really wanted to do.

The Ram lead-off was an easy put-out. Up came the Number Two man and spanked a vicious belt into center, a tough shot for the best of ballhawks to gauge. Orlich moved in, then suddenly began to back pedal. Duke himself was in motion, streaking across the turf, backing up the play. The leather went up against the score board, and Duke was on it, playing the carom. He got the peg away with amazingly quick motion. The hitter got the surprise of his life going into second, when Mike Lindsey slapped the ball on him. The next Ram went down and the side was away.

Duke started toward the dugout and Ed Orlich cut in alongside him.

"Thanks, Duke," he said. "That peg was a pippin and sure saved my neck. I'll try and make it up to you—somehow."

Duke looked at him curiously. "That's what I'm out there for, fella. You don't owe me any thanks."

"You don't mind if I say it was some piece of outfielding," the rookie said, grinning.

It was something almost strange to Duke, that look of gratitude on Ed Orlich's face. And suddenly Duke could understand how much the play meant to the rookie. The confidence of knowing that he had a guy alongside of him who could help him over the early rough spots.

"Just relax, fella," Duke said. "These guys ain't no better than you or you wouldn't be up here with 'em. Kinda remember that."

Duke saw the tenseness go out of Orlich's face.

"I'll remember that, Duke," he said. "Thanks again."

Duke felt the warmth of the guy's grin, and found himself hoping Ed Orlich made the grade. It was the first time he had ever really rooted for any-

one except himself.

Duke went hitless his first two times at bat. Then, in the sixth, he lashed his thirtieth home run into the left-field stands. He had reached the halfway mark in his bid to shatter one of baseball's greatest records.

What decided the contest in favor of the Titans was not Duke's home run. The blow came from the stick of the rookie, Ed Orlich. With two away in the ninth, Orlich got his first big league base hit. A blazing single to right with Titans aboard the second and third has-socks. He broke up the ball game, the Titans winning, 4-3.

**T**HERE were wide grins on the faces of the Titans in the dressing room. They pounded Ed Orlich's shoulders, and Duke never seen a happier kid. You'd think he had smacked a round-tripper with the sacks loaded, in a World Series game.

"Give Duke an assist on that bingle," Orlich shouted. "He sharpened the runners under me."

A couple of the Titans looked at Duke but said nothing. But Duke knew that the rookie was getting a bigger thrill out of cracking that single than he himself had ever got in hitting for the circuit.

The Rams took the Titans in the second game. Duke went hitless.

The fortunes of the Titans continued to be topsy-turvy during the next couple of weeks. Duke reaped a nice crop of home-run shots, won ball games for them, and the homer output jumped to thirty-five. The newspapers were running a daily box comparing Duke's challenge with the Babe's total for a similar number of games.

But the real test would come during August and September, the months during which baseball's Sultan of Swat had unleashed his greatest barrage of four-baggers. Nevertheless, Duke was building himself a cushion. At his present rate he would not have to match the Babe's torrid pace of August, 1927.

Promising as Duke's home-run onslaught appeared, his batting average was dwindling. The rival picketmen were snaring many of his lusty clouts. Time and again when a one-base bingle would have copped the game for the Titans, Duke aimed for the stands.

So in spite of Duke's four base wallop- ing, the Titans gathered no momentum.

They were winning more games than they were losing, but not making any inroads on the galloping Blues and Rams. Duke was not the factor he once had been. He simply was not driving as many runs across the platter.

He realized this, but could not put that ten-grand bonus out of his mind. The thought was always with him of how wonderful it would be to clear the mortgage on the home for his folks.

But most of all would be the thrill of breaking the Babe's home-run record. That would be a buffer against financial disaster. He would practically be able to name his own salary. So let the Titans go on hating him. There would be one, big last laugh, and he would have it. In part, the savage hurt of their contempt made him fiercely determined to attain his home-run goal.

One afternoon after the Titans had dropped a 1-0 game, the team came into the dressing room muttering. Mike Lindsey flung his glove across the room.

"I dunno why Hub let the pitcher hit for himself in the seventh with a runner on second," he snorted. "The percentage called for a pinch-hitter."

"How 'bout in the eighth?" Nap Comstock said. "Novack walks and Hub calls the hit-and-run. So Bosh gets tangled in a double-play that finishes us."

As the players went on griping, Duke saw the odd grin on Biff Kern's lips. Biff's prophecy that the Titans would get around to blaming Hub for their woes was becoming fact. They were beginning to lose confidence in their manager. The lash of defeat was causing them to lose their judgment. . . .

Few hitters ever really come upon the source of a slump, except to realize they cannot buy a bingle. Duke had never experienced a lengthy slump, he did not know quite how to meet the death of base hits that suddenly came out of nowhere. Maybe it was the pressure as he approached the Babe's record. But he was not a player to let pressure get under his skin.

"Keep swinging for that fence," Biff Kern told him. "You'll come out of it."

In ten games, Duke got exactly two hits and both of them were circuit clouts. The opposing chuckers were seldom letting him see a fast ball, feeding him slow stuff and keeping the ball low and curved. He was letting them bait him into swinging on more bad balls than

he had ever gone for in the past.

ON THE opening of the series with the Bears, Hub Willis said bluntly: "I'm benching you, Duke. The pitchers have got your number, so I've got to pull you outa there."

Duke swallowed hard. "You know that it's only a matter of time till I begin walloping these bums all over the place."

"I can't wait," Hub said. "This club has got to get rolling, and it's now or never. I was thinking about pulling you even before you ran into this slump. It's either the team or your home-run record, and the team is more important to me. There's too much bad feeling among the men as things now stand. I can't put off making this move any longer."

Duke's throat was suddenly dry and hot. He needed to be in every game if he was to have a fair chance of getting over the sixty-homer mark. Even with base hits scarce, he was still coming up with the big blow. So now with the goal in sight, they were picking this method of stopping him. Using his slump as an excuse to kill his home-run bid.

"I suppose this little slump makes you happy," Duke said tensely. "Gives the whole ball club something to gloat about, huh? But it's a cheap stunt, Hub."

"It all depends on how you look at it," Hub said drily. "Your home-run hitting just isn't as important as a pennant. . . ."

Howls of protest tore out of the throats of the fans when the lineup change was announced over the loudspeakers. They kept calling for Duke through the first five innings. In the sixth, young Ed Orlich doubled with the hassocks loaded, and the Titans went ahead, 3-0. Whip Morse was doing the Titan chucking, and he kept mowing down the Bears with monotonous regularity. He shut out the Bears, 4-0.

In the dressing room, Duke was aware of the gloating expressions on the faces of the Titans. They were silently telling him that they'd done just fine without him. And Duke hated them as he had never hated in the past.

The reporters came in, swarming around Hub Willis, questioning him on Duke's absence from the lineup.

"No, he's not sick or injured," Duke heard Hub tell them. "I benched him. That's all."

When they could get no more from



Hub, they flocked to Duke, throwing questions thick and fast.

"Hub is the manager," Duke said. "I take my orders from him."

"There are a lot of rumors floating around," one reporter said suggestively. "What about all this jealousy business, that some of the boys don't want to see you bust the Babe's home-run record."

"You'll have to ask the guys," Duke said. "There's nothing I wanna say."

"It's a shame and an outrage, the treatment Duke is getting," George Stevens said loudly. "He's being deliberately stopped from getting a fair chance at the record."

"I don't get it," another reporter murmured. "You're the owner and you got no use for Hub, and yet you keep him on as manager. How come, Georgie boy?"

"I've stood for all I'm going to take from Hub Willis," the Titan owner said. "And now I'm certain the fans will demand that Hub resign."

"Why don't you tell 'em the truth, Stevens?" Lou Shaw suddenly said. "That you'd rather force Hub to resign under fire and not have to pay off on his three-year contract."

Red anger leaped into the Titan owner's face.

"I've always treated you fairly, Shaw," he said hotly. "But you seem to regard yourself as a kind of guardian angel, to watch over the Titans. You deliberately tried to worm your way into my confidence to obtain information. Actually, you've got nothing to print except a pack of lies of your own design."

Shaw laughed. "You're in hock right up to your ears, Stevens. You own a ball club but there's no dough to hold you up much longer. Right now you'd sell the Titans if you could get your price. And don't tell me you haven't been looking for a buyer."

The Titan owner made a sudden lunge toward Lou Shaw. But the other newspapermen stepped in, breaking it up before a punch could be tossed.

**H**UB WILLIS walked up, and his voice was even and measured.

"I'll take full responsibility for benching Duke Emory," he said. "If the team does not get rolling, I'll resign—and cancel the remainder of my contract. The main thing is that the club gets in the pennant race, isn't it? Duke's home-

run hitting is secondary. So if I'm wrong, and it won't take many games to discover that, then I'll blow out. You won't have to worry about paying me another cent, Stevens."

The Titan owner was obviously pleased. He grinned slightly. "That's a deal, Willis."

Duke was heading toward the players' exit when Ed Orlich stepped alongside him.

"I kinda feel lost without you in right-field," the rookie said. "Gosh, I'm sorry Hub benched you, Duke. I'd sure like you to be the one to bust that home-run mark—if it's got to happen."

"Well, you don't have to worry about me breaking any records," Duke said drily. "Gotta swing to hit 'em." He gave the rookie a level glance. "Say, you sound as though you didn't want anybody to break sixty."

The rookie laughed a little. "I'll tell you how I feel about it, Duke. Maybe it's crazy sentiment, but the greatest ball player of them all put that record in the book. The Babe was Mr. Baseball himself, and I always loved the big fellow, like every kid. Maybe you or some other belter will come along and hit more than sixty homers. But I guess me and a lot of other people will feel a little sad when that happens. That record sorta belongs to him forever, because home-run and Babe Ruth's name have the same meaning."

## CHAPTER VI

### *Surprise Clout*

**I**N SILENCE, Duke and Orlich walked to the curb. Duke hailed a cab, and they drove toward the hotel.

"You're a funny guy, Ed," Duke said. "Maybe I'm the funny guy, but we got different slants on things. Heck, you don't think even the Babe himself would want a guy to stop shooting at his record just for the sake of preserving it."

"I didn't say that," Orlich insisted. "Only that I hope nobody turns the trick—not even you, Duke."

"Well, no danger of me doing it. It doesn't look like they're even going to let me get a stick in my hands again."

Orlich looked at Duke thoughtfully

and finally said, "There's something I've been wanting to tell you, Duke. But maybe you already know about it." The rookie hesitated.

"Spill it, and we'll see about this mystery."

"There's a lot of gossip that the pitchers got your weakness pegged," Ed Orlich said. "Maybe it's true, because you went into your slump when they began to give you a diet of slow curve stuff. You notice how they were pitching low to you all the time?"

"Hub mentioned something about 'em having my number," Duke said. "But what's so unusual about that?"

"That somebody tipped off your weakness," Orlich said. "The word is that Biff Kern did the tipping."

Duke froze. He wouldn't have felt the impact any harder if the kid had suddenly belted him on the jaw.

"You've got your marbles mixed, Ed," he said slowly. "Why, Biff's the guy who practically made a home-run hitter outa me. Biff's been a full-time pal."

Ed Orlich shook his head. "It didn't make sense to me either. That's why I didn't make any cracks to you before. But now that you're on the bench, I'd do anything to help you."

A good and genuine article, this Ed Orlich, Duke thought. But he was wrong as could be about Biff tipping off the enemy chuckers on his weakness.

"Thanks for the interest," Duke said. "But I just couldn't believe that about Biff."

Duke tried to dismiss the thing from his mind, but somehow the thought seemed to dig in deeper. It was rather sudden—the pitchers locating the hole in the groove. They were all serving him half-speed and slow stuff. Keeping it low and outside. He found Lou Shaw's warning drifting through his mind: "You're letting a guy like Biff Kern kid you along. . . . Biff knows that as long as you are home-run crazy, the Titans will never begin to click."

Duke decided to put the thing squarely up to Biff. The first-sacker was reading when Duke approached him.

"Biff, there's some nasty talk making the rounds," he said. "It's tough to believe and I'd be the last guy to want to accept the stuff. So here it is and you call the shot."

Kern put the paper down and gave Duke that odd grin, almost as though he

knew what was coming.

"Yeah, let's have a listen."

"They're saying you tipped off the chuckers about a weakness of mine," Duke said.

Kern was silent a moment. "That's malarky, kid. Forget it." His eyes went back to the sports pages. But the lie was written in his face, and the quick dismissal of the subject.

"Yeah, I'll forget it—maybe," Duke said.

The first baseman looked at Duke, a kind of defiance in the glance.

"So?"

"You're a liar," Duke said grimly. "You did tip 'em off."

Kern shrugged. "I'm not going to deny it. That kind of thing gets around among ball players and I'm surprised that you didn't find out until now." He laughed a little. "But what's a little thing like that between a couple of heels like you and me, Duke?"

A fire sprang alive in Duke, and there was a pounding inside his head. He could see it now, how Biff Kern was sacrificing him to make the grade as Titan manager. Biff did not care whom he smashed on the way to his goal. Lou Shaw had called the turn.

**I**T WAS a shrewd piece of work, Biff encouraging him to hit home-runs, knowing that strictly individual play would tear the Titans apart. And he, Duke, had neglected other departments of his game. But now he had been benched, was no longer a threat to team play. Biff had pulled his one big ace. He was counting on the fans' resentment of the benching to force Hub Willis to resign. Biff believed the team was ripe for rebellion against the little manager. So he'd flung that big punch, tipping off the opposition on Duke Emory's hitting weakness, aware that Hub would use the slump to bench him.

"A real pal, you are, Kern," Duke said. "You figured all the angles on how to mess up the ball club. Nothing was going to stand in your way of grabbing Hub's job."

"That's right—nothing," Kern said. "And I'm not going to wait forever either."

"You mean Stevens might sell out before you get the job."

The first sacker shrugged. "Maybe. But I got things my way now. The club

couldn't win with you in there. They won't go far without you either, and that's the nice part of it. Who've they got to play right? Just Pete Briscoe, and he ain't got the legs or the hitting average for the job."

"He did okay today."

"Briscoe is strictly a relief man," Kern said drily. "The club isn't going to dig up another Ed Orlich."

"So you got Hub over the barrel because he promised to resign if the team doesn't start rolling," Duke said. "There'll be real pressure from the fans, too. They'll say he's trying to beat me out of the home-run record."

"You sure came in handy," Kern said. "I'll tell you why it pleased me to tip 'em off about that hole in your stick. You're a phony and a glory-grabber. I'd hate to see your brand nail down a new record and all that dough Stevens promised you. There's a lot of guys who believe I did the league a good turn greasing the skid for you, see?"

Duke stood there a moment, his anger rising, and suddenly he could no longer contain it. He wanted to wipe that gloating grin off Biff Kern's face. Here was a guy who was seeking to wreck his career, all his plans for his folks.

Kern, sensing what was coming, was on his feet, throwing a punch. It caught Duke alongside the jaw but he hardly felt the blow, so intense was his fury. All he could think was that Biff Kern had sold him out, sold out the team and Hub Willis. He blazed away with both fists, not aware of the blood streaming from a cut which Kern's knuckles opened over his eye. He swung till the figure in front of him was no longer there.

He had knocked Biff Kern flat, and the man was shaking his head groggily when the door burst open.

A flock of the Titans and Hub Willis came in. Hub glanced at Kern, then his eyes swung on Duke.

"So you got smart to that guy at last," Hub said flatly. "Well, maybe that's good. But I like my ball players to do their scrapping on the field, and in a different manner. So just to remind you, there's five hundred bucks coming out of your salary. . . ."

The fans and the majority of the press clawed at Hub Willis, accusing him of deliberately conspiring to stop Duke's assault on the home-run record. They

said Hub had given in to the players' jealousy.

The storm of criticism practically died when the Titans suddenly began to win ball games. They ripped off six straight wins before a defeat caught up with them.

On the road, the Lions socked them twice in a row. It was plain enough, what was happening. Pete Briscoe, playing the right field spot, was fine as a reserve, and a good man as a pinch hitter. The veteran wasn't hitting worth beans. And in the field, Briscoe wasn't in Duke's class as a picketman and base knocks were falling that Duke would have gobbled up. Ed Orlich was trying to cover more ground, and he did not seem to have the confidence without Duke playing alongside him. The rookie's hitting fell away to a whisper and his fielding was gradually becoming shabby.

Duke knew the Titans needed him desperately, and so did Hub Willis. The final turn in the road had come.

**T**HEY were playing the third game of the Lion series, and the Titans were going down to their third defeat. It was the Lions ahead, 2-0, and the eighth frame. The faces of the Titans were grim. Every man knew that the old sputter had come into the machinery again, and to lose this game meant a skid into a second division berth. Hub Willis might just as well hand in his resignation.

The first two batters went down in the Titan half of the eighth. Iffy Martin fouled off a half-dozen shots, and then drew a pass. That brought Mike Lindsey to the hitting square. Mike singled past third and hope came alive. Pete Briscoe started up, and Hub Willis suddenly bounced out of the dugout. He hollered at Briscoe and the vet turned back.

Hub walked over to where Duke was sitting.

"You're hittin' for Pete," he said.

Duke got off the bench, and he could not help but think how a put-out would ruin them, and their tattered pennant chances. They would get Biff Kern for their manager and he himself would probably be traded. He could laugh, knowing he had his revenge for killing his home-run challenge. Then he looked at Biff Kern, and the guy was grinning, and Duke had never wanted a base knock

so badly.

He set himself for the slow curve stuff that the Lion hurler was certain to throw. If he had any chance at all of connecting safely, he would have to go back to his old, more level swing. Biff had taught him how to hit just enough under the leather to get more distance. But this trip, Duke only wanted to meet the ball evenly and solidly.

The delivery—a side-armed that dipped across the knees. Duke nicked it, fouling. He swung again and rapped another foul along the third-base line. Both of the next two heaves were slightly off the target. A two-two count, Duke waited for the next one. It came in, curving low. He brought the stick around, belting toward right. There was a sharp, explosive sound and the ball flew on a rising line toward right. It kept right on rising and went up into the right-field stands.

Even as he circled the bases, Duke knew he had never been more surprised in his life. He'd gone for a single and driven a home run. The Titans would think he was still shooting for the business. But they could be grateful that he had collected a jackpot swat.

They were glad. Whatever their personal feelings, they stood up and cheered. Biff Kern was the lone exception. The Titans won that game, 3-2.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Out of the Doghouse*

**I**N THE next day, Hub Willis called on Duke Emory again in a pinch-hitting rôle against the Rams. Duke blasted a double to left center, sending two runs across the plate. The Titans went on to win, 5-3.

They knocked the Rams off three straight and returned home to play the league-leading Blues.

"You'll play right field," Hub told Duke in the dressing room. "If we're ever going to catch the Blues, we've got to start now."

"So you're letting me out of the doghouse," Duke said.

"I'm not kidding myself that we don't need you," Hub said. "We'd be digging our way into the second division if you

hadn't come through with a couple of mighty important pinch hits."

"It's a surprise that you admit it."

Hub smiled. "All right. Maybe the gang and I owe you a debt. You still have an outside chance of breaking sixty homers. So go ahead and swing for the fences." He shook his head a little. "Besides, the guys haven't liked the talk that they're jealous. They're willing to string along with you, so belt away, fella."

It was a reluctant, but full surrender. But Duke felt no triumph. Didn't they realize that these past days he had been swinging for base knocks, and not the stands?

He went out onto the field and there was a full house. He was sharply aware of how much this game meant to the Titans. They had moved up into the third slot in the league and the second-place Lions were finally dropping off the pace. The Titans had contributed to the Lions' fade-out, but they needed the confidence of knowing they could take the Blues. Once the Titans did that, they would be in the thick of the pennant scrap.

The Blues fully realized the importance of stopping the Titan threat. They were sending their big and terrific right-hander, Kim Lawler, to the mound to stop the Titans. At the outset of the season Lawler had notched seven straight wins and now boasted another eight-game streak.

It wasn't until almost game time that Duke noticed the absence of Biff Kern. There was a new guy, Tony Bartlet, checking at Biff's first-base position. He was new to the Titans but he had done major league service, and apparently had been added to the roster overnight. Duke asked Hub about the switch.

"Kern's not with this ball club any longer," Hub said shortly.

Hub was in no mood to talk about Biff, and Duke said nothing more.

The ump flicked the dust from the plate and the Titans spilled from their dugout. The crowd spotted Duke and a blast of cheering ripped across the field. He jogged to the old right-field spot and it felt good, being there again.

Whip Morse was pouring his practice throws across. Duke felt impatient for the game to get under way. He had always taken each ball game pretty much in stride, but while he waited for the

ump's call of play, a tautness he had never known gripped him.

There it was, the ump's, "Play ball!"

Whip Morse took one last scanning glance of the field, and cut loose with the delivery. It was a strike. Whip threw again and the Blue lead-off pumped a short hoist into short right. Duke leaped forward, but gave way to Mike Lindsey, who yelled, "Mine, mine!"

It was a nice play. Mike took the ball as he raced from his keystone slot toward the foul line. Whip Morse whiffed the next batter and retired the side on a grounder to short.

The Titan hurler looked fast and loose, setting down the Blues, but Kim Lawler was also ripe for this test. The Blues had given him a couple of extra days' rest and the guy's hook slashed the corners. His fireball might just as well have come from a machine-gun. He tied the whammy on Iffy Martin, wasting nothing and throwing three times. Mike Lindsey rolled back to the mound, and Ed Orlich didn't get a nibble in three lusty swings.

Whip Morse knew he had one rough afternoon ahead of him. Lawler was a tough customer even when his shots weren't splitting hairs, but he appeared to be primed for one of his super-performances.

**D**UKE sensed trouble for the big Titan hurler in the second. Whip was a bit too cautious, and walked the lead batter. The hit and run was on then, and the batter hit behind the runner, toward the right-field hole. But Tony Bartlet, a smooth fielding guy, speared the pellet before it got through to the infield. He tossed to Morse, covering the sack, and barely nipped the hitter. Bosh Novack picked up a scorcher. While he was rifling the leather across the diamond, the base runner advanced to third. Two down.

A sharp single to center scored the run. The Blues were ahead, 1-0.

Whip Morse stamped around the mound, plainly upset. He made his delivery to the next batter a bit too juicy, and the guy whaled into it.

Duke was suddenly running like a race horse from the barrier. He took one glance at the pellet and knew it was ticketed for extra bases. As he ran he could almost smell that concrete wall.

So here it was again! He must make up his mind whether to play the ball for a safety or take his chances with the concrete. The picture of Roy Warren crashing the barrier flashed across his mind. He could hear Ed Orlich's shrill warning.

"Look out, Duke!"

He flung himself forward, trying to brace himself for the shock. He saw the ball dropping and felt the contact with his glove, and he squeezed for all he was worth. The concrete met him and jolted him something awful. He thought every bone in his body was broken. The sky got suddenly dark and the ground spun under him and there was nothing to walk on because he was flat on his stomach. He began pulling himself off the turf like a punch-drunk pug.

He fell back again, everything seeming so peaceful and fine. He could dimly see figures running toward him. Then somebody, Doc Arlen probably, breaking a stick of smelling salts under his nose. The dim-out began clearing then. He got to his feet, surprised that he hadn't broken a leg.

"How 'bout it, Duke?" Hub Willis was saying. "I can put Pete Briscoe to work."

"There's no pieces to pick up," Duke said. "I'll stay where I am."

Doc Arlen nodded his okay.

"That was a catch," Hub said. "That was Duke Emory at his best, and then some."

Duke started to shift over to his post, and it suddenly occurred to him that the Blues had been retired. He trotted toward the dugout and the jampacked thousands screamed themselves hoarse. The roar of the fans had never given him the tingle that was spreading through him now. It bewildered Duke.

The Titans were staring at him curiously, some of them grinning, and that was a new feeling, too.

"You oughta bang my head against that wall, kid," Whip Morse said. "Ole Whip got real careless on that pitch."

"Better that we get some runs," Duke said.

Duke was hitting in his old clean-up spot and Kim Lawler eyed him and cut loose that buggy-whip right arm. Duke figured Lawler would be aiming at that supposedly blind spot in his swing. But the pitch was a jughandle curve, and Duke missed.

"C'mon, Duke, slap it outa the yard!"

"A home-run, Duke! Nothing but a homer!"

The fans were yelling for him to belt a round-tripper. But Duke knew he would settle for any brand of base knock. He wanted to show the Titans that the Blues' hurler wasn't so red-hot. Somebody had to give them confidence, to get them rolling.

Duke dug in, and Lawler unloaded a downer out of the swift motion. Duke shortened on the stick, punching toward right, and the leather skidded beyond the fingertips of the Blues' first-sacker. It was a clean, one-base sock. Nap Comstock sacrificed him along a base. But Tony Bartlet whiffed, and Bosh Novack lifted an easy hoist to center. The Titans didn't score, but Whip Morse didn't seem quite so grim.

"We chipped the guy a little," Whip said, winking at Duke. "Maybe he ain't gonna be quite so tough to handle after a while."

**B**UT THE Blues' hurler seemed to get even sharper with the innings peeling away. Duke's blow was the lone bingle he allowed during the first three frames. He kept pouring that bombshell across, making the Titans swing helplessly. The guy simply was overpowering them with his speed, and his hook was a mocking flare of white in their faces. Hub sweated and got excellent support, and the Blues had to be content with their one-run margin.

Duke went up again in the fourth, after two were down. He lashed another single through the box and into center-field. Nap Comstock gazed woefully at a third called strike and the Titans were scoreless again.

Whip was sailing along smoothly in the fifth when the Blues suddenly dropped a bombshell. There were two away and Whip had the best of a two-nothing count. He tried to slip the buzzball through and the batter was waiting for it. The leather jolted into the sky, and Nap Comstock, in left, took one look and shrugged. It was a home run.

The next hitter doubled to left-center, and a moment later the Blues had Whip Morse set up for the kayo. A walk put runners on first and second and the Titans called time and huddled around their hurler Chet Hurley was the man

with the wood for the Blues. The count went the limit and Hurley tied into the next delivery. He drilled the pellet sharply into right. Duke, running with the crack of the bat, grabbed it on one bounce. He whipped the ball on a straight bullet heave into the plate.

Frankie Nichols, crouching over the plate, didn't have to move his glove. The ball smacked into the mitt without a bounce. The base runner plowed into the backstop and the dust screened the play. There was a sudden groan from the stands, and the ump's hands were spread in a signal that the runner was safe. Nichols had been knocked loose from the ball. The Blues were in front, 3-0.

The next batter went down on strikes, but it seemed apparent that the Blues just about had the ball game locked up. You didn't hand a ball club like the Blues, and especially Kim Lawler, three runs and then go on to take their measure.

The Titans came in for their half of the fifth, seeming to realize the hopelessness of the task. Tony Bartlet stirred up a lot of dust, whirling in the square, but he got nothing except some exercise for the trip. He returned to the dugout, shaking his head.

"How you gonna hit what you can't see? The guy is shooting the business on every throw."

Duke saw Hub stare at the first-sacker. It wasn't that Bartlet or the others were conceding anything to the Blues' hurler. They knew he was red-hot and they would be lucky to avoid a shut-out.

Duke could almost guess what was going on in Hub's mind. It was not just today that they would be swinging against Kim Lawler. It would be every time a crucial ball game came up, and once the Titans got into their heads that Lawler had the Indian sign on them, the pennant hopes were finished.

Neither could there be any waiting until later to beat the Blues' hurler. Now was the time.

The Titans went down in order once again.

Nothing happened in the top half of the sixth, and the Titans came in again for another crack at the scoring column. Duke almost expected Hub to lift Whip Morse for a pinch hitter. However, Whip, a pretty good hitting pitcher, took his turn. He got a piece of the

wood on the pellet, shoving a dinky blooper into left. It fell in safely and Whip Morse stood on first base, pleasantly surprised.

Iffy Martin worked a three-two count, then whiffed. One down, and Mike Lindsey went up and hit the first pitch into straightaway center. Whip Morse settled for a one-base advance. The Titan fans suddenly found their voices and shrilled even louder when the Blues' hurler issued his first pass of the game. It went to Ed Orlich and the sacks were loaded. Duke Emory was starting toward the plate.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *A Perfect Day*

**R**OARS now were going full blast for Duke to crack a shot into the stands. One of those Duke Emory copyrighted smashes would send the Titans into the lead. The Blues were gathering around the mound, talking.

Hub Willis walked toward Duke.

"It's up to you now, Duke," he said. "This is the pay-off."

The huddle around the mound broke up. The roars for a home-run grew louder. The fans were stamping their feet, beseeching Duke to put the apple in the stands. The Titans were all up and standing in front of their dugout. Duke stepped to the plate, and the defensive picketmen were laying back, playing him for that long ball.

The noise subsided, the tenseness of the moment sealing throats. Kim Lawler gave the base runners a glance, then snapped a curve across the knees. Duke looked at it, and it was a strike. The jugghandle curve. The ump's right fist shot into the air again.

The next delivery was a downer and missed the strike zone. Duke waited, and the ball streaked in, on the outside corner. Duke was punching the apple toward right. The ball looped over the second-sacker's head, and twisted toward the foul line. The Titan base runners were moving, the first-base coach was waving furiously at Duke, giving him the go-ahead sign. Duke whirled into second and pulled his slide. A base-clearing double.

It was a while before the Blues got organized again. The score was knotted, 3-3. The suddenness of the Titan bombshell and the strategy that Duke had employed to send the runs across had Kim Lawler muttering. He flipped once to Comstock and the leather was belted into left. Duke rode home on the blow and the Titans surged ahead, 4-3.

The whole Titan team was converged around the plate, waiting for Duke. They pounded his shoulders and half-carried him back into the dugout.

"Hey, let the guy alone." Hub Willis said. "This ball game has a lot to go and we need him. Ain't he the best right-fielder in the whole blame league?"

Tony Bartlet rapped another base knock before the Titans were retired.

There was a clean and wonderful feeling all through Duke, as he trotted to his picket post. The old pressure that had urged individual brilliance was suddenly gone, and at last he knew the feeling of being a team player. It was as though he'd just taken a cool, fresh-water dip. It had been coming on, this release, until now it was complete.

He guessed it had started the day Roy Warren had piled into the concrete and they had taken him off the field on a stretcher. He had seen then the spirit of a team player, how unconquerable it could be, and how terrific a driving force to a ball club. The team as a unit was the thing, that was how it should be.

Duke realized that he had been close to the answer these past games. He had found it, though, when he had gone for the base hit instead of whacking a homer. He had cost the Blues more ball games trying for home runs than he had won for them. It was the pennant that he had risked.

It had taken a while, to understand the satisfaction he had felt the day he had given a bit of help to Ed Orlich. That was team-play, instilling confidence in the rook, and he had never forgotten the look of gratitude on Orlich's face. So it was no personal resentment of him, he knew, that the Titans had made him an outsider. It was his urge to collect glory at the team's expense.

These were things that he had had to come upon himself. Neither Hub Willis nor Lou Shaw, nor the others could give him that team spark that he had lacked. He had all the mechanical skill necessary, but that did not make

a great player. But he had touched the real thing when as a pinch hitter he had swung for base hits. The spark had brightened when he had risked his hide to make that catch.

All these things flashed across Duke's mind, and he could see with startling clearness what had escaped him in the past. He simply hadn't been able to see beyond his own ambition to break the sixty home-run record. But this day he had really become a ball player in every sense of the word.

**D**UKE could have taken a nap during that seventh inning for all the bother the Blues gave Whip Morse. The big guy, fired with inspiration, knocked the Blues down one, two, three.

The game went the nine frames but it was really over in the seventh. Bosh Novack led off and powered a blazing triple down the right-field chalk mark. He crossed the plate on a single that Frankie Nichols banged through the middle of the diamond. Then Whip Morse swung on a speedball and connected. Whip steamed into second base and there wasn't a bigger grin in the ball park than the one on Whip's kisser.

That was the finish of Kim Lawler. The Blues brought on a new guy, but it didn't seem to matter who was serving them up to the rampaging Titans. They treated the relief like a batting practice pitcher. The Titans scored seven runs that frame. Duke drove a shot into the left-field stands. But there were handshakes when he came in, and not the old accusing stares. This was a time for home-run hitting, yet Duke had not had the intention of smacking the pill among the daisies.

The Titans took the game, 11-5.

It was the noisiest place in town, that Titan dressing room. The laughter and crash of voices hammered against the walls. It was the end of the rainy season for the Titans, a club that had finally come to believe the pennant would fly in their own back yard. They had pinned back the ears of Kim Lawler and the Blues, and that was all the confidence they needed. They were rolling now, with steam up all the way.

The cameramen were popping away.

"Put Duke right in the middle of the picture!" Whip Morse shouted. "That's where the big spoke in the wheel belongs."

So Duke stood in the middle, and Whip flung an arm across his shoulder, and the other Titans crowded around. It was the happiest moment of Duke's diamond career.

Duke spotted Hub Willis and Lou Shaw, and went over to them. Hub looked up, a grin on his face.

"I know," Hub said, "you wanna find out about the strange disappearance of one Biff Kern, huh?"

"Nothing too strange about it," Duke murmured. "You said you fired him."

"Well, there's a bit more to it than that," Hub said. "Of course there is no place on a ball club for two managers. But it took a while for Kern to discover that. He also learned that he wasn't the bright boy he figured himself to be." Hub nodded at Shaw. "You tell him Lou."

The newspaperman smiled. "It seems that our pal George Stevens was playing both ends against the middle. He promised Kern the managing job if he stirred up enough mischief for Hub. Stevens was sincere in his belief that the club couldn't win for Hub, and he wanted to ditch him without paying off on that contract."

"For all Stevens' mistakes, he's going to have a pennant winner," Duke said. "That's luck for you."

Lou Shaw laughed. "Luck, yes, but not for Stevens. He closed the deal for the sale of the Titans before this series got under way. That's when Kern knew he'd never be manager of the Titans. Stevens thought he was being slick. The club's been winning and he wanted to get his dough while the price was good. He figured the Blues would knock the wind out of the Titan sails, and there were a lot of holes in the guy's pocket. So he sells."

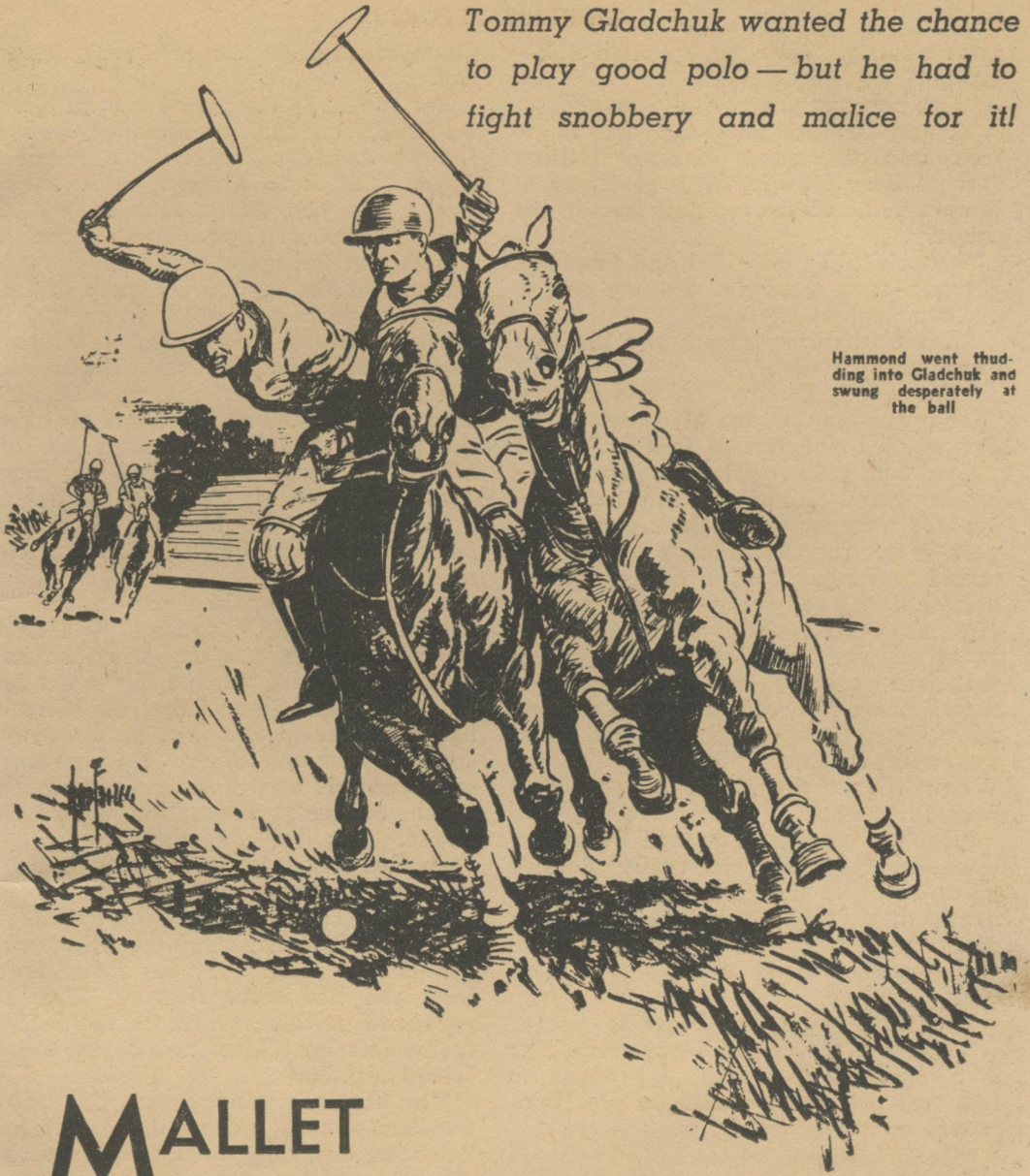
Duke whistled softly. "Just like getting what dough you can on a sweepstakes ticket, then having your nag win, huh?"

"That's about it," Shaw said. "But Stevens didn't have too much choice about selling. What do you think the fans and maybe the commissioner would have thought about a guy using a ball player the way Stevens did Kern? About the way he tried to force Hub to quit?" The newspaperman shook his head.

"It was a fine afternoon," Duke said. "This sorta makes it a perfect day."



Tommy Gladchuk wanted the chance to play good polo — but he had to fight snobbery and malice for it!



Hammond went thudding into Gladchuk and swung desperately at the ball

# MALLET MARAUDER

**L**OOPING the mallet thong over his wrist Tommy Gladchuk mounted, and settled himself in the stirrups and saddle. That done with he let his eyes roam over the perfectly manicured field of the Medway Polo

Club, and finally fixed them on the partly filled stands that extended the full length of the opposite side. A faint grin tugged at his lips, but there was a nervous dryness in his mouth and throat.

"From Macy's to Medway," he mur-

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

mured softly. "Nice going, Gladchuk—maybe!"

"Not nervous are you, old man?"

Tommy jerked his head around to look into the good looking, smiling face of Pete Marvin, high goal man at Medway, one of the top polo men in the country.

"Not a bit," Tommy lied, and chuckled. "Steady as a machine. I'll try not to make a fool of myself."

Marvin's smile warmed, and his eyes were smiling too.

"You won't, Tommy," he said quietly. "For my money, it was Medway's lucky day when I got you to join us."

Gladchuk didn't reply. He just turned his head and looked at the other players who were mounting their ponies and getting set for the practise match. He stared at one man in particular, a dark haired, dark eyed fellow with a perfect athlete's build, who was mounting a beautiful full blooded Arabian pony that had recently cost its owner the record price of twelve thousand dollars. Alec Hammond was famous and what was printed about his family in the Who's Who of the Blue Bloods took up four full pages.

"Don't mind Alec, Tommy," Pete Marvin said quietly. "He really doesn't mean half the things he says. Underneath that gold plating, he's really a nice chap. And I have an idea that, secretly, he actually admires your playing."

Gladchuk grinned at Marvin.

"You're a pretty swell guy, Pete," he said. "But don't worry. I promise to belt that willow root ball, and not Hammond, no matter what."

"Good." Marvin chuckled. "Let's get going, then."

**A** SMATTERING of applause rippled through the stands as eight players, and two mounted umpires, trotted their ponies out onto the field. For identification four of the players wore blue jerseys, and the other four wore red. It was to be only a four chukker match, half of the regulation match of eight seven-and-one-half-minute chukkers, but it was a match of great importance to all taking part. From those eight players the Club Committee would select the four man team who would play the unbeaten Burlington Knights in a single game for the Eastern

Championship on the following Saturday.

For the Reds Hammond was at Number One, Gladchuk at Number Two, a fellow named Clarkson at Number Three, and Pete Marvin at Four, or Back. For the Blues, Steffen was at One, Bayles at Two, Van Horne at Three, and Petterson at Four.

Seven of the eight were more or less on a par with each other in regard to horsemanship, and play. The eighth man stood in a class by himself. Before the war Pete Marvin had played with such polo greats as Hitchcock, and Milburn, the Guests, and Lacey, and a host of others. Today he was ranked as a nine-goal man, and fully deserved the honor.

In addition Pete Marvin was a perfect sportsman, and one of God's gentlemen.

As he waited for the throw-in, and the umpire's whistle, Tommy Gladchuk thought back to the day when he had first met Marvin. Almost five years ago on a tiny Pacific island that the Marines had taken from the Japs at a terrible cost in men and blood. He had been wounded and was stretched out on the beach awaiting evacuation from the island.

He had struck up a conversation with the man stretched out next to him on his right. That man had been Pete Marvin, an Air Forces fighter pilot, who had had his ship shot out from under him, and had come floating down by parachute with a couple of Jap bullets in his left leg. Thus had begun a firm friendship.

The umpire's whistle, and the white, five and a half ounce willow root ball bouncing out, rang down the curtain on the past and brought Gladchuk sharply back to the present.

Kneeing his pony he rode hard for the ball but Steffen of the Blues was there first, and a beautiful mallet swipe sent the ball rocketing down field. Horses and riders let go with everything they had, but it wasn't necessary. Playing the ball perfectly Marvin trapped it, and started dribbling up field at terrific speed.

Bayles of the Blues closed in hard and tried to ride him off the ball. Marvin checked and made a cross-over shot as his pony, trained perfectly to the game, pivoted in a dime turn. Hammond came up on the ball and drilled it deep into

Blue territory. Riding full out Tommy Gladchuk went after it. Between him and the goal was only Petterson the Blue back.

Gripping his mallet tight, and his slate gray eyes fixed on the rolling ball, Gladchuk rode up on it perfectly. But he had no chance to swing.

Out of nowhere came Hammond like a man gone mad. He swung desperately, but badly. The ball shot out from Gladchuk's vicinity and went ripping past the Blue back. But it also missed the eight yard space between the bamboo goal posts by a wide margin. Reining up, Tommy Gladchuk shot Hammond a hard look.

"I was set for that shot!" he snapped.

Hammond gave Gladchuk a glance of contempt.

"Really?" he echoed, and promptly went riding off.

The blood pounded against Gladchuk's temples, and for one wild insane moment he was tempted to ride Hammond down and haul him from his beautiful pony. He checked the urge, however. Instead he went pounding toward the ball that Petterson had knocked back into play.

Riding with the perfect poise of a born horseman the Blue's back rode up on his drive, whacked it by Hammond, who was thundering in to intercept, and went after it again. But this time Gladchuk was over there. The Medway team newcomer slapped the ball right under the flashing hoofs of Petterson's mount, and sent it spinning toward the side boards.

It struck hard and came off quickly on the rebound. But it came off at the correct angle, and Gladchuk led the wild chase for it.

He got there a second ahead of Petterson, and his stroke was deadly and true. The willow root sailed out into clear field on a dead line for the Blue goal. From center field Alec Hammond was riding furiously to overtake the ball and make the shot that would score the goal.

But Tommy Gladchuk's pony had already spun and was in full flight. He was up on the ball in plenty of time, and his savage swing was true again. The flat of his mallet smacked the ball and on the third bounce it split the goal right down the middle for one point.

**R**IPPLES of applause rose heavenward from the grandstands, but Tommy hardly heard it. Alec Hammond had ridden up close. His face was aflame with almost berserk fury.

"Cheap show-off!" he snarled. "You saw me riding up on it!"

Blistering words rose up to Gladchuk's lips, but he managed to cut them off unspoken. He stared coolly into Hammond's blazing eyes.

"Really?" he murmured.

Just that, and then he rode over to the sidelines to change mounts between chukkers.

The play was fast and furious by both sides in the second chukker, but there was no scoring. Time and time again both Van Horne and Petterson, for the Blues, prevented almost certain goals, and drove a return that went deep down out of immediate danger. But during that second chukker the tension between Gladchuk and Hammond tightened more and more. Half a dozen times Hammond deliberately rode his own team mate off the ball, and once a vicious, wild swing of Hammond's mallet missed the head of Gladchuk's pony by no more than a whisker. As a matter of fact had not Gladchuk whirled his pony off the ball in the last instant, the blow would have landed and done serious injury to the splendid mount.

Between the second and third chukkers, while mounts were changed by both teams, Gladchuk had to fight with himself not to go over to Hammond and have a showdown. What kept him from doing it was the realization that it would do more harm than good.

Even though Pete Marvin was his loyal friend, Tommy knew full well that he was definitely on trial with the other members of the Medway Polo Club. He was an unknown, an outsider brought into the Club under Marvin's auspices, while Medway was rich in social and polo tradition. Medway was one of those clubs stubborn and reluctant to change with a changing world. Background, wealth, and social position had been the first three membership requirements down through the years.

On the day Gladchuk and Marvin had met Tommy had possessed but one of those requirements—wealth. That only happened because an uncle he had never even met, had died when he was fifteen and left him a piece of land out

west that had miraculously spurted oil practically overnight.

Born the only child of poor parents Gladchuk had known want, and privation, and hard work in his early years. When he was eight his parents had died of the flu, and he had been taken in by an aunt who was no richer than his parents had been. Every penny counted, and he had done everything he could to help earn the pennies.

A paper boy, odd jobs after school and on Saturdays for the corner grocer, and a little later a bundle wrapping boy in Macy's. Hard, constant work, and then one day had come more wealth for his aunt and himself than he had ever dreamed existed in the world. At fifteen the beginning of an entirely new and completely different life. Now, at twenty-six, he was on trial at the Medway Polo Club.

"That was a beautiful goal shot, Tommy. Keep it up, fellow."

Gladchuk jumped quickly off the memory train, and looked at Pete Marvin. The high goal man was smiling, but there was also a look of somber warning that seemed to caution Tommy. Tommy nodded.

"Lucky shot, thanks just the same, Pete," he said. "And don't worry, I'll still concentrate on the ball."

"It's worth it, believe me," Marvin said, and gave Gladchuk a pronounced wink.

As though stung deep by that single goal against them, the Blues started third chukker play like a house afire. All four of them rode at breakneck speed, and their shots were as canny as they went smashing it, all out. Half a dozen times the scramble of horses' hoofs and swinging mallets in front of the Red goal was a madhouse of furious activity. With but one minute to go of the seven and a half Van Horne of the Blues finally drove through into the clear all by himself and smacked an angle shot to tie the score in a way that was beautiful to see.

Equally stung at having the score tied, the Reds started to go to town in their own inimitable fashion. Riding high wide and handsome, Pete Marvin took charge immediately. He drove and dribbled like crazy. Man and pony were one, and they seemed to be everywhere on the field at the same time. Cross shots came off Marvin's mallet like white

bullets, and every time they were placed perfectly for Hammond, or Gladchuk, or Clarkson to smack them on down the field toward the Blue goal.

**T**HE Blues, though, were far from content to rest on a tie score. They fought back furiously. Every time when they were in danger of having a goal scored against them, they rose to greater polo heights and beat back the attempt. However, the relentless power driving of the Reds could not be checked forever. The inevitable had to happen. And it finally did.

A sizzling low hopper off Marvin's mallet streaked by Van Horne charging in to intercept, and went over to Gladchuk who was on the far side of the field, and without a Blue horseman within thirty yards of him. Wheeling he swung and caught the white ball just as it started to bounce up. It was a perfectly timed swing under his pony's neck, and the ball instantly changed direction of travel. It went scooting over the turf from an angle for the Blue goal.

In a flash pony and rider were after it. The goal was wide open for scoring, and the only other rider that was even close was Alec Hammond. He and his pony, too, were in full motion, but it was instantly evident to Tommy that he had a sufficient lead on the ball. But for a brief instant he hesitated. Hesitated, and then tossed caution to the wind. It was his ball, and his chance to score the tie-breaking point.

So he got every ounce of speed out of his mount, and rode down on the now slowly rolling ball like so much mounted lightning. As he came up on it he caught the flash of Hammond charging in out the corner of his eye. He didn't check. He set and swung at the ball. The flat of the mallet hit it cleanly. The ball zoomed up off the green turf, traveled thirty yards on the fly, and bounced between the goal posts clean as a whistle.

Gladchuk saw it go through, and then he tried to wheel his pony away. But he wasn't able to do it in time. Hammond came slashing in, and horse flesh met horse flesh in violent contact. A flash of pain shot up Gladchuk's right leg, but it was gone in an instant. His grip on the reins was tight as his pony went stumbling off to the side. The pony kept her feet however, and did not spill.

Not so lucky, Alec Hammond and his mount. His pony tripped and went down as forelegs buckled. Hammond tried to throw himself off to the side but he was too late. Like something catapulted he went sailing over the pony's neck and head to hit ground heavily and roll over a couple of times. An instant later Gladchuk was off his pony, and had raced over to where Hammond, face white, and eyes glazed, was slowly getting up onto his feet. Luckily his pony had not broken a leg. The beast was also heaving up onto its feet.

"Take it easy, Hammond," Gladchuk said as he reached out a helping hand. "Are you hurt?"

Hammond's white face flushed deep red, and his black eyes glittered venomously as he ignored Gladchuk's helping hand.

"You filthy swine!" he raged. "You fouled on purpose!"

"No, you charged, Hammond," Gladchuk said evenly. "The shot was mine, and I made it."

"You're a liar!" Hammond half screamed. "You—you cheap interloper, why don't you go back to the gutter where you belong!"

A white and red sheet of flame seemed to pass through Tommy Gladchuk's brain, and make something snap. Not realizing it he dropped the polo mallet he still held onto the ground. Hardly realizing it, also, he drew back his right clenched fist and looked at the point of Hammond's jutting chin. But he didn't let the blow go. Three words, like pistol shots, stopped him.

"Please, Mr. Gladchuk!"

The speaker was one of the umpires who had quickly ridden up. He locked eyes with Gladchuk for a brief instant, and then looked at Hammond.

"Are you all right, Mr. Hammond?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," Hammond replied. Then with a vicious look at Tommy Gladchuk, he bit off, "But with no thanks to him, however!"

"Then let's resume play, gentlemen," the umpire said. "Mount your ponies, please."

A few moments later play was resumed, and the chukker was completed without any further scoring by either side. Mounts were then changed again, and the fourth and last chukker begun. Perhaps because of what had happened

the play was listless and sloppy on both sides.

**F**OR Tommy Gladchuk the interval was like an agony that ate at his insides. He was furious at Hammond for deliberately riding into him. He was furious at himself for forgetting himself and starting to slug the man. And he was furious at all the others for remaining coolly aloof, and refusing to express their feelings one way or the other. To coin a phrase, bushwah to Medway and its decorum worshipping bunch of blue bloods!

When the fourth and final chukker was completed, with the Reds still on the payoff end of the two to one score, Tommy Gladchuk rode quickly over to the waiting groom assigned him, turned over his pony to the man's charge, and walked quickly to the locker rooms at the rear of the clubhouse.

He spent an extra long time under the shower striving to cool himself off in body and in mind as well. When he finally came out all the others had dressed and left. That is, all save Pete Marvin. The former Air Force fighter-pilot was critically examining a mallet as Gladchuk came out of the shower room. He looked up with a wry grin.

"Feel better, Tommy?"

Gladchuk smiled a little, and then frowned and sat down on a bench, and wrapped the sheet sized towel about him.

"A little, perhaps," he said. Then, his frown deepening, he added quickly, "Look, Pete, I don't think—"

"No!" the other man cut in sharply. "Frankly, there's nothing I hate so much as a real nice guy making a fool of himself."

"Which I did!" Tommy said bluntly. "But I wasn't brought up Hammond's way. In his set if you don't like somebody you shoot them, or drop a spot of arsenic in their favorite cocktail. The nice, respectable way. Nothing so crude as slugging them unconscious!"

"I didn't mean that," Marvin said quietly. "I meant about what you were going to say. Such twaddle as you don't belong, and so forth. Rubbish! But tell me. Supposing you had slugged Alec, what would it have gained you beside a little doubtful personal satisfaction?"

"Nothing, I suppose," Tommy admitted, and scowled at the locker room

floor. "You're right. But Hammond is hating me for what he thinks I represent. He's hated me ever since you put me up for membership. He's permanent here, and I'm on trial. That's the rub. And that spill wasn't my fault, but any one would have thought so from the way you fellows sat your ponies like clams."

Pete Marvin shook his head at Gladchuk.

"No, Tommy," he said. "I for one was too far away to see exactly what happened, though I can guess. No one said anything because it was none of our affair. It was strictly between you and Alec. Nobody is exactly blind to the situation, you know. We may have said nothing, but what we *thought* was something else."

Gladchuk grinned, but his expression was tight and strained.

"Not counting you, Pete, I'll bet it was plenty," he said. "I was a dope to lose my head. And I guess I've lost more than that, now."

"Meaning?" Marvin murmured as he stood up and waggled the polo mallet like a golf putter.

"I'm off the team that'll go against the Knights," Gladchuk said grimly. "My shocking breach of Medway etiquette is sure to remove my name from the list."

A shadow of annoyance slid across Pete Marvin's face, and was gone. He sighed softly, walked over and hung up the mallet by its thong on a wall hook.

"Sorry, pal, but I'm fresh out of crying towels," he said with a humorous twinkle in his eye. "You'd better use your sleeve. When you're home, you might think things out a little. More than one way to skin a cat, as the saying goes. And you might remember, also, that Alec does not select the team. That's the Committee's job. And the Committee wants Medway to win the Championship very, very much. Be seeing you, Tommy."

As Marvin walked out of the locker room Gladchuk began absently towel-ing himself, his eyes staring thoughtfully into space. By the time his hand muscled, well put together body was dry a peculiar smile was beginning to steal across his lips.

"Provided I *do* get selected for the team," he murmured, and tossed the towel away.

ALL the next day the skies wept copiously. Polo practise of any kind was out of the question. Most of the players, Gladchuk among them, didn't even go out to the club. And the day after that wasn't so hot either, though there was no rain, just horizon to horizon layers of low hanging gray clouds. The field, however, was in fairly good shape, considering the soaking it had received, and there were men and ponies out on it both in the morning and afternoon.

No practise game was attempted, naturally, nor even a pick-up scramble, just short sessions of dribble practise, exercise for the ponies, and angle shots at the goals. Tommy Gladchuk worked mostly on his near side back shot, and kept pretty much to himself by preference. Alec Hammond was on the field too, at the same time as he, but the man didn't so much as meet his eyes once. As a matter of fact the other players had very little to say to Gladchuk, and for a while their attitude rankled him.

Eventually, though, he realized that the tension he could actually feel was not because of his late brush with Hammond. On the contrary, it was the ever mounting wonder in each man's mind whether or not he would be selected for the team. That is, with the exception of Pete Marvin. It was a foregone conclusion that Marvin would not only play Number Four but would captain the team facing the Burlington Knights.

Then the next day, Friday, the Committee's selections were posted in the clubhouse lobby, and sent to the press. Gladchuk was not among those who instantly gathered at the board. He forced himself to read another couple of paragraphs of a magazine story, and then got up slowly from his chair and walked over. The dryness in his throat actually hurt, and his heart seemed to be some seven inches above its normal position. As he made the last step he closed his eyes. Then he opened them and took a look.

And there it was, practically jumping right out at him. Hammond No. 1, Gladchuk No. 2, Petterson No. 3, and Marvin No. 4, and team captain. In the case of injury to a team member Van Horne, and Steffen were listed as substitutes. There it was! Gladchuk No. 2!

For a long minute he stared at the selections as a conglomeration of emo-

tions swept through him. Then he turned away from the board, and it was then he saw Pete Marvin standing some distance away and grinning at him. He walked over there, his brain a sort of happy blank.

"Thanks for going to bat for me with the Committee, Pete," he said with an effort. "And don't tell me you didn't."

"Don't be silly, son!" Marvin scoffed. "I said the Committee wanted very much to win the championship, didn't I?"

"Well, thanks anyway," Tommy murmured. "This is one of Gladchuk's biggest moments. Hanged if I couldn't cry."

"Go ahead and I'll join you," Marvin chuckled. "After all, it is pitiful what we're going to do to the Knights tomorrow."

Saturday dawned in weather perfect manner, and it actually seemed to get better and better as the hours passed. Shortly before match time the stands that flanked the north side of the field were filled to the very last seat and presented a long sweep of gay rainbow colors. Society, and those who would be society, were out in full force.

As Tommy Gladchuk prepared to mount his first chukker pony, and ride out with the Medway team to defend the west goal, he glanced over at the packed stands and grinned to himself. He wondered what some of them were saying. Plenty no doubt. And about him. Probably some lace frilled dowager was murmuring to another lace frilled dowager:

"Is it actually true this Gladchuk person used to wrap bundles, or something, at Macy's?"

"Oh quite, my dear! Imagine!"

"All right, fellows, let's go!"

Pete Marvin's clear, confident voice swept the make believe dowagers away into space. Gladchuk mounted, settled himself, and then galloped out onto the field with the team. At the same moment the Burlington Knights, perfectly mounted, galloped out to take their positions in defense of the east goal. An instant later a loud but well bred cheer rose up from the packed stands.

**T**HE very instant play was begun the Burlington Knights began to demonstrate in no uncertain manner how they had won seven straight matches,

and had yet to taste defeat. They rode like centaurs, and their play was swift, sharp, and decisive. Both mount and man knew exactly what to do next. Like four tornadoes they swept down the field deep into Medway territory.

In the desperate scramble that took place in front of the Medway goal the Knights were on top of the ball all the time. Finally, their Number One forward, a redhead, stole the ball clean and cracked it through for the first score.

Perhaps that score against them was just what the Medway team needed to make them shake out the lead and start playing polo. At any rate when the ball was in play again, Gladchuk was on it in a flash. He whacked it right out from under a swinging Knight mallet and toward a point slightly ahead of Hammond riding madly down field. Hammond took it nicely and cracked it further along on its way. The No. 1 redhead, however, was down field, too, at breakneck speed. He rode after the willow root ball and made a perfect near-side back-swing. Forward progress of the ball ceased at once, and it went skipping back up field.

Gladchuk and Petterson went after it at full speed. Tommy got there first, but he was too anxious with his swing. He missed and galloped right on over the ball. Petterson swerving at the last second to give Gladchuk a clean shot was unable to wheel back and make a try. At that exact instant the Knight's No. 3 pounded in and swung. He connected but not cleanly, and the ball scooted off toward the north sideboards.

It was then Pete Marvin demonstrated why he was a nine goal man. As though sensing exactly what was going to happen, he had ridden down the side field, and was on the loose ball in a flash. A chop swing stopped it from hitting the sideboards, and sent it bounding forward. The redhead at No. 1 for the Knights came pounding up hard and tried to ride Marvin off the ball. He didn't succeed.

Marvin kept the ball out in front of him and went straight down the side field. The Knights' No. 4 cut over desperately to intercept, but he got there just the bat of an eyelash too late. Marvin half pivoted his horse and swung at the white ball for the last time. It was from an angle that made the

Knights' goal posts seem but a couple of yards wide, but Pete Marvin's shot went right between them dead center to tie up the score at one all. Two minutes later the chukker ended with the score still tied.

Like the first the second chukker started off at a furious clip. But this time it was the Medway team, and not the Knights, that took over. A beautiful shot by Hammond was dead true to Gladchuk who had gone out into the clear. With a little skillful dribbling he got the ball by the Knights' No. 3 man who had charged up. Then he took a mighty swipe and sent the white willow root streaking toward the enemy goal. The Knights' No. 4 rode out to meet it, but, even as the game's greats do on occasion, he missed and was forced to ride on by the ball before he could pivot and go back.

By then it was too late. Both Hammond and Gladchuk had come down field. The ball was dead on the turf thirty yards out from the undefended goal, but the angle was bad. True, Gladchuk could have tried the goal shot, but he didn't. Instead he drilled an angle shot over to Hammond who was practically in front of the goal. Hammond leaned way over to the off side and swung. He connected but the ball missed the goal by a couple of feet.

"Tough luck," Tommy said as he loped by the flushed-faced man.

"If you'd played it well, I'd have scored!" Hammond snarled.

"There'll be another time," Gladchuk said evenly, and rode back to his position for the play-out by the Knights' No. 4.

And there was another time. Two of them in the third chukker, and only a couple of minutes apart. A long power shot off Pete Marvin's mallet rolled dead almost in front of Hammond. He swerved for a clean shot and connected. The ball went by the last Knight and into open field. Already in full flight Gladchuk thundered after it.

The enemy goal was some forty yards away and the angle was hardly any angle at all. Tommy started to swing but checked himself in the last second. Hammond was streaking straight down the center of the field. A tap shot over to Hammond and the man couldn't possibly miss. Gladchuk did the tap-shot, but Hammond did miss. The ball went

crazily off his swinging mallet to the right and missed the goal by at least twenty yards.

**T**HEN two minutes later the picture set-up was almost identical. With a one point score just waiting for the taking Tommy Gladchuk smacked the ball to Hammond who was in even better position. And Hammond's swing was bad again. He topped the ball this time, and it went dead still ten yards out from the goal. Before Gladchuk could ride up to make a sure point the Knights' No. 3 had raced across in front of his goal and cracked the ball well out of danger.

Face paper white with seething rage, Alec Hammond glared accusingly at Gladchuk, but Tommy didn't even look his way as he rode back. The germ of an idea that had taken root in the locker rooms shortly after that team picking practise game was now growing into flower. What he had guessed then was now being proved. In short, what Pete Marvin had actually meant when he'd said there were more ways than one to skin a cat. Right now in this game he could put an end to the affair Hammond-Gladchuk as far as anybody, save perhaps Alec Hammond, was concerned. A risk, of course, but it was a risk he could not side-step if he wanted to make the grade at Medway—and he did!

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chukkers were bitterly contested by both teams, but neither succeeded in driving the white willow root ball between the opponent's goal posts for a score.

Once in the fifth, though, and twice in the sixth Gladchuk had chances to make angle tries that would have brought those in the stands to their feet had they scored. But he didn't try. Each time he hit to Hammond and let him make the goal shot. But the sixth chukker ended with the score still tied at one all.

The seventh, though, was different. In fact, it was vastly different. The Burlington Knights suddenly caught fire, and they couldn't do anything wrong. In the short space of three minutes they swept down the field twice, completely outplayed the Medway team, and scored two goals to take a three to one lead. As Tommy Gladchuk rode back after the third goal Pete Marvin rode up along side. The team captain



wasn't grinning, now. His stare was level and steady. "You've won your personal fight," he said quietly. "Now start helping us win the team's battle."

"Check!" Gladchuk answered with a grin. "Glad to!"

Perhaps others have witnessed sharper and more daring polo, but those who witnessed the seventh and eight chukkers of the Medway-Burlington Knights match will never forget it as long as they live. Nor will they forget that mounted bolt of lightning, and deadly stroking wizard, that was Tommy Gladchuk. In a sense Pete Marvin's crisply spoken words had lifted tremendous weights from his shoulders, and fired him to the nth degree.

He played as he had never played before, or even dreamed he could play. He was all over the field, in the middle of every ball scramble and, more times than not, stealing it and making a hair-raising solo charge down the field. At times when he was trapped or boxed he hit out to his nearest teammate, and several times that man was Alec Hammond.

However, whenever it was a question of a goal try Gladchuk didn't waste time tapping to Hammond. He made the shot himself, and they were from all angles. In the seventh he made two goals, and in the eighth he made two

more. Those added to the three Pete Marvin had drilled through saw the match finally end with Medway out in front by an eight to three score.

Half an hour or so after the match, the players of both teams, the officials, and several other polo dignitaries, were gathered about the table set up on the sidelines, on which rested the gleaming silver victory cup, emblematic of the Eastern Championship. And in accordance with polo custom, it was filled to the brim with champagne. After a nice little speech praising the play of both teams, the Medway Polo Club president handed the cup to Captain Pete Marvin to take the first drink.

For a moment Marvin held the huge trophy in his hands, and then he grinned at his team mates.

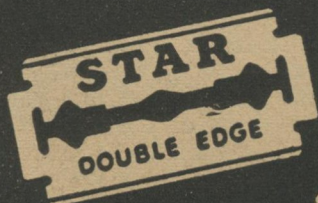
"I think that today," he said, "our most promising high goal man deserves the honor. Here, Tommy."

Gladchuk blinked, and accepted the cup with hands that trembled. But when he glanced about at the ring of sincere smiling faces, a great calm stole through him and steadied his hands. Even the usual hostile contempt was gone from Alec Hammond's face. It was then Tommy knew for certain that he was in; that he was really one of them. He drank deep, and for no man has the victory cup ever tasted half so sweet!

Next Issue: A COACH FOR CINDERELLA, Football Novelet by Joe Archibald

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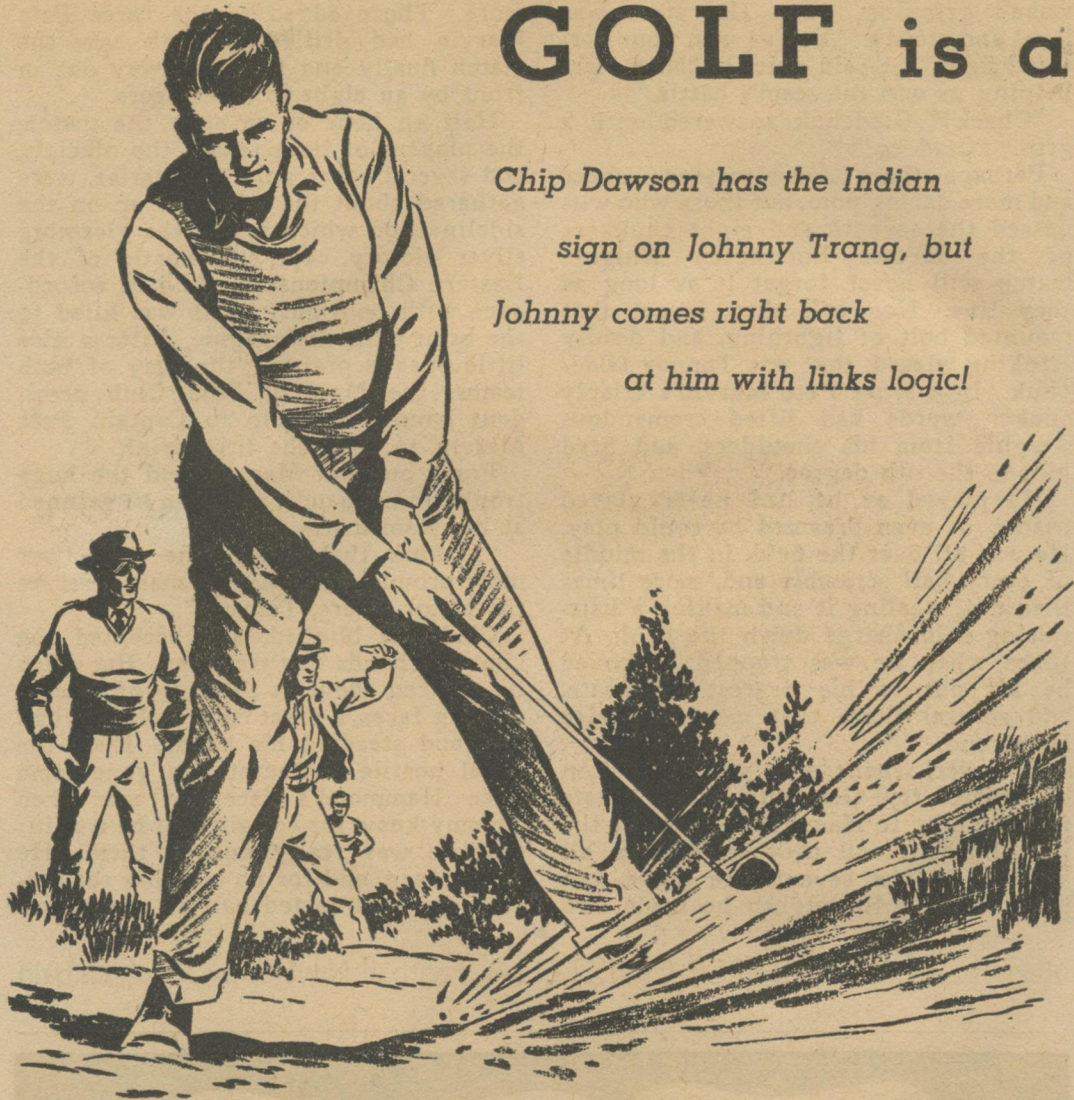


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# GOLF is a

*Chip Dawson has the Indian  
sign on Johnny Trang, but  
Johnny comes right back  
at him with links logic!*



## CHAPTER I

### *Rebellious Nerves*

**I**T WAS a two-foot putt on a green as flat as a pool table, but Andy Bellows studied his lie as carefully as though he were in a trap, fifty feet from the pin, with a strong cross-wind. That was Andy Bellows' way. He studied every shot, weighed every possibility, foresaw every calamity.

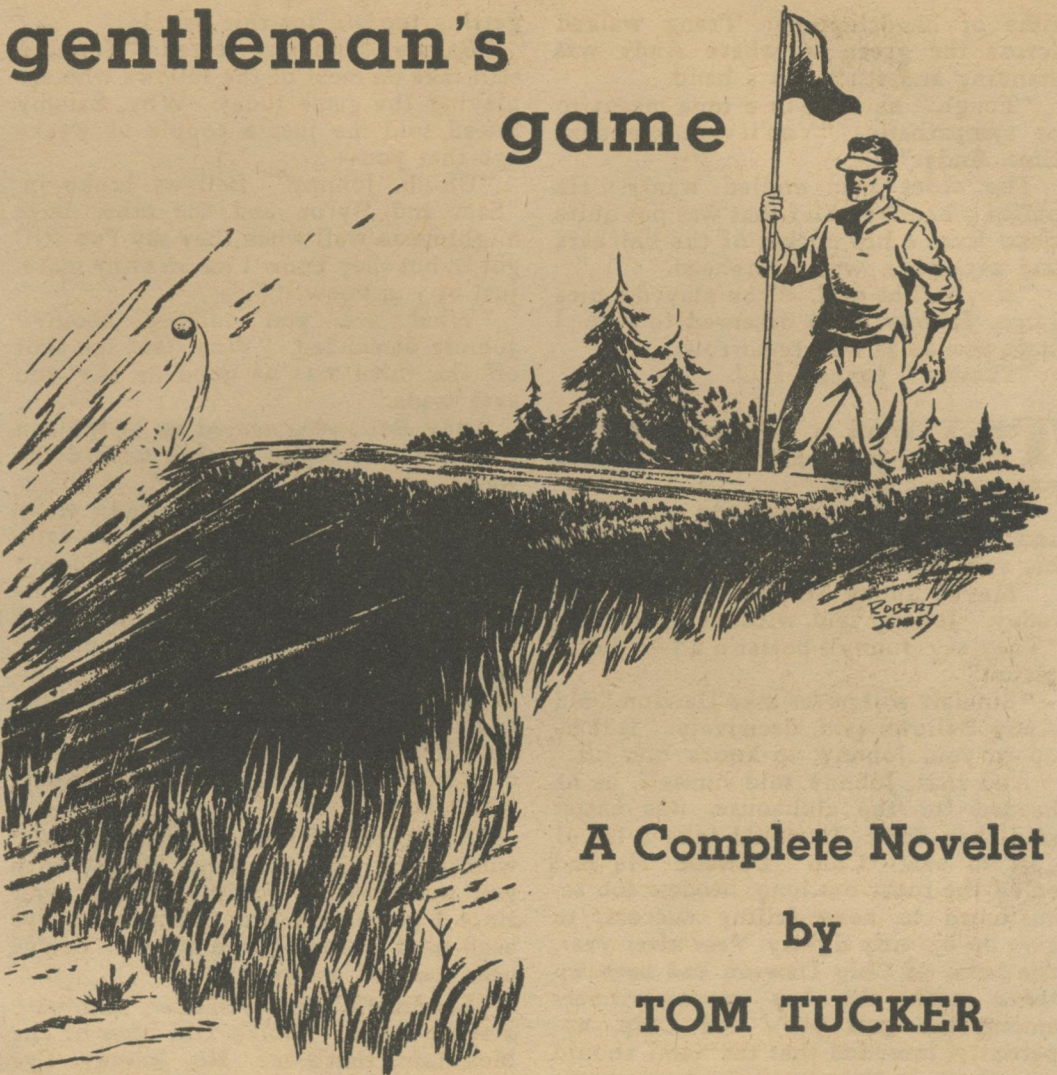
Across the green, Johnny Trang tried hard not to show his impatience. After all, Andy Bellows was noted for his deliberations and better men than Johnny, Hagen, Jones, Turnesa and the others, had stood by while old Andy

lined up a putt that a baby could have made, spending minute after minute studying the ground, hunting for any possible almost invisible pebble or worm cast that might deflect the ball.

"Bellows," somebody had said once, "never could be called a *feverish* golfer, by any stretch of the imagination, but he does really test a man's patience."

Johnny Trang wasn't noted for his patience. Years of competition golf may have blunted some of the raw edges of his temper, but there still were times when he had to fight hard against the

# gentleman's game



Traag blasted one which banged the rim of the bunker, then trickled back to his feet

## A Complete Novelet by TOM TUCKER

impulse to kick over the traces and sound off about what he thought of golf in general and his opponent in particular. This was one of those times.

It would be different, he told himself, if Andy had a ghost of a chance of winning this match. But Bellows had been off his game ever since he had come to Brucehurst and now he was four down to Johnny coming up to the fifteenth green. Even if he should take this hole, he would still be lying dormy and there wasn't much chance that he could take it. He'd hooked tee shot and spent two more in a bunker, his pitch had been good but when he sank his putt—if he

ever got around to doing it—he'd have to chalk up a five, and Johnny was on in three, six inches from the pin.

Bellows finished sighting the ball, got up off his knees and carefully wiped his hands on his old-fashioned, checked plus-fours. He tapped his ball and it plopped into the cup.

"Mr. Bellows is down in five," the judge said. "Mr. Trang putting. Quiet, please."

Johnny walked up to his ball, barely glanced at the cup and tapped the white pellet in.

"Mr. Trang wins this match, five and three," the judge said. There was a

rifle of handclapping. Trang walked across the green to where Andy was standing and stuck out a hand.

"Tough," he said, in a tone meant to be sympathetic. "You'll get me next time, Andy."

The older man smiled wanly. He pulled a handkerchief that was not quite clean from a hip pocket of the knickers and wiped his sweaty forehead.

"Maybe," he said. "You played a nice game, Johnny. You deserved to win. I hope you do as well tomorrow."

"Thanks," Johnny said.

**T**HAT WAS a fine wish, Johnny thought, but making it come true was another story.

"It's about time somebody took Dawson," Andy Bellows went on. "He's had his own way long enough, I'd say."

"Maybe Sunny Sinclair will take him today," Johnny said, without much hope. "They say Sunny's hotter'n a two-dollar pistol."

"Sinclair will never take Dawson," old Andy Bellows said, decisively. "It'll be up to you, Johnny, to knock him off."

And that, Johnny told himself, as he headed for the clubhouse, was easier said than done. It would take a lot of golf to beat "Chip" Dawson. He had ruled the roost too long, become too accustomed to never-failing success, to give up his title lightly. Year after year, the name of Chip Dawson had been up there with the top money-winners among the golf pro's and Chip, apparently, intended that the name should stay there, in the van of the tournament winners.

Johnny walked beside the old veteran, Bellows, down the slope of the sixteenth fairway toward the white, sprawling building that was the clubhouse. The gallery they had attracted dissolved, to cut through the woods in order to pick up the Dawson-Sinclair match at the fifth tee.

"Where you heading now, Andy?" Johnny asked. "Texas or California, this winter?"

The older man's weather-beaten face donned a wry smile.

"Neither, Johnny," he said. "I'm packing up my clubs."

"You're what?"

"I'm quitting," Bellows said. "I promised myself that this would be the last tournament, win, lose or draw. I'm

getting too old for this grind."

"Baloney," Johnny jeered. "You can still take on most of the fellows who are playing the game today. Why, Sammy Snead told me just a couple of weeks ago that you—"

"Uh-uh, Johnny," Bellows broke in. "Sam and Byron and the other boys might mean well when they say I've still got it, but they know I haven't any more, just as you know it."

"What are you talking about?" Johnny demanded. "Why, that tee shot off the third was as good as any you ever made."

Andy Bellows squinted up at the sun that had just begun to sink toward the western horizon.

"There aren't enough of those shots left in the old boy, Johnny," he said, softly. "One good shot a round doesn't win tournaments. Nope, I'm going home where there's a two-by-four country club where I can get a job as pro, on my record, and putter around, playing dollar Nassau rounds and selling a club here and there and a half a dozen balls every once in awhile, and bawling out the caddies now and then, just to show 'em who's boss."

"B-but, gosh," Johnny Trang said, "it won't seem like the same circuit with you not playing, Andy. I mean, ever since I played my first tournament, I've been used to seeing you around. You've been sort of a—a—"

"Landmark," Andy Bellows said, with a short laugh. "Golf's Old Man of the Mountain, that's me. No, Johnny, I've had enough. The strain, the high blood pressure, the fake grin you have to put on when a putt doesn't fall, robbing you of a couple of thousand bucks—I'm past the age when I could take that."

"It's a bum racket, Johnny. Oh, I know we live in the best of clubs and eat thick steaks and drink the best bonded bourbon a man can buy, but we pay for it—every drink and every bite of food and every fancy bedroom the club lets us use. We pay for it by getting old before our time, by forfeiting any kind of decent home life we might have, by getting to be strangers to our kids, by spending those 'white nights' when we know we should be sleeping but we can't because our long game has mysteriously deserted us and the man we're playing tomorrow will murder us and we can't afford to lose this one, and—"

He broke off and swung around to look Johnny in the eye.

"How old do you think I am, Johnny?" he asked, quietly.

"Gee, I dunno," Johnny said, uncomfortably. "You've been around a long time, Andy. Uh—fifty—fifty-five, maybe?"

There was that harsh, mirthless bark of laughter again from the older man.

"I'm forty-six, Johnny," Bellows said. "The difference between that and the age you see on my face was put there by competition golf. And you wonder why I'm quitting the racket?"

They were walking up the steps leading to the patio opening off the grill.

"I'll buy you a drink," Andy Bellows said. "Sort of a farewell highball, we'll call it."

"I'll take a bottle of pop," Johnny

"That's the way Chip does," somebody else said, idly. "Just when you think you've got a chance to beat him, he comes up with one of those super-specials, and you realize right then that you're just another guy named Joe, playing the great Chip Dawson."

"I remember a time at Amarillo," a voice said from a corner. "I was five and six on Chip. He was having a terrible day—or so we all thought. That twelfth at Amarillo was a dog-leg, number two iron hole. I played it safe, being that far ahead. I landed at the turn and I was pretty sure I'd be on in four. Chip fluffed his tee shot and landed in the rough, to the right of the fairway. He picked out an old bulger club that just got past the rules committee and laid it across the crook of that dog-leg, over the trees, a mile high."

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said. "With me meeting Dawson tomorrow, I'd better lay off anything harder."

"You see?" Andy Bellows said. "If you were a stockbroker or a shoemaker, you could have a drink with a friend, seeing that your day's work is done. But because you're a pro golfer, you're starting to worry about tomorrow already. You don't dare have a friendly highball. You're afraid a drink might kick back on you tomorrow when you've got a putt to make that'll mean so much to you. You'd rather have a highball than a bottle of pop, but you're afraid, kid—afraid! And that's what pro golf is—fear!"

**A** HOT denial sprang to Johnny's lips and died there. He laughed, uncertainly, and shrugged.

"Maybe you're right, Andy," he said, "but I'm still having that bottle of pop."

They walked into the clubhouse bar and put their feet on the rail.

"Nice game, Johnny," somebody called, from across the room. "Going to do the same thing to Chip tomorrow?"

"How's Chip stand now?" Johnny asked.

"Three up," the voice replied. "Sunny hasn't got a chance. Not after that second hole, when Chip came blasting out of a trap to lay the pill an inch from the cup. Sunny broke his heart right there."

There was a deep sigh from the corner.

"It landed on the green," the voice said. "Chip was on in two and down in three."

Another sigh.

"I didn't take another hole," the lugubrious voice said. "Chip won that match, on the twenty-first."

Johnny Trang pushed the glass of soda pop away from him and turned from the bar. His voice was higher-pitched than he meant it to be.

"You fellows trying to scare me?" he asked. "Ever since I lasted out the preliminaries, got into the quarter-final round and the semi-final, all I've heard is what a hot-shot Chip Dawson is. You fellas wouldn't be ganging up on me, by any chance, would you—trying to get my nerves edgy?"

"Why, Johnny!" somebody murmured. "You know better than that!"

The tournament secretary, a round little man named Irvine, came through the door into the bar, his face wearing its perpetual harried look. He saw Johnny standing at the long, gleaming counter and hustled toward him.

"It's you and Chip tomorrow," he said. "Chip's got Sunny five down, coming into the last thirteenth and Sunny's blown sky-high. It'll be over in a minute."

## CHAPTER II

*Indian Sign*

**J**OHNNY TRANG suddenly felt ill. The pop he had drunk suddenly tasted stale in the back of his mouth. He had never admitted it to himself, but he had been hoping, praying, that "Sunny" Sinclair would do the impossible that afternoon and beat Chip Dawson. If the impossible happened and Sunny got into the semi-finals, Johnny could have that highball he had refused to drink with Andy Bellows. Sunny was a good golfer, a long ball man with a lot of laughs, but Johnny could beat him.

But Chip Dawson—that ruthless, emotionless golfing machine—that would be something else again. Johnny never had beaten Chip when the dough was on the line. Oh, he had beaten Dawson in a few games at East Lake, in Atlanta, and once at Rolling Road, in Baltimore, and once in New Jersey, at that fabulously impossible course that some mad genius must have laid out, but they were just "friendly" games, five and ten-dollar nassau, and Chip hadn't had the blood in his eye that always rose there whenever there was a big tournament to be won.

It was funny, but when Chip was playing for fun, he was an all-right sort of guy. He didn't laugh much, true, but there was none of that thin-lipped, cold-eyed attitude he carried into tournaments, either. He was almost as human as the next man in those "friendly" games. But on a tournament course, he changed.

Johnny remembered the time in California, during the tournament sponsored by that movie star, when he, Johnny, had come close to beating Dawson. Chip's putting had been off that day, and Johnny found himself making the turn of the final eighteen with three holes to his advantage.

Chip was his usual tournament self, close-mouthed, ignoring the gallery, the caddies, the weather, his opponent; intent only on sinking his ball in the next cup with as few strokes as possible.

"Y'got him, Mr. Trang," Johnny's caddy whispered, as he handed Johnny

his midiron on the tenth. "This is the time you beat him."

"Don't put the ah-poo on me, fella," Johnny said, lightly. But in his heart he thought certainly that this was the time he was going to beat Chip Dawson.

He addressed his ball. He was three quarters of the way down the fairway, with a bunker to his left and a sand trap rimming the right side of the ovulate green. He knew he'd have to "borrow" from the left, because the green pitched from left to right, so he changed his stance a trifle.

It was while he was shifting his position that, for a reason he never would know, his club slipped from his fingers. The head of the midiron performed a parabola and clicked up against the ball, as though it had been aimed. The white pellet traveled two or three feet and rolled to a rest.

Johnny, staring down at the ball, knew, somehow, that he had lost this match to Chip Dawson. There was no reason why he couldn't still win it. Dawson was playing some of the most miserable golf in his long career, Johnny was three-up with nine holes to play, the lost stroke was just a stroke, after all. But Trang knew that this was the break Chip had been waiting for. This was the turning point.

Chip Dawson was like a prize-fighter, lying back, ever-watchful. Let a man make a mistake while playing Chip and Dawson was in there, gaining some kind of strange strength from his opponent's momentary lapse.

There was a silence behind Johnny. Then the judge's voice said, quietly.

"Mr. Trang lies two strokes. Mr. Trang is away."

Johnny whirled, the rage born of that unaccountable slip of his club, the freak tap of the ball, spurring his hot voice into action.

"It was an accident!" he half-yelled. "Anybody could see I didn't take a cut at the ball! The club dropped out of my hand and—and—"

They were all staring at him, astounded, as he yelled. Johnny felt a hot flush of shame well through him as he realized what he had done, and he turned away from the round eyes of the gallery, gulping.

"Do you want to protest, Mr. Trang?" the judge asked.

"No," Johnny muttered, shaking his

head. "No, I'm sorry."

He forced himself to address the ball, brought back his club and heard the sick click of a slice as the club-head whipped through. He watched the ball disappear down the fairway, headed for the bunker. He was in, he knew, and for some reason he knew, too, that he wouldn't be getting out of that bunker with one stroke.

He didn't. He blasted one that sent the ball up into the air, to perch on the rim of the bunker and then trickle back to his feet. He baffed the second try and whiffed the third. Tournament rules demanded that he play out the hole; otherwise, he would have picked up. He holed out with a nine, while Chip Dawson was down in four. Chip Dawson won that match, and the tournament, on the seventeenth, two-up.

Things like that always happened when a man played Chip Dawson in a match that was important. You couldn't call it luck, exactly. It was as though Fate conspired to make Chip a winner.

"Okay," he told the tournament secretary. "So it's Chip and I."

"Eighteen in the morning," the secretary reminded him, "and eighteen in the afternoon."

"Uh-huh," Johnny said.

"You'll be expected at the first tee by nine o'clock," the worried tournament director said. "Please try to be prompt, Mr. Trang."

"I'll be there," Johnny said, grimly.

"The radio says rain," the secretary said. "I hope—"

**H**IS voice trailed off as he spotted somebody else he wanted to talk to and left Johnny staring at the glass of pop in front of him. There was a moment's silence and then Andy Bellows shifted his weight and sighed.

"It won't be any fun in the rain," Andy remarked, idly. "It's tough enough in good weather."

"Rain or shine," Johnny said, stubbornly, "I'm going to take that guy some day. It stands to reason that he's got to lose one of these days."

"Sure," Andy said, soothingly, "but the guy that's going to beat him is probably wearing diapers right now."

Some sports writers came into the bar then and pushed their way up to Johnny.

"Going to win tomorrow, Johnny?" one of them asked. "Going to beat the old jinx?"

"Dawson's short game looked way off to me, today," another put in. "Maybe the old master is starting to slip. I remember when Jones first began to slide. His short game left him before anything else."

"Drink up, fellas," Johnny said. "Oh, bartender!"

"How about a little something for the panting public?" the sports writer who had spoken first asked. He was a heavy-set man who wore a sun helmet set far back on his head. "Something about may the best man win and all that hooey?"

"You can put some words in my mouth, can't you?" Johnny asked, forcing a grin. "Seems to me every time I see myself quoted in the papers, it's something you boys made up, anyway. But you can say it's a lucky break for me that I beat Andy Bellows today, and something about Andy being a credit to the game and how we're all sorry he's dropping out of pro competition."

"He's what?" asked the reporter.

"Ask him," Johnny said, briefly. "That's what he told me."

That set the sports writers off in full cry after Bellows, who was trying to slip out of the bar. His aim accomplished and rid of the newspaper men, Johnny laid a bill on the bar to pay for his drinks and started to leave. He met Sam just outside the door, and Sam wore a worried frown on his lean, sun-burned face.

Sam was the man who represented one of the nation's biggest golfing equipment houses. It had been Sam who had approached Johnny when Trang was just starting up the ladder, that day at Charlotte, North Carolina, when Johnny had cracked the course record in a qualifying round. It had been Sam who had gotten Johnny's name on the dotted line of a contract that meant considerable money to Trang, even when he was coming up, and would mean a great deal more if and when Johnny ever beat Chip Dawson in a big tournament.

"Hi, Sam," Johnny said. "Why the worried look? Don't tell me you let that kid who's been burning up the West Coast get away from you and sign up with Zenith."

Zenith was the main competition of Sam's company. Zenith had Chip Dawson signed up. Chip used Zenith clubs and Zenith balls, he wore Zenith shoes

and his caddy carried a Zenith bag, just as Johnny's caddy carried a Triumph bag and just as Johnny used Triumph clubs and Triumph balls and wore Triumph shoes.

"Naw," Sam said. "I got him about ready to sign, I think. What I'm worryin' about is this wire I got from the home office today."

"About me?" Johnny asked, carefully.

"Yeah. The home office says—well, they were disappointed in the showing you made in the Open, Johnny, to be frank. They said in this wire they'd like you to win this one or—or—well, you know how these businessmen are."

"Or the contract's canceled, huh?" Johnny asked.

"Something like that. Oh, I guess they'll keep you signed up, but there won't be the dough there would be if you beat Chip tomorrow."

Johnny Trang kicked at the side of the clubhouse, his spiked shoe tapping the fieldstone foundation thoughtfully.

"You can't blame them, I suppose," he said, slowly. "There's a heck of a lot of difference between the advertising value of a runner-up and a champion. I guess I have been pretty much of a flop for Triumph, always getting beaten by Chip."

"Believe me, Johnny," Sam said, earnestly, "I think you're one of the swellest guys in golf. If you can take Chip tomorrow, Triumph can really go to town. They like you, Johnny—honestly. It's just that—well—"

"They can't stay hooked up with the perennial runner-up," Johnny said, forcing a grin.

"Well, yes," Sam admitted. "And there's something more to that wire. The home office tells me that Chip's contract with Zenith is expiring next week. I've got orders to sign him up, at almost any cost, if he wins tomorrow."

The lean-faced man slapped a hand lightly on Johnny's shoulder.

"I know it's tough to put the pressure on you like this," he said, "but I thought you'd want to know how things stood."

"Sure," Johnny said. "Thanks."

"I saw Midge on the clubhouse porch," Sam said, after a pause. "She told me she'd be waiting for you there."

**Y**ES, Johnny thought, Midge would be waiting. She'd always be waiting, with a brave smile, every time John-

ny came back from losing a match that always seemed to be in the bag until Chip Dawson came along. Midge had waited on a thousand clubhouse porches, always gay, always smiling, never letting the world see that she knew her husband was the perennial runner-up.

Johnny made his way slowly toward the porch, on the other side of the building. The Dawson-Sinclair match was finished now and the crowds were streaming past the white building, bound for their cars or for a table in the lounge. Trang kept his head down as he walked through the crowd. He had no desire to be pounced upon, right then, by some old gaffer who would insist on telling him how he could beat Chip. Nor did he want to sign any score-cards, either. Let Chip Dawson sign the score-cards—his signature would be worth something tomorrow, after he had beaten Johnny, while the runner-up's name wouldn't mean a thing.

Midge was at a table near the railing of the porch that looked over the broad sweeping expanse of the Brucehurst course. She wore white, with a wide, brown, brass-studded belt around her slim middle. Her eyes, as she looked up at him, were happy, gay, and still they asked a question.

"Nice golf, Mr. T.," she said, as he pulled out the chair opposite her. "Somebody said that recovery you made on the fifth was a beauty."

"Andy was off his game today," Johnny said. "I wasn't so hot. Not hot enough to beat Chip Dawson on the worst day Chip ever had. By the way, Andy told me he's quitting the racket."

"Quitting?"

"He's going to get himself a pro job at some little two-by-four country club," Johnny said, "and enjoy life. No more ulcers."

"I wish—" Midge began, and then stopped. Johnny waited for her to continue and then asked:

"You wish what?"

"Nothing," Midge said, with the suggestion of a nervous laugh.

"You wish I'd quit this racket, too, don't you?" Johnny asked. "You wish I'd get a regular job somewhere and settle down and make a home for the two of us and quit this knocking around the country from one tournament to another. That's what you started to say, wasn't it?"



Midge toyed with the cigarette lighter that lay in her long fingers.

"You wish I'd give up the idea that I can ever beat Chip Dawson, don't you?" Johnny continued, relentlessly. "You wish I'd get wise to myself and know I'll never be anything but a runner-up, that I'll never be good enough to be anything but second best."

"You're not second-best to me, Johnny," Midge said, quietly. "You've always been very-best to me."

"Some very-best," Johnny said, bitterly. "When we were married, I was going to make Bob Jones look like a duffer. I was going to win every tournament in sight and we'd have a million dollars. So what happened. I've taken the second money every time and that money I'd usually bet on myself to win, and lost. You've had to scrimp and scrounge to keep a decent dress on your back, because you're married to a second-rater. You want kids, but your very-best husband won't give up this rat-race and admit he's a perennial runner-up and get a real job at selling shoes or peddling ice, so you can have a home. A fine very-best you picked, Midge."

"Johnny," Midge said, in her quiet voice, "you're talking now as though you'd lost tomorrow's match already."

He reached for a cigarette in the pocket of his sports coat—the Triumph sports coat that would have cost a hundred dollars for anybody else. His hands were unsteady as he thrust the white tube into his mouth.

"Why kid ourselves, Midge?" he asked. "I won't beat Chip Dawson tomorrow. I'll never beat him. He's got the Indian sign on me, and he always has. Ever since the night at East Lake when—"

That seemed a long time ago, but it had been only five years or so previously when Johnny Trang had seen Midge walk into the East Lake dining room on the arm of Chip Dawson. Chip was on his way to Augusta for the Master's and Midge was visiting friends in Atlanta and the word was out that this was the girl whom Chip was going to marry.

"The lucky stiff," somebody had murmured as Johnny had stared at Midge. "He's got the world's best game of golf, all the money they've minted since the Year One and now he gets the prettiest girl in the country to be his wife."

"She's not going to be his wife," Johnny muttered, mechanically. "She's going to be my wife."

"Take it easy, Johnny," his companion had said. "She's wearing Chip's ring right now. What chance do any of the rest of us have with that set-up?"

"The devil with his ring," Johnny said. "Somebody get me an introduction to that girl!"

"You been drinkin', Johnny?"

"No. How about that introduction?"

LATER, that night, he got to meet her. They danced in the long, narrow ballroom and she was light and warm in his arms.

"Look," he said. "I know this sounds like High School stuff, but I'm in love with you."

She drew back and looked up at him, waiting for the rest of the joke.

"No, really," he said. "This is no line. I looked at you and—and—"

He couldn't go on. Midge Faraday—that was her name then—put on a puzzled frown and shook her head.

"I think you've made a mistake, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Trang. Johnny Trang."

"Mr. Trang. You see, I'm from out of town and—"

"And you're engaged to Chip Dawson," Johnny broke in. "I know all about that. Well, I had to tell you that I fell in love with you the first time I saw you."

"Really, I can't listen to this."

"If you want to stop dancing, we'll go back to your table," Johnny said.

"If I'm bothering you, just say the word. I don't want to be offensive."

She looked up at him and then down, the long lashes veiling the blue eyes.

"You're not offensive, Mr. Trang," she murmured.

"Johnny," he prompted.

"Johnny," she said, in a voice just above a whisper.

And later that night, Johnny Trang took Midge in his arms and kissed her warm lips.

"This is awful," she said, after that kiss. "I'm engaged. You must think I'm terrible, Johnny."

"I think you're wonderful," he said. "Let's get in my car and go somewhere and get married. I know a man who'll marry us right now. He'll take care of the license and everything."

"But what about Chip?"

He took her shoulders in his hands and held her off to look at her.

"You do love me, don't you?" he demanded.

"I—I guess—I mean—oh, Johnny, I do! I never believed that story-book business about two people falling in love at first sight, but now I do believe it. I never felt like this before, not even with Chip."

"Come on," Johnny said, purposefully. "My car's over this way."

So they were married. The story of the elopement was a minor sensation in the press for several days. If Chip Dawson's pride was hurt by having his fiancée stolen away before his eyes, he never showed it. He kept a tight-lipped silence and when he met Johnny Trang at Augusta, a few days later, he shook hands and wished Johnny luck.

"Midge wanted us to tell you—" Johnny started.

"Forget it," Chip Dawson said, briefly. "Seems I've drawn you in the first round, Trang. You'd better play some golf today."

Chip won that round, with a 68. And he had won every round that mattered after that, from Johnny Trang. All that Johnny remembered now.

"He's got the Indian sign on me," Johnny repeated to Midge. "I guess it's his way of getting revenge for that night at East Lake."

## CHAPTER III

### *Gloating Rival*

**M**IDGE reached across the table with an impulsive grasp. Her hand closed over Johnny's and he felt the bite of her long fingernails.

"Johnny," she said, "don't you see that you're beating yourself, always taking it for granted that Chip is going to beat you? You've made it sort of a complex, darling. You think Chip hates you because I married you instead of him, and every shot you make, every putt you line up, is handicapped by that thought. That's why you've never been able to beat him, Johnny."

"Psychic stuff," Trang grunted. "Freud and Company."

"Maybe," Midge acknowledged. "But—oh, Johnny, I do want a home and children and all the rest of it we've never been able to have. But before I want that, I want you to win a tournament against Chip Dawson! I may be silly, but I think it would mean more to you than just the money or the contract with Triumph. I think that until you do win from Chip, you'll always think of yourself as a second-best man, in golf and everything else. I don't think I could go through life with a husband who thought himself a second-best man, Johnny."

"In other words," Johnny Trang said, harshly, "if I don't win tomorrow, I'll be out a wife?"

"Of course not," Midge said, her voice tinged with hurt, "but if you win tomorrow, if you'll beat down this complex you've been carrying, we'll be a lot happier, Johnny. Then you can quit tournament golf and we can get a place in the country somewhere and raise that family we've always been talking about, and you'll know that you really are that very-best man I've always seen you as."

"If I win tomorrow," Johnny said, gloomily.

"You can, Johnny! You *can*!"

A group of people came out of the clubhouse and moved to a table on the other side of the veranda. One of the group was a thick-set, unsmiling man in a gray, rough coat, dark green tie and bluish-green slacks. His hair was yellow, made almost white by the sun and his features were deeply tanned. As he walked, he held himself with an air that proclaimed his utter self-confidence.

"There he is," Johnny Trang told Midge. "There's the great one, himself."

Chip Dawson held out a chair for one of the women in the party and then moved toward another chair. His eyes flicked over the crowd on the veranda and came to rest on Johnny Trang. If Chip ever could be said to smile, he came closest to it then. He murmured something to the woman who was his escort and headed across the veranda, bound for the table where Midge and Johnny sat.

"Observing the amenities," Johnny said, cynically. "He might hate my innards, but he still has to make the courteous gesture."

He stood up as Dawson approached the table. The big man with the sun-bleached hair stuck out a large, browned hand.

"I hear we're slated to tangle tomorrow," he said. "Hello, Midge. Sit down, Johnny."

He pulled a chair from an adjoining table and sat down.

"Nice game today," Johnny said, tonelessly. Chip shrugged.

"Sunny had some bad luck," he said, easily. "I hear you gave Old Man Bellows a real shellacking."

"He's quitting the game," Johnny said. "He's retiring."

"I heard that," Chip Dawson said, "and it's about time. He's all through, washed up. I'll be glad to be able to play a tournament without him ahead of me, puttering around, taking a half hour on each shot."

"I always liked Andy," Midge protested. "He's a friendly sort of man."

"Sure," Chip said, with a laugh that had a hint of unpleasantness in it. "He's friendly enough. But since when did friendliness pay off in dollar bills?"

Johnny stared at the man across the table. That kind of talk wasn't like Chip—not like him at all. Chip was taciturn but when he said anything about another golfer, it always had been something complimentary, never anything like that crack about old Andy Bellows.

Chip signaled a waiter and looked at Johnny.

"What're you drinking?" he asked.

"Orangeade for me," Johnny said. "Midge will have a—Manhattan, is it?"

She nodded, her eyes intent on Chip. "Orangeade," Dawson scoffed. "Don't tell me you've gone on the wagon to beat me tomorrow, Johnny?"

"Maybe," Trang said, carefully.

"Two Manhattans and an orangeade," Chip told the waiter. When the man in the white jacket had gone, Chip leaned forward, his elbows on the table, that enigmatic half smile still on his face.

"Because if you think you can beat me by going on the wagon, Johnny," he said, distinctly, "you've got a couple of more thinks coming."

**J**OHNNY bit down hard on the words he wanted to say and kept a semblance of a smile on his face.

"Because," Chip Dawson said, measur-

ing his words, "I'm going to beat the life out of you tomorrow, Johnny. My contract with Zenith is up next week and I'm shopping around for a new contract, with Zenith or Triumph. If I don't win tomorrow, I might have a little trouble getting the price I want for my contract, but I'm going to win."

He looked around to make certain that he was not being overheard and leaned forward again.

"I owe you this, Trang," he said. "I owe it to both you and Midge, for making a fool out of me with that elopement of yours. When I heard you two had run off and gotten married, I swore to myself that I'd beat you at the only thing I could—golf. And I have, Johnny, and I always will."

He held out a hand as Midge started to push her chair back.

"Don't get up, Midge," he warned. "You don't want to make a scene, here on the Brucehurst clubhouse porch, do you? No, sit still and we'll all grin at each other and have drinks together and the people will all say, 'Isn't it a great sport, golf, where two men who are going to meet tomorrow for the title can sit down and drink together and be friendly.' Yes, we have to keep up appearances, don't we?"

Johnny Trang looked at his hands, lying on the table top. He watched one of his hands ball itself into a fist.

"No, Johnny!" Midge warned, sharply. Chip Dawson laughed.

"Want to slug me, Johnny?" he jeered. "Don't think I haven't wanted to slug you plenty of times, every time I saw your face. But I didn't. I get my satisfaction out of beating your ears off every time I get you on a golf course. That movie star's tournament, when you blew up and made an ass out of yourself—I enjoyed that, Johnny."

"You'd better leave, Chip," Midge said, in a low voice. "You'd better go back to your party."

"Sure," Chip said. He leaned back in his chair and hooked his thumbs over the braided leather belt with the hammered silver buckle. "But I just wanted you two to know that tomorrow's going to be the pay-off. I've been Chip Dawson, the gent who had his girl stolen and never shed a tear, but now I'm Chip Dawson, the guy who pays his debts, Midge. Tomorrow, I'm going to beat this bright boy, Midge, and then I'm

going to take his Triumph contract, and I hope the two of you starve to death, trailing around after the second-rate tournaments, playing for peanuts."

"That's enough," Johnny said, holding his voice under a tight rein. "Beat it, Dawson, before I give the newspapers something real to write about. I always thought that polite face you wore was a mask and now I know."

Chip Dawson stood up, leaned over to lay a hand on Johnny's shoulder. To those who watched the little tableau, it seemed that Chip might be wishing Johnny luck on the morrow. Dawson's half-smile, the grin that Johnny had somehow managed to maintain, Midge's composed features, all spelled the lie to what really was taking place.

"See you tomorrow, Johnny," Dawson said. "See you tomorrow and beat your head off—with pleasure."

"Hold it a second, Chip," a voice said. The three people at the table turned to see a newspaper cameraman aiming his lens at them. There was the snick of the shutter while the three beamed at the camera.

"Thanks," the photographer said. "Nice shot. Champ and challenger the best of pals when they're not fighting it out on the course."

"The best of pals," Chip said, heartily. "Be seeing you, Johnny."

That night, sleep was long in coming to Johnny Trang. He lay there, staring at the ceiling, seeing himself make every shot he was slated to make the next day. On the first hole, a straight-away par four with deep, disastrous traps waiting for the unlucky man who hooked or sliced, he got halfway down the fairway and then his club slipped, the ball moved a foot or so, and Chip Dawson laughed.

It was a new laugh, like the new manner Chip had adopted. He never had liked Chip, he always had been afraid of Chip on the fairways and greens, but Johnny had always respected him for his sportsmanship, his taciturn gentleness.

And, that afternoon on the clubhouse veranda, Chip had proved that his attitude had been a pose, had shown Johnny clearly that he had had one main goal in life after that night at East Lake, to beat Johnny Trang, to prove with driver and mashie and putter that he was a better man than Johnny.

So, in his mind, he lost the first hole

and the second, a water hole, went to Dawson, too. The third was a dog-leg and Johnny sliced his drive into the woods and took three strokes, four, five, a hundred, to get out. And Dawson won the fourth and all the others and nobody would stop the match, even though Johnny Trang had no hope of winning. He was five down, six, ten, twenty—and still he had to keep on playing. And with every lost hole, Chip Dawson laughed, his voice mounting to a bellow.

"You can't win!" Chip Dawson howled. "You're just a runner-up—a perennial runner-up!"

Then there was Midge shaking his shoulder and telling him to wake up.

"You must have had a terrible dream, Johnny," she told him. "You were thrashing around, yelling something about beating somebody if it was the last thing you did."

**N**ERVOUSLY Johnny reached for his robe, wrapped it around him, and walked to the window. He looked out on the golf course, bathed in moonlight. There lay the fairways, the greens, the tees, the bunkers, the traps, he would have to play over tomorrow, that day, without hope of ever winning. Because he never could beat Chip Dawson.

He found a cigarette, lighted it, and sat down in an arm chair that faced the picture window looking out over the course. Behind him, he heard the rustle of Midge leaving her bed and then she was beside him, lovely in her dressing gown. Her hand rested lightly on his shoulder for a moment, touched his hair.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" she asked, softly.

"Nothing," he said.

"Are you worried about tomorrow?" she asked. "Don't be. Even if Chip beats you tomorrow, there'll be other tournaments. It's not that important."

He looked at the glowing end of his cigarette and shook his head.

"It's something more important than winning a tournament," he said. "I've been an almost-good golfer long enough. Somehow, I feel that if I don't win tomorrow, I'm through. Chip made sort of a challenge there on the veranda this afternoon."

"You're tired, Johnny. Try to get some sleep."

"A challenge that told me that this was going to be my last chance to win. Not the game, especially, but my own self-respect. For years, now, I've played second-best, where Chip was concerned, in everything but you, Midge. And even the love you might have for me—that can't endure forever, with me an also-ran, a runner-up."

"Don't say that."

"But it's true, Midge," Johnny insisted. "I promised you so much and I've come through with so little, really. The man you were going to marry, the man you probably should have married, has beaten me every time it counted."

"Johnny!" Midge said, softly, "Don't say things like that. You know you'll always be very-best with me. No matter how many tournaments Chip Dawson wins from you, you'll always be my Johnny."

"Johnny, the runner-up," Trang said, dismally. "Johnny, the guy who was never quite good enough."

Her hand left his shoulder and she moved across the room, a dim figure in the uncertain light. When she spoke, her voice was totally unlike the voice Johnny Trang always had known.

"Can't you ever say anything but that?" she asked, her tone hardening. "Must you always just sit there and call yourself a perennial runner-up, a not-quite-good-enough man? Aren't you ever going to take a brace and tell yourself that you're as good as Chip Dawson, on the golf course or off it?"

"Midge!"

"Chip sat across the table from us and laughed at us," Midge went on, stormily. "He took off his mask and showed us he was gloating over the fact that he was getting his revenge for his jilting by beating you at golf. And every time he wins from you, he'll gloat more. He'll tell himself what a fool I was to marry you, the runner-up, instead of him, the winner. And while he's laughing, gloating, you'll be sitting in your own little private pool of misery, saying you're no good, beating yourself with your whips of self-commiseration."

"I—"

"You said a few minutes ago that my love for you might not last through years of being married to an also-ran. Well, Johnny, maybe it won't!"

He stared at her with disbelieving eyes. Was this Midge, whose loyalty

never had been shaken? Was this the girl to whom Johnny had always been sure he could turn for an encouraging word, a phrase that could soften the bitterness of defeat?

He put out a hand toward her and heard her muffled sob as she turned away.

"Oh, Johnny," she cried, "you know it hurt me to say things like that. But maybe I haven't been good for you. Maybe, if I gave you less sympathy, if I said things and did things to make you mad, you'd put up more of a fight. As it is now, you're leaning too heavily on my love, you're tying yourself to my apron strings and running to me for sympathy when you should be getting mad enough to beat this jinx you've raised in your own mind, mad enough to win from Chip Dawson and all the other Chip Dawsons of life."

She crossed the room again and put her hands up to Johnny Trang's shoulders.

"You've got to win today," she said, her voice low and earnest. "You've got to show me and the others that you can win under pressure, not curl up and be half-beaten before you tee off. Because if you don't win, Johnny, I don't know what will happen to us."

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## CHAPTER IV

### *A Gentleman's Game*

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**W**HEN Johnny Trang reached the first tee, the next morning, his face was taut and lined. He wondered vaguely whether any other pro golfer had gone into a match with quite so much pressure put on him. The prize money, the Triumph contract, these would be enough to bear ordinarily, but they were secondary now. There was Midge and her faltering faith and there was Chip Dawson and the silent laughter he had enjoyed for years behind that taciturn mask.

Chip was at the tee when Johnny arrived, sitting on a bench, tapping the ground between his feet with the head of an iron. He barely glanced up as Johnny approached him, but the fleeting look he gave Trang seemed to be one of mocking contempt.

Johnny forced himself to walk up to the other man and hold out his hand. Chip got to his feet and grasped Johnny's hand in a hard grip, then let it drop.

"We've got good weather for it," Dawson said. "Yep, it's a grand day for it."

A grand day for Johnny Trang's final humiliation, he might have said. A grand day to administer a beating to Trang that would be the costliest Johnny ever had suffered. Johnny forced himself to smile and nod. He busied himself fitting the fingerless glove over one hand and stood by, waiting, while a coin flickered in the morning sun.

"Heads," Chip Dawson said. Then: "Heads it is."

His tee shot was a booming screamer, straight down the fairway, trickling to a stop within possible pitch-shot distance of the green. There came a murmur from the gallery, the muffled rumble sent up by men and women who might often have dreamed of making such a drive but never had and probably never would.

Johnny stepped up, knelt to tee his ball. He straightened, wiped a hand down one side of his slacks, and took his stance. He wagged his club, shifted his feet a fraction of an inch, brought back the iron and swung.

It was a fluff and the crowd gasped. Johnny had topped the ball and the white pellet trickled miserably down the fairway, barely traveling a hundred yards.

"Tough," Chip Dawson murmured, and there was the same mocking contempt in his voice that Johnny had seen in his eyes. Trang tried to keep his features from reflecting the black despair that welled up within him as he turned to hand his caddy the iron.

"Good place to get rid of the bad one," the caddy said, hopefully.

"Sure," Johnny muttered. "Brassie."

His next shot was a long, low drive that carried beyond Chip's ball and then, inexplicably, took on a rolling curve that carried it into the pocket of a trap on the right of the fairway. Johnny bit his lip to choke back the words that fought to be said. What was the use? This man, this Chip Dawson was out to ruin him and he seemed to be able to command the roll of a ball.

Dawson was away and he took some time in measuring the chip shot that

was his specialty, the shot that had given him his nickname. Then, when he swung, the ball arched in a neat, long parabola, hit the green with a backspin, seemed to hesitate a moment and then streaked straight for the hole. The man holding the flag leaped back hastily and stood there, his eyes fixed on the white pellet, as the ball trickled forward, hung on the lip of the cup and then plunked in. The gallery burst into a spontaneous cheer.

"Nice shot," Johnny Trang told Chip Dawson.

"You ain't seen nothin' yet, Johnny," Dawson said, under his breath. "I've been saving some real eye-openers for you—and Midge—for this special occasion."

Johnny managed to halve the second, but Chip took the third, with another of those seemingly impossible chip shots that rolled to within a few inches of the pin. They halved the fourth and Johnny won his first hole on the fifth green. It was a fifteen-foot putt that did it.

"And they call *me* lucky," Chip Dawson said, in a barely audible voice.

Dawson took the next three holes in a row. Johnny managed to halve the ninth, but at the turn, Chip was four up, with twenty-seven to play.

"Want to quit now, Johnny?" Dawson murmured, his face holding that half smile. "You could have an attack of appendicitis, or something."

"Play golf," Johnny hissed back, his voice furious.

"I'm going to, Johnny-Boy," Chip Dawson muttered. "I'm going to play your ears off. This match is for keeps."

The judges must have sensed the undercurrent of mutual hatred that passed between the two finalists because they kept giving Chip and Johnny uneasy glances now and then. The two men kept their voices so low that not even the caddies could catch the words, but Johnny's scowl and Chip's manner told the judges, and gradually the gallery, that there might be something more between these two men than the natural rivalry of a big-money tournament.

Trang sank another long putt to halve the tenth. He lost the eleventh and the twelfth. Chip's smile was broader now than anybody remembered ever having seen it. He handled his clubs with almost disdainful ease. He took chances that gave the crowd the impression that

he could afford to gamble, playing a man like Johnny Trang.

And Johnny began pressing. His short game went to pieces, stroke by stroke. He overshot the green time and again, sent his ball into traps, sliced, hooked, played his strokes like the most impossible duffer. The gallery murmured and Chip Dawson's smile grew almost to a beam.

"You're off your game, Johnny," Dawson said. "You really can't be this bad."

"Shut up," Trang said, savagely, his voice rising despite himself.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," one of the judges said, in a low voice.

"It's all right," Chip said, aloud, smiling at the judge. "Johnny usually blows his cork like that when he starts losing."

SO NOW it was out, for all the gallery to hear. Now the farce of sportsmanship was over and done with and the people watching the match knew that the handshakes, the posed photographs, were all part of an act and that these two men really detested each other. They knew that Chip Dawson was getting a great deal of pleasure by running away with this match, humiliating the other man, and they knew, too, that Johnny Trang would have liked nothing better than bringing his club down against Dawson's skull, instead of the ball.

"Poor loser," somebody murmured in a voice that just carried to Trang's ears.

"You can't blame him," somebody else said. "Chip's been needling him ever since the match started. Dawson's the poor sportsman, not Trang."

Johnny, waiting for Chip to drive, looked down at his hands, gripped around the leather-wrapped shaft. That was it, all right, he told himself. Chip had worked on his, Johnny's hot temper, knowing that those half-whispered digs, those murmured slurs, would blow him up, in time.

But why, if Chip was so much the better golfer than he, would Dawson have to resort to those tactics? Why, suddenly, had Chip unmasked himself, changed from the silent player he always had been into this new character who openly broke every rule of sportsmanship, had acted so strangely that the judges had had to openly caution him. Chip had coughed at the top of Johnny's

swing, he had cleared his throat while Trang was lining up a put. He had used every despicable trick known to a golf course.

And why?

Then realization struck Johnny Trang. Chip Dawson, he thought, would not have done those things if he had the self-confidence he had boasted of, over that table on the veranda the previous day. When Chip Dawson resorted to the kind of tricks, it meant that Chip Dawson was worried, afraid of losing this match. It meant that he was willing to lose the respect of the gallery and of the judges rather than face the defeat he feared might lay in Johnny Trang's clubs.

Johnny nearly laughed aloud. Chip Dawson had given himself away. Chip, by his own strange tactics, had done more to revive Johnny's confidence than all the arguments Johnny had given himself, all the arguments of Johnny's friends—yes, even the words of Midge. Chip was telling him, with every snide trick he played, that he was afraid of Johnny Trang.

Chip's ball whistled down the fairway, straight and true, and Johnny walked up to address his ball. He looked around the circle of faces that stared at him and, suddenly, he grinned. There was a lightness in his heart that had been too long absent, a strength in his arms, a sureness in his eye. He saw Sam looking at him, his eyes marking his embarrassment at Johnny's humiliation, and Trang winked.

He wanted to call over to Sam, tell him that it was all right now. He wanted to send a message to Midge, on the clubhouse veranda, that things were going to be okay, after all because Chip Dawson had showed him that he, Chip, was just another golfer, after all, a human who could get as scared as the next man and who, when he cracked, showed it more than most. Jinx? If Chip held a jinx over him, he wouldn't have to play dirty pool. Heck, no, Chip possessed no jinx. Chip was scared.

He brought his club back, swung, and heard the sharp click of a cleanly-hit ball. There was a murmur from the crowd behind him and he knew he had outdriven Dawson, the great Chip Dawson, the man who held the Indian sign over Johnny Trang—like the devil.

He saw Chip flash him a glance and

there was none of the mocking contempt in that look.

"Where did you find that drive, Johnny?" Dawson sneered. "Don't tell me you've got a winning hole left in your bag."

"Chip," Johnny drawled, and there was no venom in his voice now, only amused self-confidence, "I think I've got enough winning holes left in my bag to beat you."

"And you're six down," Chip Dawson sneered.

"Five down, after this hole," Johnny corrected, "and there are quite a few holes left to play."

"Hah!" Dawson said. "You stand a fat chance of catching up with me now."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," the course judges murmured.

**J**OHNNY was three down at the end of the eighteenth and there was a new spirit in the gallery following the match. They had seen a man who had been hopelessly beaten suddenly acquire some new surety of eye, some new strength of arm and wrist, some new precision of swing, to begin crawling up on the man who had been trouncing him so badly.

They had seen, too, a Chip Dawson suddenly grown grim, playing his heart out with every stroke, realizing that the hot breath of the other man was coming closer and closer to his neck. Chip played as well as he ever had, during those last holes of the first eighteen, but Johnny Trang played better. Where Chip took a chance, Johnny took a reckless gamble—and won. And then, on the eighteenth, when Dawson was on the green in two, with a birdie in sight, Johnny Trang had elected to play the pin, risking an over-run, and had sunk his second shot for an eagle.

"I've got him, Midge," Johnny said, exultantly, in their room, after lunch. "I've got him and he knows it. He can't win now."

"Oh, Johnny," Midge said. "I knew you'd find yourself, some day. I knew you'd discover that Chip Dawson could be beaten."

"I didn't discover it by myself," Trang said, laughing. "Chip told me the whole story himself. The way he acted yesterday, and on the course today, told me that he knew he had to try to put the pressure on me, make me blow up, to win. Once I realized that—once I dis-

covered he was no superman—it was easy."

**I**T WASN'T easy, that afternoon, but Johnny Trang won, three up on the thirty-fourth. Chip Dawson fought bitterly with every stroke. Time and again, the gallery was electrified by the brilliance of his play, but there seemed to be no stopping Johnny Trang now. When Johnny sank the long putt that gave him the match, and when the crowd broke through the lines and surged up around him, shouting, pounding his shoulder, shoving scorecards at him for his autograph, Johnny looked over to where Chip Dawson was standing, his face bleak.

"Just a minute, please," Johnny begged. "I'll be right back."

He walked across the green to where Chip stood. His hand went out. Dawson looked down at Johnny's fingers and then, slowly, accepted the handshake.

"Thanks, Chip," Trang said, in a quiet voice.

"What do you mean, thanks?" Dawson asked, his voice strangely harsh. "I never played a better game in my life. You don't have me to thank for anything."

"I do," Johnny Trang said, "but I don't think you'd understand."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was late that night in the bar of the Brucehurst Country Club and the tournament crowd, for the most part, had departed. Johnny and Midge were gone, driving away together with their faces reflecting a happiness that might be compared with what they had felt that night at East Lake, years before.

"No more tournament golf for me," Johnny had said, just before he left. "I'm going to use this prize money to buy into a business I know of and start being a homebody. You fellows can fight it out for the checks without me. And while you're eating crackers and milk to pamper your ulcers, you can think of Johnny Trang, eating thick steaks and having no more worries about golf than wondering whether or not I'll be able to get away Saturday afternoon for a friendly nine holes, ten-cent Nassau."

Chip Dawson didn't look up when he heard a chair on the opposite side of



his table pulled out. He kept staring at the glass in front of him, moving it around in wet circles.

"That was a fine thing to do, Chip," old Andy Bellows said, quietly.

Chip looked up across the table at the older man and then returned his eyes to his glass.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, deliberately.

"No?" Andy asked. "You didn't know either, that young Trang's marriage was in danger of going on the rocks, all over that complex he had about you, did you?"

"Of course not."

"You didn't know the boy, nor Midge, either, would never be completely happy, until he proved he wasn't a perennial runner-up, until he beat you."

"If you're hinting that I threw the match, for some crazy reason," Chip said, "you're wacky. You saw me play. Did I let up on him once?"

"No," Andy agreed, "but you did something else. You went so far out of character that it's a wonder everybody who saw you didn't get wise. You almost overdid it, Chip. You knew that Johnny Trang needed a jolt to shake him out of that dizzy inferiority complex he had concerning you. So you

turned villain, all of a sudden—you, who's always been one of the finest sportsmen on the links. You needled Johnny on the veranda yesterday—oh, I watched the whole little act—and you needled him on the course today. And finally, he got so mad, or got so *something*, that he forgot you were the great Chip Dawson, who always beat him, and proceeded to give you a shellacking."

Dawson didn't raise his eyes as he grumbled:

"You've got a great imagination, Andy."

"Sure," the older man said. There was a pause and then Bellows said:

"I think I know why you did it, Chip. You knew Midge was unhappy and I reckon her happiness meant a lot more to you than winning a tournament, even this one. So you made her husband back into the boy he used to be, even if you had to be one of the biggest rotters I ever saw in tournament play to do it. That was the reason, wasn't it, Chip?"

Dawson raised his glass and gulped his drink. He put the glass down hard and looked straight at Andy Bellows.

"You've been seeing too many movies," he said, firmly. "C'mon, I'll buy you a drink."



## You Can't Keep 'Em Out

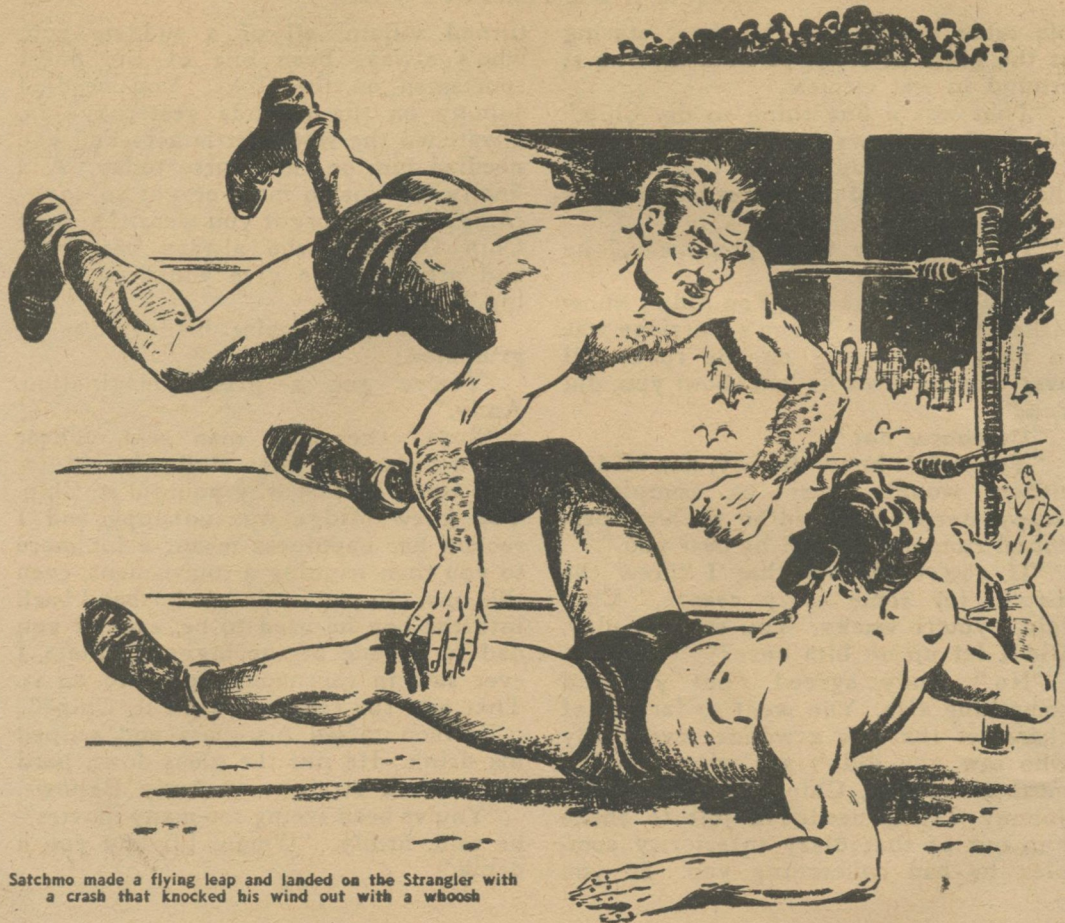
WHEN the Olympic Games were first founded by the Ancient Greeks, they were rated strictly a stag affair. And, after 720 B. C., when Orsippus of Megara lost his loincloth during a race and went on to win the sprints, they were strictly nudist as far as the competitors were concerned.

Later, and for a most curious reason, not only competitors but their aides and assistants, as well as the officials on the field, were required to shed all clothes. Cause—a lady crashed the stag lines.

Pherenice, whose son, Peisidorous, was a pugilist, was so anxious to have him win his event that she went into his corner, disguised as a man and carrying the ancient equivalent of sponge and bucket. Her son triumphed and, in the thrill of victory, she so far forgot herself as to give him a motherly buss.

After the resultant hulabaloo had died down the authorities decreed that thereafter no clothes were to be worn by anyone on the sand or turf of the arena. But the damage was done, the male barrier was cracked and it was not long afterward that the Olympic games became a mixed affair.

Even in those days it was impossible to keep out the girls for long!—*Matt Lee.*



Satchmo made a flying leap and landed on the Strangler with a crash that knocked his wind out with a whoosh

# THE EYES HAVE IT

By JOE GREGG

*Cuthbert, the Strangler, learned wrestling science and art in college—but to win, he had to find the bumps!*

HE LOOKED around him at the crowd there in the Garden and wondered how so many people with the dough to get in the jam-packed place for the wrestling matches, could be so dumb. "Strangler Braden vs. Satchmo Gilhane," the announcer had belted the semi-final feature of the heavyweights.

Actually, it was Satchmo Gilhane, the challenger for the Heavyweight Title of Grunt & Groan, having himself a good

workout before his final tour of the Eastern Circuit and the announcing of his coming bout with the champ.

And nobody knew it better than Strangler Braden himself, sitting in his corner after the first fall—which he had won, and which he knew was all he would win—and looking his disillusioned disgust at the excited fans.

"Tag him, Strangler! Throw th' big bum into th' tenth row!"

Strangler Braden had been born Cuth-

bert Braden, and educated by his own dogged determination at Harvard, where he had worked his way through. He looked with a curious gaze at the excited fan who had implored Braden to pulverize the larger, more polished Gilhane.

"Why doesn't somebody tell these goons the facts of life?" Braden asked his manager, Baldy O'Doul, sourly. "Look at Satchmo; and look at me!"

Baldy O'Doul ranged his blue eyes in a worried check-up over his leading wrestler. "You look good, Strangler. What's he got that you haven't?"

"Cutting straight to the bone of things," Strangler said sourly, "about thirty pounds."

"But, Strangler, you're an educated wrestler. This bum ain't. He's Pier Six, with a bit of savvy. See?" Baldy lifted his eyes to the big, red-haired, barrel-chested man who was touted as the next champion. And he winced involuntarily. "He has a lot of extra weight slowing him down, too!"

Strangler made a rude sound. "I should get slowed down like that!"

"Tsk, tsch," Baldy reproved, patting his bald dome. "Such langwisch. From a Harvard, too. You'd think your education would have taught you more than that. And more than just plain figuring the other guy wins because he is bigger."

"Aw, skip it," Strangler growled. "Everything else being equal, the guy with more guns wins. And this red-headed baboon has more guns than I have. Poundage, holds, the dirty work, everything. He just got careless and gave me a chance to put a twisting hammerlock on him; and he didn't want to argue about it. So—we're cheering!"

Baldy licked his thin lips and nodded when the beeper gave them the warning. "You know," he murmured, his eyes sad with the wisdom of experience, "sometimes I think maybe it's better if a guy don't know all those things he gets to know in college. Now, you take me, Strangler—"

"And that's another thing," Braden cut in, flexing his arms and legs on the ropes when Baldy cleared the stool away. "That's another thing, this 'Strangler' deal. Strangling is out, in modern wrestling. And if it weren't, I would go for the cleaner stuff, anyway. I wouldn't strangle a man. There are too

many other ways. Why resort to savagery? You think I spent all those years it took me, to work through college, and then I'm going to play monkey-out-of-a-tree for a living? I beat a man with superior strength and superior knowledge."

"And the old fight ain't nothing?"

The educated wrestler looked his derision at his bandy-legged, bald-headed manager. "Taking a look at what is in the other corner, I hope not!" he growled. "Well, here's the bell."

**S**ATCHMO came out of his corner with a publicity-roar and a savage forearm that struck viciously at his younger, cleaner-cut opponent.

Strangler took the blow with a grunt of disgust. "Whyn't these lugs play it straight?" he wondered, as he got in two of his own clubbing blows, and broke fast from a waist lock that he had started to put on the big red-head. "They waste time and strength putting on acts. When they've clowned enough, it will always settle to the same result—who has the most guns, knows the most grips, knows the most escapes."

He didn't have time to do any more academic thinking. Satchmo was angry because Strangler, after accepting Satchmo's proffered hip to throw a waist lock on, had turned down the bait just in the nick.

The big red-head hadn't relished Strangler's cool analysis of the opening weakness that Satchmo had exhibited in accepting this dark-haired, dark-eyed, smooth-muscle man as just another set-up. He was out to avenge having lost the first of the three scheduled falls.

Strangler had thought of Satchmo as just a good big boy with a complete working knowledge of the holds, and with a shrewd manager to get him the right matches at the right time. That quick decision that Satchmo had made to take the ball when Strangler had pinned that punishing hold on him, had changed Strangler's idea of the man.

"Smart," he saw it. "Plenty smart! Not only that he might have got badly hurt breaking the hold; but even if he had broken it, he would have worn himself out, maybe left the door open for me to take the last two falls, if he did weather it through! Smart!"

Strangler had worked hard for his education. Nobody had given him anything. Deafened by a blow he picked up in his very young wrestling days, Strangler had been 4-F and without Service to get him a lift from the GI-Bill.

He'd waited tables, mowed lawns, hauled ice, heaved coal, worked the roads in the summer, helped harvest crops, done the hundred and one rough, but necessary, jobs, to get him his tuition money to get through college.

For athletics, he had chosen only wrestling. He loved the science and the skill of the game, the cold logic that this sort of pressure would bring about that sort of fall, and the neat chain of holds that brought about a desired situation, just as surely as a math prof worked out an equation on a blackboard and signed it with that Q.E.D.

Satchmo Gilhane and Strangler Braden and the Champ, Cowboy Martin, had their own sets of equations that they worked out for the edification of the action-loving wrestling fans:

"The right grip, applied with the right pressure, will set the guy up for a fall. Q.E.D."

But when two guys with the same knowledge got to the mat together, the guy with the most equations, or with the most strength to force his equations on the other guy, was the one who wrote his Q.E.D.—and, later, wrote the best-looking checks at the best-larded banks.

This, more than once, Strangler had pointed out to Baldy, as under Baldy's shrewd tutelage and match-making, Strangler Braden rose from the throngs of Prelim Boys and into top-spots at the smaller clubs, and into smaller spots at top-clubs; and finally into the Garden, in New York, to land the semi-final of a very good wrestling card.

"Yeah, we're doing okay," Strangler would agree cautiously, when the infectious Baldy would whoop his joy over a victory. "The pressure ain't on us yet."

"Bad grammer for a Harvard man," Baldy would murmur, with a gleam of humor in his eyes. "Ain't. Tsk, tsk."

"Baloney. Harvard is like other colleges. They have books, and they have guys to study the books. Only more of the top-crust goes to Harvard than other places. But you know what I mean, Baldy. The lower ranks in wrestling, as

in everything else, are filled with men who can't learn, can't remember, or don't care. Up top, the going will get rough. And then—"

"And then we get tougher," Baldy had chuckled.

"Aw, Baldy, cut the Mother Goose stuff, the fables. You know the answers. We can make us a good living in this game—if we are smart. But when we hit a guy who knows what we know, and has more beef behind it—well, it will have been a nice ride. You know that. And knowing that, you'll be wise to pick our spots!"

But apparently Baldy hadn't known, for he had signed Strangler into a semi-final spot with the big, rough-tough, smart Satchmo Gilhane.

Not that Strangler was either a child and unable to say his piece; or stupid, and didn't know just what an hombre Satchmo was. But Baldy had a way about him, when nobody was around, of doing a rosy job with words and making things look good.

And then, like tonight, with the hard glare of the ring-lights lighting up Baldy's dim dream into stark reality, Strangler knew that he had been over-matched.

Baldy's first answer had been, "Aw, he's a morning-glory. He looks good, but he'll fold. You can take him easy. Just try to outlast him, and look for your chance. Go to it, kid!"

But even Baldy had gone silent when Satchmo had climbed into the ring and walked his hairy muscles about and grinned his broken grin at the former collegiate star, Strangler Braden.

The red-head had been so sure of things that he had given Strangler a shot at that punishing hold, and Strangler hadn't missed. Strangler was too good a workman to miss that opening. And Satchmo was too good a workman to ever give him that opening again.

**S**TRANGLER made his start for that waist-hold, but broke away from it just in time, when Satchmo swung hard to try for a headlock.

Strangler knew that the fault with most American collegiate matmen was that they went almost mechanically into that waist-hold position, knowing their man would almost surely go to the mat with them in a high-bridge, and feeling

certain they could break the bridge.

It worked until they tried it on a man who had practised his bridge so long and so patiently that he could hold it almost forever, meanwhile giving him a chance to get a punishing hold on the waistlocker when he was off his feet, and working him where he wanted him. Satchmo, or any other good pro wrestler, could do that.

Strangler's own pet specialty was a head-scissor which he worked carefully to permit him a toe-hold, and then he'd let his opponent wear himself down between the pain and the strain, until he could take him to his back in the fall.

Big red-headed Satchmo circled, clowning it with his ferocious face-making and pawing at his lighter, good-looking, smoother opponent. But if it looked funny to the fans, it didn't to Strangler.

He saw Satchmo start to cross his left foot over his right, circling again, and he went in fast, dropping his right knee to the canvas and grabbing for the left foot, to make a rapid pick-up and fall.

Satchmo gurgled his mirth as he danced the bait out of reach, at the same time clamping a headlock on Strangler. The big red-head roared and locked his huge arms until the blood pounded in Strangler's ears, and then he wrenched, and threw his lighted opponent viciously to the mat.

Strangler tried to roll clear; but he grunted as the big man made a flying leap and landed on him, driving his breath out in a whooshing gasp. Satchmo liked the roar of the crowd, and he worked it to let Strangler get in a partial crouch before he assaulted the dazed wrestler with another headlock and another vicious whirl and smash to the canvas.

Strangler relaxed in the storm of muscle that was lashing him, knowing that even if it was punishing, it also was showy. Too showy for any results—just yet, that was.

But Satchmo was riding the fury of that first unexpected fall, and now he went to the mat with Strangler and started to work his man with a series of holds that Strangler would break, only to fall into another.

Strangler felt the punishing toe-hold that Satchmo clamped on him and steeled his nerves to take the gruelling pain of it. When he had Strangler weak-

ened by the hold, Satchmo shifted suddenly to a crotch-hold, surged to his feet, and lifted Strangler for a bruising smash to the canvas again. This time in the center, where he could go at it all over again.

Strangler thought he had a chance to make that leg-lift again; but cold logic stopped him, even as he started his grab to try and spill his opponent.

"That's what I bit on before. He's just hoping I make the try again, and then he'll clamp a nelson on my arm and take me," Strangler thought.

So he bunched his arms under him, took the smash, and then tried to surge clear and work a hold of his own. But Strangler felt the punishing toe-hold clamped on him again, just when he was trying to whip clear.

Satchmo gained the second fall to even the match, with a toe-hold that slid to a crotch-slam and an arm-lock for the decision.

The third and final fall went to Satchmo in as savage a struggle as the fans had seen this new season.

Cunningly, the huge red-head had set Strangler up for the fall; but Strangler, his first defeat in two years staring him in the face, had discarded his hard-facts defense and hurled himself at his man in a rocking flying-tackle.

Satchmo had rocked down extra hard, smashing his head with stunning effect; and then Strangler had thrown his own advantage to the four winds by hurling himself hard on the man and working a frantic arm-lock to try for a quick decision.

Satchmo had grunted his surprise, folded his mammoth arms around Strangler, and rolled to his side, working the ex-collegian with a scissors and holding him in a bear-hug that Strangler fought hard to break—fought too hard to break.

Satchmo rode with the lighter man's struggles, then, timing it to split-second nicety, had smashed him in a surging heave and gone for the toe-hold again.

Strangler's face had been a mask of agony when the red-head had worked him to the proper state of weakness, and clinched the fall with a series of body-slams followed by a full nelson.

Strangler lay on his back on the rubbing-table, thinking back over his match, looking for a spot where he would see he had been wrong. He saw . . . something.

"Maybe I could have tried for that leg-lift, that time. But Satchmo must have wanted me to. Anyhow, it was only my first-minute luck in getting him when he wasn't expecting it, that gave me the chance for the limit falls that I had. It is just the old formula over again—the good big man beats the good smaller man. Savvy-and-Muscle are beaten by Savvy - and - More - Muscle. Q.E.D., period!"

He told it to Baldy O'Doul, when he and the mournful-eyed little Irishman were alone in the dressing-room. The main-event was on.

"Well, could be," Baldy said, slowly. "Like you say, it could be it was in the books. Q. E. D., or however you call it. Still and all, I thought maybe you had a chance, the second fall, to dump him. But . . . I guess I was mistaken."

Strangler looked his surprise. "I guessed he wanted me to do just that. So I didn't."

"And that time you had him groggy and dropped on him."

"Well, I figured he was in the books to take me, with his savvy and weight; unless I got to him fast. So I went in."

"If one smash had him dizzy, another might have had him dizzy, see? Maybe I figure wrong. After all, I'm no wrestler, I'm just a manager. But I been handling wrestlers a long time, kid. I see things."

"Well, you don't see miracles," Strangler grunted. "This is a scientific, logical business. It wasn't in the books for me to beat Satchmo. So I didn't."

"I guess so," O'Doul mourned. "Well, wanna watch the final?"

Strangler shrugged away his concern about it. "I got a headache," he said. "Anyway, Cowboy Martin will take Mauler Gibbs. Probably with his airplane spin and a hammerlock. Heck, that's as sure as I'm standing here talking to you. Gibbs is good and he's big; Martin is good and he's bigger. It's that simple."

"I'm simpler," Baldy smiled sadly. "I'm going to look, anyway. All the experts say your way, that Cowboy won't have no trouble. Like as not, the 'Ayes' will have it, as they say at lodge-meetings. But I'm gonna look. Well, see you at the gym in a coupla days. I'm working another guy in my string, in the middleweights. No money in them, only small-town action. But we gotta eat.

I'll be seein' ya, Cuthbert."

Strangler stopped and stared. "Hey! You called me by my name, for a change. How come?"

"Aw, I dunno. I guess you got the right slant, see? This stuff of nick-names. Strangler, and Satchmo, and the like. And wrestling. Like you say, it's so scientific that almost all you gotta do is weigh in, and have a quiz, like. And the guy who weighs more, if both wrestlers know the same grips, wins." He chuckled and winked. "But it sure is nice they all don't feel like we do, isn't it, Cuthbert? I mean, what would we do for a living? Well, s'long."

Stranger Braden stared after his manager a sober moment before he shrugged, grinned, and went away from the roaring crowd and to the street.

**SPELLMAN'S GYM** was a collection of little magnets of rings that drew splinters of watchers to their hems. Strangler Braden was one of these splinters, five days after the Satchmo match. Ordinarily, he would have been back at the gym in two days, three at the most. But the Satchmo Gilhane match had him thinking.

"Where to, now? Back along the small club route? That's where I should have stayed until we had picked all the crumbs, before making our bid for the big-time! Maybe I would have learned more. Anyway, we would get better notices, losing none, than we will now, with the Satchmo match against me."

So Strangler had stayed away, fearful that the pull of the ring would sway his cooler, more logical judgment. Mentally, he reviewed things in his logical trained way.

"If I'd played some football, now, at college. Of if I'd fought some, maybe, I'd have some other place to go. This way, I've been up as far as I'm going. What now?"

But when he went four days without being able to make a decision, and the pull of the game and of the excitement that went with it was riding him harder with each idle hour, he made his way to the gym.

"Hey, Cuthbert." Baldy looked down from the apron of a ring where he was watching a pugnacious-looking blond work with a light-heavy. "This here blond kid is Tiger Lacey. What you think of him?"

## THE EYES HAVE IT

Strangler looked the kid over. "What does he know, what does he weigh?"

"Middle; and he knows enough. But—" Baldy winked his eye in a secret sign when the young wrestler looked over at him. "Okay, Tiger, just go on working. I'll be around. I want to talk to this guy some."

Down on the floor, Baldy got Strangler aside from the crowd and made sure they weren't overheard before he spoke. "This kid is good, but he's got a bit of eye-trouble. That's why he hasn't been wrestling, see? I mean, except as an amateur. I don't see how he can get hurt any; but if he did, and it was to come out he had eye-trouble like I say, then I'd be in trouble, see?"

Strangler blinked. "You mean, he needs glasses, or something?" He thought about it. "Plenty athletes who need glasses wrestle."

Baldy lowered his voice. "This is different, Cuthbert. It's like a disease. Wait until you see. I'll get another guy in the ring with him."

Strangler said slowly, "Before you go—what's the idea of keeping on calling me Cuthbert? I mean, it's been Strangler so long, might as well keep it that way."

Baldy looked surprised. "Oh, sure. It was just I thought you were sick of all this phony-stuff, like nicknames, and all. Okay, sure, I'll call you Strangler. Like you say."

"I don't care," Strangler said, irritated. "The name is just for publicity. That's all. It isn't to scare anyone. You could call a baby 'Killer,' and it wouldn't make him a killer. It's just I'm used to it, that's all. It don't matter."

"Yeah, I know you feel that way, Cuthbert. So just hold it here while I show you something funny. Hey! Hey, Tuffy!"

Tuffy Walther, a so-so heavy wrestler, came over. Baldy put a hand on the man's elbow and led him to the ring. He talked with Tiger Lacey, his light wrestler. Tuffy started in through the ropes, and Tiger shook his head.

Strangler grinned, thinking he saw Baldy's play, and seeing that play break up under Baldy's nose.

"He's trying some psychology on me, in his own odd way," Strangler thought, grinning. "Wants to show me a middle who will take on anything at all, any size at all. 'Raw, stark courage.' That

hoovey! But Tiger is beefing, and won't have any."

He moved over to hear what was being said, and the grin left his face when he heard.

"Naw, Baldy," Tiger Lacey was saying, shaking his head reprovingly. "Nothin' doin'. I want a big man, see? My own weight, at least, see? I mean, this runt—"

"Shut up, Tiger!" Baldy snapped, looking around him nervously. He winked rapidly at the man, then laughed and said to Tuffy, who was a 190-pounder, "A great gag-man, Tiger is. Don't be rough with him, just give him a good work-out." Then he went close to Tiger. "The guy tips one-ninety," he said, out of the side of his mouth. "What have I told you about cutting' that squawking, huh? Want to ruin things?"

Tiger looked sheepish. "Okay, Boss. I just didn't know. I mean—well, every new one is like that, see? I'm sorry."

"Trust me," Baldy said, "Tiger. Trust me. I'm not putting any kids up against you. This guy Tuffy is really big. Isn't he, Cuthbert?"

Strangler said, "He sure is, Tiger. What makes you think he isn't? Heck, can't you see the guy?"

Baldy dragged him away. "Take it easy. This kid, the trouble with his eyes is, he sees things funny. Like them telescopes and things. You know how it is when you look through the wrong end? Huh? Everything looks small? That's how it is with him, with Tiger. He can't see anything its right size. Everything looks small to him, see? Well, Tiger is the other way around. He ain't scared of nothing but that he will hurt one o' these small people he sees!"

"For the love of Mike!" Strangler breathed. "How does he read, or anything, if a huge man looks small to him?"

Baldy shrugged. "You'd be surprised how many good wrestlers couldn't read, let alone didn't go to college. Some still can't read. Me, I didn't ask Tiger could he read, all I say is, he sure can wrestle. Watch him."

**S**TRANGLER watched, fascinated, as the smaller man tore into his bulky opponent like a fury; and he stared his surprise when Tiger dumped the larger man hard, only to go to a knee beside him and ask: "Did I hurt you, guy? You okay?"

"Aw, come on an' wrestle, Shorty!" Tuffy snarled, and threw a savage headlock on his opponent. "Come on, Junior!"

The action got tough and wild, and Strangler watched with wide eyes as the lighter man roughed Tuffy severely, picking him up and smashing him in a series of slams that soon had the heavy-weight docile enough to pin.

Baldy sent the two men to the showers, and turned to Strangler. "I got something, huh? Good, isn't he? Boy, if the goon was only fifty pounds heavier! Even so, I got something. The sticks will really pay to watch this middle flatten a mob o' heavies. And maybe even the big-time will pay, huh?" He winked. "What about it?"

Strangler said, "Maybe it was a fluke. Maybe Tuffy wasn't on his game."

Baldy laughed. "He's been flattening heavies all week. But everybody thinks like you. You know why he flattens them? They get in, expecting some light competition, and in comes Tiger with a bang, and he takes them to the mat by surprise."

Strangler stared at Baldy, his eyes slowly widening. "Say, you know what it is? This fellow doesn't know how big those men are! He doesn't see them as big men, so he—" He held it there, shaking his head. "Naw. It can't be that. Heck, I was thinking it was psychology, see? Tiger, I was thinking, doesn't know how big these men are—actually he sees them as smaller men, much smaller men—so he tears in and because he doesn't think they have more stuff than him, in power, he takes them. That; and the surprise of it."

Baldy frowned. "You believe that high-brow stuff? That fizzology, or whatever you call it? That bunk?"

"Oh, it isn't altogether bunk," Strangler shrugged. "Not by any means. But—well, in this case, it is. I mean, it is something else. Tuffy is good, sure. But—off his feed."

"Yeah, that's what I figure."

"Or Tiger is very good."

"I hope so. We'll watch again tomorrow. But don't try to tell me that fizzology stuff, that deal about him not knowing how big the men is having anything to do with it. It's a surprise to them, that's what does it. And Tiger is good, and pushes his advantage. Well—you ain't ready to start work again yet, I can see it. You're thinking things

over, eh, Cuthbert?"

Strangler nodded. "Yeah. I mean, where is there to go, except to the place where they cut up paper-dolls? If I'm lug enough to play over my head, I know what I'm about. I can see my way, don't worry."

"Well, think it over, Cuthbert. I'll see ya."

Strangler did think it over, in the days that followed; and in the days that he saw Tiger Lacey, the middleweight, take on and flatten nearly every heavy he tackled in the practise-ring. He even thought to take the man on himself; but held back because of his natural business instincts.

"If I won, so what?" he asked himself. "If I lost—if this guy looking at the world through the small end of a telescope took me—wouldn't I look lousy? Heck, he couldn't; but—if he did?"

Instead, he watched others take The Tiger on, and he talked with the others, casually, as if he weren't interested, and he got the same answer from them all.

"The guy just don't know when he is outmanned! Boy, he is smart; and he hits you with that rush and he keeps moving! The Tiger just has no respect for size, that's all."

Strangler thought, "You mean, he has no idea of size, can't see size." But he kept Baldy's secret. Baldy's and Tiger's.

Two weeks later, after a lot of rest and thinking, Strangler came to Baldy and asked, "What chances are there of getting Satchmo for a return? Sure, it's dopey. But where else have I got to go?"

"I hope you know what you are asking," Baldy murmured, his eyes doubtful. "You sure you want him, Cuthbert? You sure? I mean, you aren't like Tiger who doesn't realize how big a man is!"

"I don't care how big Satchmo is," Strangler growled. "And for the love of Pete, stop calling me Cuthbert! Get me Satchmo!"

SO BALDY got Satchmo Gilhane for the Strangler, and the crowd came to see Satchmo make good his boasts that he would finish "Cuthbert"—as he had mockingly called the ex-Collegiate wrestler in his newspaper interviews—in two fast falls.

Instead, they saw a hard-charging,



hot-eyed, grim-faced Strangler Braden lose the first fall after as savage a battle as the Garden had ever witnessed. But the fall was so hard-won by Satchmo that the big red-head was a quick victim to his smaller opponent's mad charge when the bell rang for the second fall. Cagily, the red-head went down when he saw that his smaller opponent had him on the run.

And in a third fall that had the crowd screaming and raging at the ref to stop Satchmo's fouling and gouging, they saw a relentless, bloody, bruised, but laughing Strangler hurl his man from him in vicious body-slams that had the larger wrestler sobbing and yelling for the towel to be thrown in.

It was thrown in. The ref threw it back out. Strangler hurled Satchmo after it, and the Garden roared its delight at the supplanting of the red-headed, brutal challenger for the championship by the grim, fighting, dark-haired lad who didn't know enough to know when he was stopped.

Strangler dressed rapidly, intent on watching Tiger Lacey in the crowd-thinning wind-up against a good but lighter wrestler. It seemed Baldy wasn't going to give his hand away by showing him against a heavy.

"Let them get to know him first, and then work his giant killer racket later, see? Maybe on the same bill you take your crack at Cowboy Martin for the championship, Cuthbert!"

"Let's hurry," Strangler urged. "I gotta see this. Come on."

He watched, his eyes wide with wonder, when Tiger's opponent hurled Baldy's boy around as if he were a limp rag.

"Holy Smoke!" Strangler exclaimed. "What happened, Baldy?"

Baldy said, "I didn't tell you, did I? Well, it was like this—I got to worrying about Tiger's eyes, see, making everything different than they should. Smaller, they made everything. I figured if anything went wrong, bloom! The Commission lands on me, and I'm through. So I took him to a big Doc, and he worked on the kid. You know what happened? Get this, boy—what happened, now Tiger sees everything just the opposite he did before! Yeah! Everything is very big to him now. What do you know about—Hey. Hey, no, Strangler! Don't hit me!"

"I'm not going to hit you!" Strangler gurgled. "I'm going to hold you safe here until the crowd gets out. I can't afford to have the most educated manager in all wrestling history injured in this jam! And while we are waiting so we can get out safely, Baldy—how much money did you lay out to work this game on me?"

"The, uh, fizzology, or whatever?" Baldy grinned. "Aw, skip it. It's bad enough you should be educated and a victim o' them rackets they tell about in colleges. Like they say at a lodge-meeting, 'the Ayes have it,' on'y it is spelled 'eyes.' Kid, you got good eyes. Can't you see the Title clear from here?"

Strangler Braden knew he could.

NEXT ISSUE

TURN ON THE HEAT, a Baseball Novelet by ROY LOPEZ

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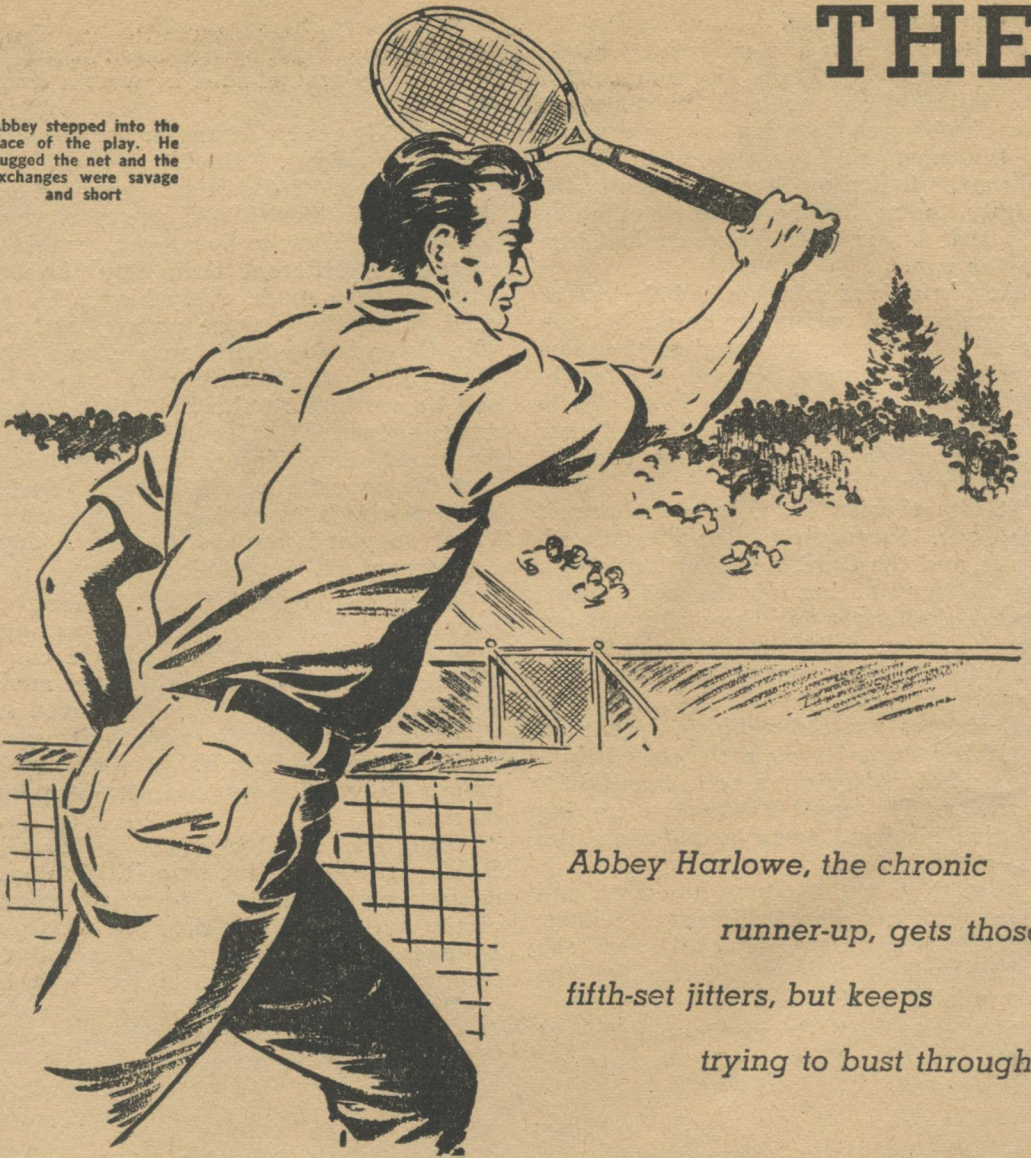
CREAM-OIL CHARLIE SAYS: "IT CONTAINS LANOLIN!"

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# THE

Abbey stepped into the pace of the play. He hugged the net and the exchanges were savage and short



*Abbey Harlowe, the chronic runner-up, gets those fifth-set jitters, but keeps trying to bust through!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Habitual Runner-Up*

**Y**OU know how it is when you first step out there and the magic of the surroundings stirs and warms your blood. You are young and a little headstrong and the whole tennis world is your oyster.

Abbey Harlowe wasn't just another guy, though, climbing upon the big time circuit with a heartfelt of dreams. He hit with a real splash and, perhaps, the nicest build-up ever given a guy making

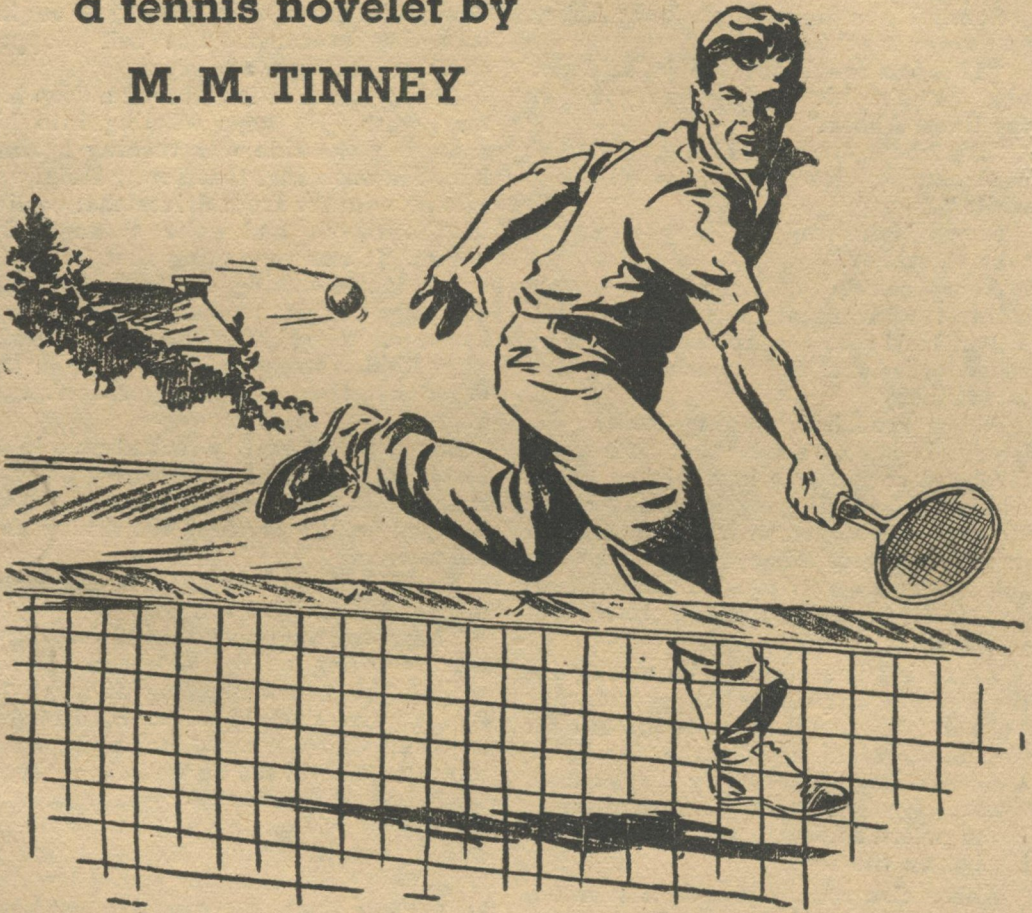
the jump from the collegiate ranks. He'd won the Intercollegiate net championships in his junior and senior years and been tabbed another Big Bill.

He had everything, Abbey Harlowe, the stroking prowess, the physical equipment. Also, he was ambitious. Love of the game burned in Abbey's heart. Even after nearly three seasons of the big grind, the experts still called Abbey a real comer, but they had considerably tuned down their original estimates. No one was more conscious of his disappointing progress than Abbey himself. A bitter frustration was beginning to

# LONG WAY HOME

a tennis novelet by

M. M. TINNEY



grow in him.

He felt that bitterness anew as he walked to the service stripe to open the fifth set. He told himself that this time he would make the grade. There was a good man across the net, Sonny Holm, seeded Number Two on the USLTA's list. One more winning set and he'd land in the tourney's finals. But Abbey couldn't help wishing that Holm didn't look quite so confident and cool about things.

Abbey bore down hard on the delivery, and the ball was a swift streak that broke sharply to the outside. He moved in warily, then changed his direction as Sonny Holm blocked deep. Abbey took

it with a nice, graceful motion, his back-swing effortless. The ball lashed low and close to the sidelines. Sonny Holm sprang across the turf, reaching and hitting off a running backhand. It was a nice retrieve timed to explode as Abbey stepped toward the net. Abbey grinned slightly, and whipped the volley cross-court and Sonny Holm shrugged and left that one alone.

Next Abbey slammed another winner into the empty side of the court. When Sonny Holm scowled and shook his head, the fatigue stealing up Abbey's legs did not seem so punishing now. He sensed that at last he was breaking free of the shackles that had so often stopped

his rise to the top. This time he would do better than simply give a headliner a run for his money.

**T**HEY made the odd game change as applause drifted across the court. Holm was wide open for the upset and the spectators knew it.

Sonny Holm flicked a glance at Abbey, as they met at the net.

"This is a rough one," Holm said simply. "You're hitting 'em like you own the lines, Abbey."

"It's about time," Abbey said. "I've been coming close for an awfully long while."

Sonny Holm smiled. "Maybe you can take it, Abbey."

Abbey couldn't quite figure it, the absolute confidence of the man. No bluff, either. He'd seen that cock-sure smile on other occasions and somehow it irritated Abbey.

Abbey crouched, waiting for the delivery. It came, a sizzler that bit into the forehand corner at a low, wicked angle. Abbey lunged, digging it to mid-court. Holm danced under, whirling the racquet in a savage arc. Abbey went back deep and made the retrieve over his shoulder. It drew a gasp from the crowd, that retrieve.

Twice in succession Holm swung for the kill and each time Abbey returned the ball. Then Abbey made his bid for the point, rushing into the forecourt, and unloading a half-volley that skidded toward pay-dirt. It was then that Sonny Holm pulled a miracle, and somehow got his bat on the shot.

Abbey clamped his jawline harder and dismissed the incident. He plunged into the pace for all he was worth, determined to win. Once he got the edge, he could concentrate on holding his own serve, and the odds would be all in his favor.

But Sonny Holm met the challenge. He was all over the court, seeming to smell out the shots Abbey meant to make. The score went to forty-thirty. Holm closed in on the net and Abbey went up on his toes, smashing. The ball struck the far corner, and Abbey sensed that he'd gotten too much depth. The call was "out." He'd missed. Inches or yards, it didn't matter. He'd missed the big one.

The umpire said, "Game to Mister Holm. The games are one-all, fifth set."

Abbey could feel all his old fears re-

turn. It was a terrible feeling, and made him bite down hard on his lip.

Even as he swung into his serve, Abbey could see that mocking grin on Sonny Holm's lips. He faulted. He tried again. The serve exploded like a hand grenade and nine times out of ten would have gone through for an ace. But somehow Holm managed to get it and angled into the forecourt. The ball plopped there on the tape, and froze.

Abbey stared at it and took a deep bitter breath. He kept whaling into his shots but the tide was turning against him. He was aware that Sonny Holm was hitting winners from drives that earlier in the match had gone through for points. It was something that he could sense, Holm coming on harder and the dimming of his own stroking. It had happened many times before. Always some hidden strength in one form or the other that came off the opposition's racquet to spell defeat.

Sonny Holm swiftly racked up a love-forty. Abbey tied him and they went at it again, dueling from long range. Holm pumped on the pressure till Abbey netted twice.

The match ran its course, Sonny Holm taking the decisive set, 6 to 4.

There was the usual handshake and picture-taking at the net, and all the while, Abbey was thinking of what the tennis writers would write. He'd read it so often that he could write the story himself. They'd say he was a real threat that showed "sparks" of greatness.

As they shook hands, Sonny Holm said, "Brighten up, Abbey boy. It wasn't such a bad day for you. I sweated all the way to get there first. I just hope I'm as hot when I go against Dave Metz tomorrow."

Abbey said, "Yeah, for you it was a fine day."

"Relax," Holm said, quietly. "You've been reading too many of your own press clippings. And you're really not that good, palsy."

"Thanks for reminding me," Abbey said.

**H**E WALKED toward the locker room where a lot of people shook his hand and gave him the old oil.

"Tough one to lose, Abbey. Next time you'll get him."

Next time. It was always the next time, except that pretty soon they'd

smarten up and realize that he was a chronic runner-up. When that big pay-off moment struck, he didn't have the stuff to bring him home the winner.

He stayed under the showers a long while, mulling over the match and trying to find the reason for his failures.

"Hey, Abbey," a voice called from outside the shower room. "It's taking you longer in there than to go five sets. Snap it up, huh?"

He recognized the voice, and said, "Be with you in a minute, Dave."

He washed down quickly, and went out. Dave Metz was waiting for him. Dave was big and wide-shouldered, and just about the swellest guy on the circuit in Abbey's book. A champion, Dave, and somehow he looked like one. It'd been Dave who'd first called attention to Abbey and contributed greatly to his earlier successes. Later a real friendship developed, for Dave Metz took as much pride in his protégé's accomplishments as his own.

Abbey said, "Kind of let you down again, huh, Dave? It's getting to be a habit."

"I'm not worrying about you," Dave said easily. "You'll bust through one of these days."

Abbey shook his head. "Sometimes I'm not so sure I'll make it, Dave. Look what happened today. I'm hitting 'em sweet and pretty and on my way to spilling Holm. Then wingo, Holm steps in and steals the match. I still can't figure how he did it."

"You missed a lob, remember? You needed that one to square the score on Holm's serve. Sonny Holm isn't a player who'll give you two or three chances to collect. That was the match right then."

"Yeah, I guess it was," Abbey said. "I kicked it away."

"Holm took it away," Dave said, eying him thoughtfully. "Maybe I could explain it, Abbey. But even if I did, you wouldn't really believe me. There's things a guy has to find out for himself about this game. All the instruction in the world doesn't, in itself, make a winner."

Abbey said, "You're being nice about it, Dave. But I'd have given anything to have taken Holm today."

"Then you'd have found yourself in there with me come tomorrow," Dave said, grinning a little. "And you'd look just like any other guy to me across the

net. I've got a real nasty streak in me these days, Abbey."

Not nasty, Abbey knew, in the sense of the word. Dave was gunning for another Nationals title, before bowing out of tennis. It was well known that this was Dave's last season.

"Well, maybe I wouldn't mind so much taking a drubbing from you," Abbey said. "At least, I'd have gotten into the finals. That's something that hasn't happened."

"There's always another time when you're young and hungry to win," Dave said.

It stung, that "next time" business. Abbey was sick and tired of hearing that routine.

"Look, Dave," he said, his voice sharper than he really intended it to be. "That's all right for you. You're top guy. But I'm stuck in one big rut and haven't made half the progress that even you figured I would. I want to get up and go, Dave."

Dave said, "It just happens that way sometimes." He paused, and an odd grin slid across his lips. Then: "You're not letting your plans get in the way of your tennis, Abbey? That's not good."

A touch of red spilled into Abbey's cheeks. Dave was making an indirect reference to Ann Lindsey. It was said that she had a prettier pair of legs than any girl in tennis. The nicest looker, certainly, since Kay Stammers.

Abbey said, "Let's just say ambitious, Dave. I just haven't got forever to make good."

"I suppose Ann ties into those nice ambitions, Abbey?" There was, Abbey sensed, the slightest rustle of sarcasm across the words. "Well, better not rush things too much there, either."

Abbey swallowed hard and a tenseness came into his face. Several times recently Dave had hinted that Ann was not the gal for Abbey, and Abbey was too much in love not to resent it. For all his loyalty to Dave, he didn't intend to tolerate it.

"I'm a pretty lucky guy having a swell gal like Ann go for me," Abbey said. "That's one department where I'm not too keen for your coaching, Dave."

He said it lightly, but the edge was there.

Dave shrugged and laughed a little. "Okay, Abbey, guess I am talking a little out of turn."

## CHAPTER II

*Champion's Shadow*

A SHORT while later, Abbey walked into the club bar, and found Ann there, sitting at a table, and chatting with Sonny Holm. It was hard to imagine this blue-eyed gal with the dazzling smile racing over the grass courts. She'd look so much better, Abbey thought, across the breakfast table.

"Abbey," she said as he stopped, "I was just telling Sonny how awfully lucky he is to be in the finals."

Abbey said, "Holm beat me. The score tells the story."

"Not always, Abbey," she said.

Sonny Holm said, "Well, here's your gal, Abbey. Just keeping her from getting lonesome till you got here."

"I've seen enough of you for one afternoon," Abbey said smiling.

Sonny grinned and went on his way. "Nice guy," Abbey remarked. "But not good enough to beat Dave tomorrow."

She said, "You're really sold on Dave, aren't you?"

"Sure," Abbey said, laughing a little. "But I think I'd rather have you."

She frowned a little. "Sometimes I'm not so sure that Dave is helping you."

"That's a strange thing to say, Ann. Why did you make that remark, Ann?"

"For several reasons, Abbey. I've watched you in match after match. Each time you seem on the brink of a big victory, something happens. I can't help but feel that Dave is responsible."

He looked at her in amazement. "How responsible?"

"Perhaps I believe that Dave Metz really wants you to get nowhere in particular for the present. At least until he wins himself another Nationals."

Abbey said, "You're wrong if you think Dave has the slightest fear of me beating him. Awfully wrong, Ann."

She shook her sleek blonde head. "Dave keeps telling you how fine you're doing. But has it occurred to you that a lot of people are beginning to suspect that you're an almost guy? Is it doing fine, losing big matches?"

"No, it's anything but fine, Ann. I'll grant that." It had hurt him to hear her call him an "almost guy."

"You're playing in the shadow of Dave Metz," Ann continued unheeding, her blue eyes earnest. "Abbey, you must get from behind that shadow and start playing tennis on your own." She paused slightly, drawing a breath. "You want to marry me. Well, I don't want an almost guy. You could be a champ but you're wasting time. I can't afford to wait too long for you to break away from those apron strings."

Abbey was silent a moment, the shock of her words ripping through him. It was odd, he thought, how suddenly clouded his future had become. He'd never imagined his progress along the tennis trail would be so slow, so heart-breaking.

Abbey said slowly, "You're forcing a tough decision on me, Ann. I just couldn't walk out on Dave like that."

She smiled slightly. "Perhaps you're making that decision more difficult than it really is, Abbey. Suppose I told you that Dave Metz thought it might be a pretty good idea to marry me himself. All right, that was a while ago. I guess it hurt his ego more than anything that I simply liked you better. That's why I suspect he isn't playing fair with you."

For a moment, Abbey did not appear to have heard, so incredible did it all sound. Then like a bombshell, her words hit home.

"Can it be true that Dave is stringing me along," Abbey murmured. "I can hardly believe it of Dave." But even as he spoke the words, Abbey was remembering Dave's odd resentment of his marrying Ann. He could see that odd grin on Dave's lips.

"Dave's too clever to ever let you know his real feeling for you, Abbey. Besides, he's gotten a lot of publicity by helping you."

Abbey said, "I'll have a talk with Dave."

"If you can do that without a nasty scene or outsiders learning about it, go ahead, Abbey."

Abbey bided his time. He still couldn't really believe that Dave held any grudge against him, yet there was something strange how casually Dave shrugged off his flubbing the big matches. He wondered if Dave was really laughing at him, leading him on and on until he became a real tennis bum. Dave had enough of a grip on him to twist and direct his career as suited the purpose. Still, it

was difficult for him to accept the theory that Dave was double-crossing him.

**Y**ET he was going to marry Ann Lindsey. Would she likely invent some fantastic lie? If he was going to have doubts about her now, then he might as well forget about marriage. Was it possible, Abbey asked himself over and over again, that Dave's outlook had changed when Ann came into the picture? He'd heard of solid friendships being ruined over a girl.

There were a couple of incidents during the next couple of weeks that puzzled Abbey, and brought suspicion back into his mind.

"Look," Dave told him, "you've been working on and off in my office." Dave was a junior partner in a brokerage house. "We're rather busy there now, and we could use your help. In fact, it might do your game some good if you got away from tennis for a couple of weeks."

Abbey said, "Wouldn't it be a lot better if I stuck around and sharpened up my game? You know, the big tourneys aren't very far away, Dave. The Sea-view thing starts next week, and I'd miss that one entirely."

Dave looked at him thoughtfully, and there was just the slightest tightening around his mouth. This was the first time Abbey Harlowe had really balked about following Dave Metz' advice.

"You don't want to go, then?" Dave said slowly.

"It would only make me more restless."

"Perhaps you aren't quite so restless about leaving tennis as you are about leaving Ann." Dave's eyes were on Abbey, searching his face.

Abbey said, "That isn't any of your business and you know it, Dave."

"I know that tennis and a gal on your mind don't mix," Dave snapped. "Right now she's interfering with your doing what I think is best for your game."

Abbey said, "It isn't just my game, Dave. You don't care for her, do you? You'd like to break us up. Why, Dave?"

A redness came into Dave's face. "Perhaps it'd be more apt to say that Ann doesn't think very much of me."

"I heard that you had ideas about her yourself once, and didn't quite make it."

Dave's jaw came up like he'd been struck. "Yes. I carried quite a torch for

awhile. But that has nothing to do with the present, see?"

"You never told me about you and Ann before."

Dave's eyes flashed. "I've known a lot of gals," he said sharply. "Do you want me to write out a list so that you can approve it?"

Abbey said, "We're not getting anywhere this way, Dave. We're both saying a lot of nasty things. It's never been that way before."

Some of the tension went out of Dave's face. "Then keep listening to me and you'll get somewhere in this game. I want you to take that trip to the home office. Get wrapped up in the work as best you can, and forget tennis for awhile."

"All right, I'll go," Abbey said slowly.

He left for the Big Town the next day. He felt like a caged bird at first, and missed his daily practise stints something awful. But after the first few days, he found the change of routine rather a pleasant experience. It was his kind of work, having studied along those lines in college. So much work was poured on him that he had precious little time during those two weeks to think about tennis or anything else.

He felt strangely refreshed when he returned to the tennis circuit. Dave led him to the courts almost at once, and worked his game over. Abbey was surprised to find that his stroking had not suffered much during the lay-off. In fact, he hit the ball with a new and almost savage enthusiasm. He forgot all about those almost victories he did not score and looked forward to the next tourney.

He saw less of Ann, too, than had been his custom. Not only was he kept busy bringing his game to an edge, but Ann was also drilling hard. She didn't rank better than fifteenth on the Women's National ratings, and seemed determined to improve that position.

**T**HE field at Sulphur Springs was very strong as usual. This was a tourney that Dave had copped two straight seasons, though Sonny Holm appeared to be a strong threat to that supremacy. Abbey rushed through the preliminary rounds at his usual brisk pace. He got into the quarter-finals, and the draw put him against Larry Carter, a seasoned and consistent performer.

"You've played Carter before and know what a smart gent he can be in there," Dave told him. "He's a baseline guy and loves those long rallies, and neither you nor I can outsteady him. Kinda remember that."

Abbey Harlowe remembered. He went out there and played Larry Carter. He started service, and winged two straight aces through. Carter couldn't handle him that first game. Abbey slashed away the meager retrieves that came off Carter's bat and swept the game at love.

The next game was tougher. Carter cannily mixed a slice into his game that kept Abbey guessing. He got the first one in, picking up the centerline chalk. Abbey lunged, and drove down the middle. He expected Carter to use that return to engineer a rally. He was surprised to find Carter hustling into the forecourt, and rising a half-volley. With that stroke, the rally died. It was fifteen-love.

Abbey laid Carter's next delivery into the far corner and moved in, pressing the attack. A lob went up, falling short and Abbey stepped back and smashed it away. He owned tremendous power from all levels, and when he was sharp, a wonderful piece of machinery to watch in motion. It was odd that he had not made faster progress. Even when Abbey was losing, he generally looked great, and kept the fans excited about him.

He ripped a backhand past Carter, and then uncorked a dazzling crossing volley. He took the serve again, and angled short and close to the sidelines. He came in and a streak of white passed him. Carter deuced the game, sneaking into the forecourt and blasting a placement down the line. Abbey stood still a moment, and gave the veteran a curious glance.

Carter, the old baseline bombardier, was up to tricks. He was using that forecourt plenty, and going for the kill-stroke himself. Carter grinned at him, appearing to sense the surprise of his switch in tactics.

He sliced the serve, and Abbey anxious to belt through as Carter jockeyed in, didn't quite allow for the slice. He got it across, but Carter was waiting for it and pounded beyond retrieve. Abbey answered the challenge, volleying, and spoiling Carter's hopes of grabbing the game. Deuce again, Abbey poured on the pressure. He hit hard, and with such

detonating speed that he twice forced Carter to net. Breaking Carter's delivery, Abbey went ahead in games, 2 to 0.

## CHAPTER III

### *Fifth Set Jinx*

**B**UT after Abbey Harlowe held serve in the third game, Larry Carter seemed satisfied that he could not win the set. He settled back into his old baseline role, apparently saving his strength and appearing to make no real effort to fight the rising tide. Abbey kept whirling in at close range, and crashing a fusillade of bludgeoning blows that were superb in their execution. He ran out the set, 6 to 1.

Abbey was confident as the second set got under way that he'd put the whammy on Carter in straight sets. He did not expect anything like the sudden and furious shot-making that began exploding from Larry Carter's bat. Carter, who'd played a calm and precise game, with emphasis on style, began whirling and crowding toward the net. He won his own service.

Abbey took over the serve, and the score went to deuce. Three times Abbey grabbed the advantage, but couldn't find the clinching shot. It was deuce again.

Abbey put a rifle-like delivery into the backhand corner. He didn't expect that one to come back. But it did. Carter leaped sideways, and half-pivoting with the force of the wallop, blocked deep. He plunged in then almost recklessly. Abbey leveled the forehand, the thing blazing. Carter got his bat in front of the low drive, cutting it off and angling sharply. He scored a break-through when Abbey trying to find a loop-hole for his backhand, hit over the baseline.

The surprise was not so much that Carter was back in the thick of the match. Rather that he'd made a complete shift of tactics, and was waging an attacker's game. In the past, Abbey had found Dave's advice to be faultless, but it was hardly the case on this occasion. Still, he could not blame Dave for Carter's change of strategy. And then it occurred to him that possibly Dave had some inkling of what was to come. He



dismissed the thought as an outgrowth of other suspicions he'd let into his mind about Dave.

Abbey stepped into the pace of the play. He hugged the net himself and the exchanges were savage and short. Time and again, he passed Carter, and appeared to have all the best of it. But Carter wouldn't yield the net position, and managed to pick up enough points to hold on his own serve. That was good enough to win the set, 6 to 4.

All through the third set, Carter returned to his baseline style of play. Abbey stuck to the forecourt game, and he copped the set, 6 to 3. Then in the fourth, Larry Carter began crowding in, again piling on the pace. Whenever possible, he was forcing Abbey to hurry his shot-making, and shoot for tiny openings. He seemed intent on carrying the match the full five-set limit.

Abbey owned double the power of Larry Carter, but Carter was not a guy he could mow down. He was a cutie in there, one set practically living in that forecourt and the next dueling from the baseline. He was mixing up his stuff, too, with drop-shots, soft-volleys and tricky spinners.

It was a rough and bitterly fought session. Except for a lone swapping of break-throughs, the service pattern held. They came up for the nineteenth game of the set all squared away. Abbey's first serve barely missed the chalk. He tried again, and his luck was miserable. The ball slapped against the tape and dropped back into his own court. Then Carter's backhand sniped the sideline after picking up Abbey's seemingly impossible forecourt twister.

Those old fifth set jitters began to come on then. Abbey didn't want this match to go the limit for he'd yet to take a big-timer the size of Carter, when things got to that stage. It would be the same routine of the "almost guy" missing out again. Already the taste of defeat was in his mouth.

Abbey pounded into the serve, giving it the full weight of his shoulders and forearm. It burst across and Carter simply shook his head and strode to the other court. Abbey went for the ace again, but this time Carter pounced on it and blocked to the baseline. They went at it then, the drives bulleting to the far corners. Abbey came in and whipped a volley cross-court. Carter took the shot

close to the turf, and brilliantly passed Abbey. Fifteen-forty.

The maneuvering started all over again. Carter inserted a forecourt trap-shot into the rally and Abbey hit into the net. There it was, the big break-through, putting Carter ahead in games, 10 to 9.

**D**ISAPPOINTMENT welled up in Abbey then, stronger than ever, the old frustration. Abbey tried to fight it down. He laughed at himself for thinking that getting away from tennis for a couple of weeks had helped him overcome his old weakness. He just didn't seem to have the stuff in a pinch. Even the breaks of the game didn't favor him.

He put everything he had into an attempt at knocking Carter loose from his delivery, once again squaring the match. But Carter's stroking seemed sharper than ever and he was cutting the lines to pieces. He fired two consecutive volleys home and Abbey could not lay a bat on either of them. Leading off with that kind of bulge, he had no difficulty holding the serve and winning the fourth set.

Hardly had the fifth set gotten underway than Abbey realized how his strength had dwindled away. He'd fought Carter mostly at close range, and turned on great gobs of power in a slashing attempt to rout him. He was beginning to feel exhausted. His whole game was built on power and speed and much of the fine, sleek edge was gone. His forehand grew erratic and where he'd been cutting the lines, he was missing now. The finishing volley became a spotty weapon.

He could see now how really crafty a plan Larry Carter had put into operation. He'd paced himself, sometimes coasting, and satisfied to maneuver along the baseline. But when the chips were down, he'd battled into the forecourt. Also he was forever pressing that attack, and willing to risk placements winging past him. Altogether it was a peculiar and unorthodox brand of tennis that Carter was exhibiting, certainly a radical departure from his usual standard of play. And no matter how hard, how desperately Abbey prodded, he could not force Carter to give ground.

Fury welled up in Abbey. He stood back there now, ripping blast after blast

across the net. He wanted to beat Carter with sheer power, to rip open holes for his stroking. The rallies became long and seemingly endless. But if Carter had been a stubborn customer at the net, he was even tougher dueling at long range. With the score deuce on his own serve, Abbey twice in succession saw his shots miss the baseline chalk. That was Carter's lone break-through.

He played it smart and close the rest of the route, and Abbey found himself whipped, 6 to 4. That spelled elimination from the tourney.

Abbey went into the dressing room, and Dave followed him in a few minutes later.

"You were the better man with the racquet," Dave said, "but Carter knew the tricks and threw the book at you. Just smarter, that's all."

The sting of defeat was burning in Abbey. "Sure, smarter and a lot better player. Dave, I just haven't got it when the going gets rough."

Dave said, "You ought to be glad in a way for the lesson in tactics Carter gave you. Maybe next time you won't try to beat him at his own baseline game."

"Baseline? The guy seemed glued to the forecourt."

"Yeah, he threw a new wrinkle at you for awhile. He confused you and kept you guessing. But when the pay-off came in the fifth set, he was back there on the baseline."

Abbey said, "I ran myself ragged going to the forecourt like you told me to do. In the fifth set, the edge was gone."

"I can't do your thinking for you, Abbey. But I still think you'd have taken him if you'd kept going in until the very end."

Abbey was silent a moment. "Maybe that's my trouble, Dave. I'm depending too much on your judgment. Maybe I'm standing in your shadow and can't see the daylight." He was aware that he was voicing an opinion that originally came from Ann.

"There's a shadow all right," Dave said slowly. "But I'm not so sure it's mine."

Abbey dressed and met Ann as she was coming off the court. He was surprised to find Sonny Holm a bit ahead of him. He eyed Sonny curiously, and the nation's number two star laughed a little.

"Now don't tell me you're wanting to make up with Ann again. Just when I've come to her rescue."

Abbey said, "If you could only be that corny across the net, Sonny. Then I'd have no trouble with you at all."

"Surely, you must have heard," Holm said, smiling, "Ann's my girl now."

Ann said suddenly, "Please stop that talk, both of you."

"Okay," Abbey said. "I'll see you later, Ann."

She looked at him. "No, I'm awfully tired and I'm going straight home, Abbey."

"I'm driving her home," Holm put in happily.

Abbey felt a sudden rush of anger. He'd taken it for granted that Sonny Holm was kidding, but now he was not so sure.

"What makes here, Ann?"

"We'll talk about it some other time," she said quickly. Then she turned and walked toward the dressing room.

**T**HAT rocked Abbey. Just like that, out of a clear sky, Ann had turned cool toward him. He tried several times during the next few days to talk things over with her, but met with a polite rebuff on each occasion.

His bafflement grew to outright anger when he saw Ann in the company of Sonny Holm.

It was Sonny Holm and Dave Metz in the finals. Fine shot-maker and brilliant retriever that Holm was, he couldn't whip Dave, the old master. Dave had slowed a trifle, but was a marvelous example of a man who knew how to keep himself in top condition. He wanted that Nationals title badly, and was bending every effort, sharpening his big guns. He took Holm in four sets.

Abbey tried again to see Ann, but she'd abruptly checked out of her hotel no sooner than the last shot had been fired. Abbey went to Sonny Holm in an effort to find out what had brought about such a change in Ann's attitude.

"Listen," he told Holm, "there's something crazy going on that beats me. Maybe you know what makes with Ann. Why the big brush-off?"

Holm smiled dimly. "Maybe I should just tell you that you just don't fit into her plans any longer."

"That's about the answer I expected from you," Abbey said. "But it still

isn't the real thing. It couldn't possibly be."

Holm was silent, then laughed shortly. "It appears that Ann is hurting your career. She's ruining you as a tennis player and the fact that you lose the close ones is all her fault. As simple as all that."

"You don't have to be funny, Holm."

Holm said, "It sounds funny even to you, huh? Well, your benefactor and coach seems to think it's the case. So Ann is quite willing to go her way, having been requested to do so."

The breath went out of Abbey. "You're telling me that Dave had a talk with Ann, and told her to quit me?"

"I'll bet the other kids didn't have a chance when you were in school," Holm said sarcastically. "You're sure fast on the pick-up."

"It just isn't possible that Dave would do a thing like that."

"He's done it," Holm said. "He doesn't want his protégé sacrificing himself for a gal."

"I'll find out about that," Abbey said evenly.

"And while you're finding out," Holm said smiling, "you might inquire about him casually tipping off Larry Carter how you intended to play. It seems that Dave neither wants you to marry Ann nor to win big matches. Rather intriguing, the way Dave is handling things."

It was a double-barreled blast. Abbey stood there a moment, the fury gathering so hard in him that he trembled a little.

"Thanks for spilling things, Holm," he said. "I can take over from here on."

Holm said, "You know, you're quite a guy with that bat, Abbey. Better probably than even you yourself suspect. I'd kind of hate for you to really find your own power. You'd make it awfully tough on a lot of us—and Dave Metz, too."

"There doesn't seem to be much chance of that happening right now," Abbey said bitterly. "You can put those worries away, I guess."

A LACROSSE NOVELET

## GENIUS OFF THE CREASE

by ROGER FULLER

NEXT ISSUE

## CHAPTER IV

### *Widening Rift*

**S**EETHING with fury, Abbey Harlowe didn't waste a minute going to Dave Metz. It was showdown time, and he meant to dig into the whole nasty situation.

He saw Dave at the star's hotel room and brushed aside the preliminaries.

"There's a couple of answers I want, Dave," he said. "So let's take off the wraps and call the shots the way they are."

Dave looked at him, almost as though he suspected what was coming next.

"Yeah—go ahead, shoot, Abbey. You're apparently serving."

Abbey said, "Did you go to Ann and tell her to forget about me?"

"We had a talk," Dave said without hesitation. "I was under the impression that it was an off-the-record thing. But I see I was mistaken."

Abbey said bitterly, "I can see why you were so anxious to get me away from tennis for awhile. You just wanted a chance to run the show your own way."

"She's not good for you, that girl," Dave said. "I'm sorry to have to say that."

Anger spilled through Abbey like some wild, uncontrollable wave.

"That's for me to decide," he said fiercely. "You understand that? For me to decide."

Dave said, "Perhaps I did overstep the mark. I won't again, you can be sure of that."

"You'll be a sorry guy if you do."

"That'll make two of us," Dave said quietly. "Since you've cleaned the board, you can make your exit now, palsy. Just turn around and you'll find the door."

Abbey said, "The board isn't quite cleared. It seems there's the little matter of that match with Larry Carter. You send me out there to play net and then tell Carter exactly what I intend to do. That's great stuff."

"Look, kid," Dave said, "I made a small wager with Carter that you could take him. I said you'd never give him a chance to go into those long rallies. The fact was, I was rooting for that match to go five sets. I figured beating Carter

in the five sets, it'd give your confidence quite a hoist. Well, it didn't work out and messed things up more than ever."

"That's a wonderful alibi, and you can keep it," Abbey said tensely. "First you mess things up with my gal simply because it burns you that she took me over you. Then you pull a stunt like that with Carter. Fella, I don't mind walking out that door one bit."

Abbey was filled with a thousand frustrations. The break-up between him and Dave could not help but leave a mark. He'd always liked Dave, and sometimes he found himself almost wishing there'd been no Ann Lindsey to come between them. But it wasn't right, no matter how Dave figured, to go to Ann the way he'd done. It wasn't right for Dave to control him as though he owned him. There was a limit. He thought, perhaps it might be for the best that he was finally on his own.

Abbey detoured a bit from the major league circuit, deciding to play in a minor tourney. He wanted to get away from the familiar faces, the regular grind, if only to calm the turmoil boiling in him. The change in scenery would give him an opportunity to size up the future, and still keep his game at a sharp level.

Abbey had no trouble at all reaching the finals of the tourney. But easy as the victories came, he knew he was not playing his regular brand of tennis. The fierce competitive desire to win simply seemed to have dried up in him. He thought at first this was due to the second-rate opposition he was encountering.

He got the surprise of his life in the finals when a fiery young college kid upset him. The news of that upset hit the headlines, and Abbey's stock took a quick tumble. Even in a bush league tourney, where he'd been an overwhelming favorite to win, he'd been an almost guy again. There seemed no way to fight his way clear of the jinx that clung to him.

The combination of the jinx and the whole background of conspiring circumstances killed much of the incentive in him. He fought hard to regain the touch, but the shadow of those fifth set jitters stuck to him. It became more of an obsession than ever and a feeling of utter futility crawled in him. He was no longer slashing through the opening rounds with ease. Twice in succession he was

put out in the third round, and then he lost a first round match.

**T**HE tennis writers had stopped some time ago calling him a potential champ. They looked back over his record and wrote of his "almost" career. They said he just didn't have it when the pressure got hot. They relegated him to the list of those who'd made a terrific stir, and then never quite lived up to the advance publicity.

Things were never quite as smooth with Ann either, even after the split with Dave. Abbey sensed an off-key feeling there, but when he inquired about it, she laughed and told him how wrong he was. It was when he'd gone down to his fourth straight walloping that Ann literally pulled the rug from under his feet.

"Look, Abbey," she told him, "I'm afraid things really aren't the same between us. You see, I just can't imagine myself married to a person who has let himself fall into your kind of rut."

"I'll snap out of it," Abbey said. "It can't go on this way forever."

She looked at him, and the dazzling smile was not quite there. The blue eyes were hard, seeming to laugh at him.

"I'm sorry, Abbey. You're an almost guy, and you'll never rise above that station. No hard feelings."

He stood there, and his throat was hot and lumpy. He could not bring himself to believe Ann was so casually tossing him aside.

"You're kidding," he murmured. "It's that talk you had with Dave—"

She laughed a low, almost bitter laugh. "You never had a chance, Abbey. I tried to let you down easy but you didn't want it that way. I'm sorry, though, you had to be the one to get hurt. But it seemed like such a perfect way of settling a grudge with your Dave Metz. He thought he was beyond revenge. Well, now perhaps he knows differently."

"You didn't kid Dave one bit," Abbey said. "Dave didn't let that smile beat him."

"How right you are, Abbey. In fact, I wasn't good enough for Dave Metz, big shot that he is. Oh, yes, it was nothing at all for him to simply laugh me off."

Her voice was bitter and she went on talking, but Abbey wasn't listening. He was thinking how little he'd really meant to her. He'd been an adventure, a guy ticketed for the best the game had to

offer. Since she could not on her own ability make the grade, she did not hesitate to steal from the glory of another. In one way or another, she'd satisfy her own frustrated ambitions. First, she had tried to take Dave Metz over the hurdles. But Dave had seen beyond the dazzle of the smile in time and shelved her. So it was this terrible vanity, cutting and smarting that demanded some measure of revenge. She'd used him to accomplish that purpose.

Abbey said: "You can sorta write the mission off as completed now, can't you, Ann? You were determined to split Dave and me and you succeeded. A nice piece of spite work there, and clever, too. You pretended to be quitting me strictly on Dave's say-so. But in the meanwhile you tipped off Sonny Holm and he innocently spilled the beans. You knew that would be the finish between Dave and me."

She said, "You might as well know, too, that I really didn't care when your game went on the rocks. You see, I knew how hard Dave Metz had worked to make you a champion. In fact, it was my impression that he was almost as anxious to see you make the grade as to win the title again himself. It was a new kind of thrill to Dave practically to develop a player, call the turn on him, and then see it all come true. Well, that's one dream I wrecked for him. That one hit him right between the eyes."

Abbey said evenly, "I'm almost glad my game did go sour. At least it helped me to learn about you sooner than I would have otherwise."

Turning away from her, Abbey felt an odd gladness rising above the bitterness swirling in him. The indecision of the weeks, bearing down so heavily, was gone. It was like stepping into the fresh air from a tangled and darkened web. There was clearness of mind and direction. He could not hope, he knew, to mend the breakage strewn along the path, but he could at least look ahead to the future.

It was the West Side Tennis Club, and Abbey Harlowe was stroking with a brilliant finesse on the legendary center-court. Across the net was Bud Robbins, a capable but never outstanding performer. He'd upset Abbey in the first set, but never had a chance in the next pair. The voltage in Abbey's bat suddenly burst into a splurge of line-lashing

placements. There didn't appear to be much doubt about Abbey winning his way into the round of sixteen of the Nationals.

**A**BBEY took a low volley as he raced toward the sidelines, and the backhand flowed in a smooth, powerful thrust. A streaking white ribbon slid through the hole, and Robbins was caught flatfooted at the net. The umpire said:

"Game to Mister Harlowe. He leads in games, five-three, fourth set.

There was a spattering of applause. The backhand shot, a sparkling piece of markmanship seemingly rated more enthusiasm than the gallery gave it. But the match itself was being taken pretty much for what it was worth. The gallery just couldn't seem to get excited. Earlier on the same court they'd seen the cagy veteran, Larry Carter, play the best tennis of his career to spring the tourney's major upset. Carter had whipped Sonny Holm in five spine-tingling sets, and what followed was strictly anti-climax.

Abbey could understand the gallery's apparent boredom, even beyond the fact that the Carter-Holm match had drained their emotions. They'd seen him time and again, when he'd lifted their expectations in him to the highest pitch, and then let them down miserably.

So it was old stuff to them, the idea of him looking great against minor opposition, and folding down when the going got really rugged. Besides, the next day's draw would throw him against Dave Metz and that would doom any continued advance in the Nationals. Dave Metz was roaring hot, and with Sonny Holm sidelined, there was nobody likely to extend him. It appeared that Dave was moving toward his easiest conquest of the crown in all his seasons on the big time.

Even now with the match practically wrapped up, Abbey felt some uneasiness. He wanted to knock Robbins off quickly, for buried in the back of his mind was a fear of a fifth set. Even the thought of such an occurrence put a taut feeling in his stomach.

He served, pouring murderous speed into the shot. Robbins somehow got his bat on it, returning a soft hoist to mid-court. Abbey took a calculating glance, and swung the racquet in an overhead

smash. The only way Robbins might have gotten that one was to have been sitting up in the stands. That's where the caroming ball landed.

Abbey fired that blazing delivery across again, and Robbins couldn't touch it this time.

It was all over a few minutes later. Abbey flipped a second ace and then ended the match on a dazzling cross-court volley.

He started toward the dressing room and a voice at his shoulder said:

"You played some nice tennis in that one, Abbey."

Abbey stopped suddenly, his glance swinging onto Dave Metz. He'd seen Dave around, but had stayed clear of him. He didn't believe Dave cared very much about seeing him after what had happened between them. Nor did he want to go crawling back to Dave simply because he'd found the going rough elsewhere.

Abbey said, "Hullo, Dave, I'm hitting 'em a little better. But I'm not kidding myself about tomorrow."

Dave laughed a little. "Still got those fifth set jitters, huh? Well, we'll try and fix it so that it doesn't go more than three sets."

There was a lot of things Abbey wanted to tell Dave, but there wasn't much doubt that Dave already was aware of most of them. He didn't want Dave to think he was looking for sympathy or that he wanted any favor the next day. He said simply:

"See you tomorrow, Dave."

He went home and ate lightly, seeming to have no appetite at all. The night was restless, and he spent most of it turning and pitching. He had no great desire to play the match, for he somehow did not want to fight Dave's bid for another Nationals title. He wished the draw had not put him in the line of Dave's march. In his heart, Abbey knew, he was rooting for Dave. Since he'd found how right Dave had been about Ann, the loyalty-tie had tightened and was stronger than ever. But just as he discovered Ann's tactics too late, so was it beyond the hour of reclaiming Dave's friendship.

It was no surprise to Abbey that none of the tennis experts gave his chances of beating Dave Metz a look-in. They couldn't see him winning more than a set at the very most, and he'd have to be very lucky to accomplish that feat. There

was no doubt that Dave had brought his game to a shining and almost unbeatable edge for this last fling at fame. He hadn't dropped a set this far along the tourney road.

The next day, Abbey walked out into the bright, soft September afternoon to play Dave Metz. The big crowd was relaxed and aware that their thrills would come from watching Dave Metz's masterful execution of shot-making. So they'd come mostly to watch Dave Metz, the champion, toy with Abbey Harlowe, one of the biggest disappointments ever to hit the big time circuit.

**G**RIMLY Abbey stepped upon that fabulous patch of green center-court, and started the warm-up rally with Dave. He felt none of the thrill of the moment—simply a sick, sinking feeling.

He went to the net for the racquet-flip. Dave won it and elected to begin service.

"Let's give 'em their money's worth," Dave said. "Make a match out of it, Abbey. You've got the stuff to at least do that for awhile."

Abbey said, "Yes, for awhile at least." He saw Dave eye him curiously. Then Dave's jawline tightened, and he knew the old fighting fever was beginning to stir in the champion. A match did something to Dave Metz, changing him from a big, friendly guy into a grim and relentless hunk of fighting man.

A moment ready, the umpire said, "Ready, gentlemen?"

Dave Metz arched under the white-shirted pill, and the racquet swished in a blazing downward thrust. He laid that big, first Sunday pitch smack on the outside chalk. Abbey came out of his crouch, bat flashing and punching across the return. Dave was a big, swift cat, sensing the play perfectly and driving savagely into the deep corner. Abbey sprinted and flailed with the backhand.

He covered nicely when Dave shortened the angle of his shotmaking, and adequately met each challenge as it arose. It was all mechanical perfection, the brand of tennis that was good enough to beat the also-rans. But it was not of the stuff to beat a Sonny Holm or Dave Metz. It never had been and there was no reason to expect any change in the situation on this day.

On each exchange, Abbey could feel the tremendous power of Dave's strok-

ing, seeming always to pile higher and toward an explosion. He chased down a forehand and then the rally ended abruptly. Dave found his opening and exploded a cross-court volley. That was the way Dave Metz played the game, probing and giving the opposition a sense of security. And then he dropped the anchor.

Abbey barely dug up the next delivery, and he stood helplessly while Dave slashed it away. An ace burst past him. Dave walked across the turf and repeated the blow. A love game.

They made the odd game change of court, and Abbey did not look at Dave. He was just a little ashamed at the futility of his stroking in that first game. He hadn't even come close to scoring a point. Abbey toed the stripe and felt the hitch creep into his swing. Fault. Then a double-fault.

The serve was sticky and a fraction out of control. Abbey sacrificed speed, and knocked a twister into the service box. It came back, striking at his feet and he put it into the net. Dave ran right through his serve, and took the second successive game.

The crowd stirred a little. It was plain to see that Dave Metz was his old brilliant self, and that Abbey wasn't going to give him much of a battle. They'd expected more of Abbey though, for he'd given the best of them a run for three or four sets. But he was cracking up earlier than usual. Abbey sensed the let-down of the gallery, and he bit into his lip and tried to summon the old fighting heart. But the eagerness, the incentive for the match did not seem to be there.

He played better tennis over the remainder of the set, for he owned that mechanical knack of looking good in there. He was just too fine a player to be mowed so easily into submission. In the fourth game, Abbey won his own serve, and that was the lone game of the set he copped. Dave took the set, 6 to 1.

While they were switching courts, Abbey stole a glance at Dave. What he saw made him draw sharply on his breath. Dave was staring at him, a look of scorn in his face.

"The one thing I didn't figure you for was a quitter," Dave said, pausing briefly. "It isn't much satisfaction whipping a guy without the guts to fight back. Let's get it over so I can get the taste of

this thing out of my mouth."

Abbey rubbed his hand across his cheek as though he'd been slapped. "It won't be over as fast as you think, Dave. Not even you can take me in straight sets." Dave laughed.

## CHAPTER V

### *Tough Road Up*

**I**T OCCURRED to Abbey Harlowe then that he was cheapening Dave, and certainly his own self, giving so listless an exhibition. The trait Dave admired in a guy was the ability to scrap. Dave loved a good fight, but it was an insult to the big guy's pride that the other man didn't give with the best in him. And in this case, especially cutting to Dave's pride, Abbey knew, since Dave had done so much toward shaping his game and career.

Abbey poured into the serve, and touched the depth of his real power for the first time. The ball came back, Dave making a marvelous recovery. Abbey rifled deep and Dave stroked off the backhand, the shot clearing the net with the barest margin. It was in there, riding toward a placement when Abbey stretched and the wrist-locked bat made contact.

The ball slid along the sideline, and some applause began drifting into the afternoon. The cheers died abruptly, then came on in a splashing wave as Dave Metz picked the ball off the chalk and miraculously angled into the forecourt for the point. Abbey took a breath, and tightened his grip on the racquet. He looked across the net and Dave was grinning a little. It was like saying:

"That's the way to hit, fella. Just perfect for me to break your heart wide open."

It was a dilly, that game, but when it was finished, Dave had scored another break-through. Twice, Abbey fought to advantage, only to have Dave spike away and roll back the score to deuce. He finally lost the upper hand, and once Dave got the advantage, rushed the game to a conclusion.

There was a definite pick-up in Abbey's play but it did not quite approach the glistening edge of Dave's weapons.

He managed to hold on his own delivery after the first break-through, but could do nothing about cracking Dave's serve. So as they came up for the tenth game, Dave led, 5 to 4.

Abbey crouched at the waist, and dug in. There was resolve and a tautness in his face. He was aware that if he yielded this next game and set, he was through. With a two-set pull, Dave would open up the throttle and gamble on the kill. He could afford to throw, then to pile on the pressure, without having to worry too much about the result. The two-set bulge would be insurance against whatever might occur in the meantime.

Okay, Abbey thought, you wanted a fight and you're going to get it.

They battled from the deep-court, after some brisk forecourt business. Abbey stalked the baseline, and fired one booming shot after another across the net. But no matter how hard he hit, Dave kept shooting blazing returns of his own back at him. He'd had many practice sessions with Dave but never quite realized the murderous impact of Dave's game till now. The ball came at him, spinning with degrees of undercut, side and topspin. And sometimes it rode on sheer, bludgeoning force. Abbey could never quite be sure of what to expect, so devilishly did Dave mix up his stuff.

A low-skidding volley chipped the sideline, and Abbey glimpsed Dave moving in on the net, making his bid for the point. Abbey lunged, and swung for the empty side of the court. The smooth follow-up of the stroke was missing on that one, but the ball nevertheless flew across the net like a bullet. It sailed through and creased the chalk for a passing placement. Dave stood glued to his position, and shook his head a little.

Abbey hung in there grimly, owning that one-point bulge and fighting to make it stick. He lost the next point, but came right back with another passing shot. He crept ahead, forty-thirty. Dave went for the ace, whacking a savage thrust down the middle line. Abbey gambling, blasted and prayed. The ball exploded at Dave's feet, the gamble surprising him as he whirled in on the net. The best Dave could manage was a sitter and Abbey quickly angled it away. There it was, the break-through he

wanted, leveling the games at five-all.

It went on from there, the service order holding till the sixteenth game. Then Abbey made his big bid. He began storming the net, and Dave swiftly streaked through a passing shot. But Abbey kept plunging in, touched with a furious abandon and determined to take this one set from Dave. He cut off a low volley, and slapped it away. He raced deep for a lob, picking it out of the air and smashing a brilliant shot into the corner.

He got passed again, then whistled a bullet of his own down the line. It went to deuce four times before Abbey finally worked the advantage his way. He rode in again, behind a deep forcing shot. Dave knew he'd be up at the net, and swung for the money.

It whizzed past Abbey apparently earmarked for another placement. Abbey simply stood there, knowing the baseline decision was going to be very close. Somehow, Dave had a wonderful knack of clipping the lines when the pressure was at its tightest. He waited tensely, and then picked up the linesman's call—"out". This time Dave had missed and the umpire was saying:

"Game and set to Mister Harlowe, nine to seven. The sets are one-all."

**I**N THE gallery the murmur grew louder, and there was obvious surprise in their cheers. It was the first time that Dave had been whipped in a set since the tourney had gotten underway. But then, too, Dave had met no one who owned the big game that Abbey boasted.

It was odd, having accomplished so brilliant a feat, and feeling no real satisfaction. Against any other player, Abbey knew, there'd be a glow and pride in his work. But with Dave across the net, he almost wished he'd lost the set. And yet he was aware that above anyone, Dave wanted none of that feeling. Dave was a champion and would stand or fall on that championship.

They went into the third set, and Dave began prowling the court in tigerish style. Abbey tried to meet the challenge. He never really had a chance, though, there was no break in serve through six games. Dave was coming at him all the time, flashing in on the net to make brilliant put-away shots. He controlled the play from the baseline, and Abbey felt his own stroking being



crowded, and the backswing slightly out of gear. Dave was smashing and volleying and the sting of a cobra's bite was in his shot-making.

The third set went to Dave, 6 to 3.

The surprise of Abbey's second set win had worn away, and the gallery was settled and relaxed again. He'd made his bid for the day and was finished. Dave would go on to end the thing quickly. But Abbey was not ready to fold. He was going to make Dave sweat for every point, and if nothing else, discourage those thoughts about him being a quitter. More than anything, Abbey realized, he wanted Dave to respect him.

He threw himself into the fourth set, fighting, struggling, and conceding nothing. He won on his own delivery and then made his attempt to crack-through Dave. He gambled, knowing he couldn't give Dave the advantage of following in on the bulleting delivery. Somehow, he had to win over the offensive, and the answer seemed to be a hard service return. The first time Abbey tried to whale it back, he netted. But the next attempt brought a low, twisting shot that slid through for a winner.

It was point for point and the score rode to deuce. Dave was hanging back warily, anticipating the vicious retrieves. Abbey dropped a forecourt trap-set into the middle of a lengthy rally. Dave came in, retrieving beautifully. Then Abbey hit into the vacuum and got the advantage. When Dave faulted his first ball, Abbey threw all the chips down, blasting into the second twister. He drove it down the line, a low and lashing thing, and irretrievable.

He surged ahead in games, 2 to 0.

Even as Abbey laid his heart and courage wide open for all to see during that fourth set, other thoughts were creeping into his mind. He thought of Ann Lindsey and how wrong he had been about her. In her book, he was a washed up tennis bum, a guy who didn't have it when the going got rough. It was funny now, looking back and realizing how easily she'd taken him over the hurdles with that dazzling smile. He'd been so sure of himself, so anxious to rush his tennis and please Ann. But he was in no hurry now. It did not matter too much whether he reached the tennis heights today or the next day.

The set wore on and Dave threw one furious bid after another. Then the fury

dimmed somewhat in Dave's bat, as though he realized that the tide of the fourth set could not be turned. He seemed to be resting, saving himself for the decisive last set. He would let everything ride in that one.

Abbey took the fourth set, 6 to 3.

Once again, Abbey went into a fifth set, having pushed his man to the limit. So many times he'd sweated the best tennis out of the opposition only to be beaten. He could sense the crowd being aware that the same old act was about to be unveiled again. He'd made a fine effort and the writers would say nice things about him and that would end the matter.

He steeled himself for the old fifth set jitters. Dave was counting on the jinx to paddle through the crisis. Abbey started to serve, and there was no panic, no terrible fear passing inside of him. And he wondered why this set was different than all the others.

He lost the first point, but still there was no alarm rising in him. He looked across the net and smiled slightly, and somehow imagined that Dave's face went a shade grimmer. He could not figure this odd looseness, even the logic of the smile. But possibly all this easiness of mind was simply another trick of the fates, leading him on.

**I**T WAS a long, bitterly fought game. The sparks of brilliance flew and they tore into each other with a savagery that held the gallery in awed silence. There was Dave pulling a furious bid for a quick break-through, and Abbey somehow holding him off. Twice Dave grabbed the advantage and seemed a cinch to crash through the delivery. It went on and on, seemingly endless, and then Abbey did what he could not do during a rally. He found the finishing stroke—two consecutive aces that were blinding in speed. He'd held his own serve.

Abbey started toward the opposite court in the odd game change. At the net, Dave paused, throwing him a curious glance.

"What happened to those butterflies in your stomach, Abbey?" he remarked quietly. "They should be swarming through you any moment now."

Abbey said, "I don't feel that way, Dave. Not even a little bit."

"That's how it happens, I guess," Dave

said. Then he walked on.

It began to come to Abbey then, the picture brightening and growing clearer in his mind.

"That's how it happens," he repeated to himself.

Here in the tenseness, the glitter of that center-court, Abbey knew he'd found the answer. And he knew from looking into Dave's face that Dave realized he'd finally come into his own. He was not going to falter or quit to the old jinx.

Strange, how even Ann Lindsey, minx that she was, had contributed to his finding the answer. He'd always been in too great a hurry, and in his eagerness to make the grade fought the game, and mostly himself. A quick overnight surge to the top, and then a dip into the pro bread basket. But it was not that easy for even a guy who owned the tremendous possibilities with which he was endowed.

It was something, as Dave had told him, that couldn't be rushed. A guy had to go along, passing through the various stages, growing up with the game. There were players as Dave Metz had been, who sped through these stages, and others who had to go a little slower. It could not be explained, this period of development, no more than why some daisies bloom before the others.

He had tried to force his own growth, and the more he forced, the slower had been his progress. So there'd been bitterness and frustration, and his very enthusiasm was his downfall. It had turned him into an almost guy. Maybe if there'd not been so much publicity attached to his entry into the amateur ranks, the ride might have been easier. But the double handicap of trying to live up to his publicity and ambitions proved too much for him.

The day he'd discovered that Ann was stringing him along had in itself been a wonderful day. He'd begun then to slow down, take things in their stride, though it had taken a bit of readjustment. It took time, he realized now, for a guy to go through the mill and really find himself. That's what Dave had meant by saying, "There's things a guy has to find out himself about this game, Abbey. Maybe I could explain it, but you really wouldn't believe it. You've still got to go that payoff set on your own."

Abbey could understand the poised grin that he'd seen on the faces of guys like Sonny Holm and Larry Carter and all the others. It was a mark of confidence. They'd been through the mill, and had arrived in every sense of the word. He'd thought it was luck and some strange thing how the breaks always had seemed to fall to the others in the clutch. But somehow, he couldn't help but believe that the breaks had a way of coming to the great players.

Even as he crouched to receive the delivery, Abbey was conscious of how his very respect for Dave had worked in his favor during this match. He hadn't come into it fighting himself, afraid to lose. And that was partly the reason there'd been no fifth set jitters. This time he'd not been over-anxious to accomplish the impossible.

Abbey belted the serve straight down the middle, and he could feel the tingle rising and spilling into his arms and even his fingertips. He raced deep, lopping as Dave came in behind the forcing shot. Dave braked and took the ball on a bounce, drilled it low and severely. Abbey charging in, shoulders dipping, and tried a risky half-volley. He got it away, picking up the sideline chalk.

Dave faulted, then tried to cut the line and the ball barely missed the money-slot. A double-fault. It was the same kind of tough break that had happened so often to himself, Abbey knew. But it was not just a lucky break. He'd forced such pressure on Dave that he'd chosen to go for that ace. Dave came back, getting the next pair of points. Abbey slid a thrust through the defense and edged ahead again. He won the break-through, smashing away a lob. Dave put up.

**T**HE struggle went on, Dave cracking Abbey's delivery and holding on his own serve to square things. Then Abbey once again knocked Dave loose from his serve. It raged and stormed, the struggle, and Abbey showed no sign of cracking. In the ninth game, Dave held serve and made his bid to save the match. Abbey led in games, 5 to 3.

Abbey served and it came back, exploding into the deep backhand corner. They fought a nerve-wracking duel for the next point, maneuvering for the fleetest opening. Abbey pounded a backhand that clipped the sideline, and closed

on the net. Dave swooped across the grass, firing an amazing forehand. Abbey plunged sideways, reaching and twisting and stabbing at the ball. He got enough of his bat on it to flip the shot across. It was beyond the desperate scoop of Dave's racquet.

He saw Dave look up from the turf and shake his head a little. And Abbey sensed then that Dave, gallant champion, had little left except the big, game heart.

That match-clinching game seemed to Abbey to last a thousand years. There was a kind of physical pain in being the one to beat Dave. He sent the pay-off placement through the slot. He stood there a moment, fighting back the dimness in his eyes.

The umpire was announcing the score: "Set and match to Mister Harlowe; one to six, nine to seven, six to three, six to four." The cheers were rolling in waves from the crowd. But Abbey was not listening. He looked up and saw Dave starting toward the net and he ran to meet Dave.

"Dave," he said, gripping the extended hand, "it wasn't something I enjoyed—beating you. Maybe it sounds cock-eyed, but I was rooting for you to win this tourney."

"It hurts losing, sure," Dave said, "but if it had to happen, I'm glad you're the guy who turned the trick, Abbey." He paused slightly, managing a grin. "After all, I'm the guy who trained and picked you to be a champ. So, it's not as bad

losing as you might think. I've been on top a long while."

Abbey said, "But this was your last big shot, Dave. I had to be the fellow to spoil it."

"I'm making way for a new champ—because you'll win this thing, Abbey. It's happened to better players than I and it's part of the game." He added thoughtfully: "There's enough of this game in my blood to want to play in an occasional tourney. But that's all. I've got to settle down to be a business man."

Abbey said suddenly, "I sure figured you were off me for good after that mix-up."

"Ann Lindsey gave me a rough time for awhile," Dave said. "But I caught wise to her little game sooner than you. But that doesn't matter now. You're on your way and you've found the answers you needed to know. That's the important thing, Abbey."

The cameramen were clicking a barrage of pictures. Abbey looked at Dave and winked and said:

"I feel better about things, Dave. Much better."

Dave nodded, laughed a little. "That goes for me, too, Abbey. I lose a championship but still have me a champ. Pretty good trick, huh?"

And for the first time, Abbey really heard the crowd's cheers in the background.

The feeling of being an almost guy was gone, he knew.



## The Big Gate

**M**ANY years ago, when Hy Myers was playing for the Brooklyn Robins, he objected to playing an exhibition game during an off-day of the regular season.

The fact that the game was to be held in his home town of East Liverpool, Ohio, did not change his attitude until Charley Ebbets, then owner of the Brooklyn club, offered him a quarter of the gate receipts.

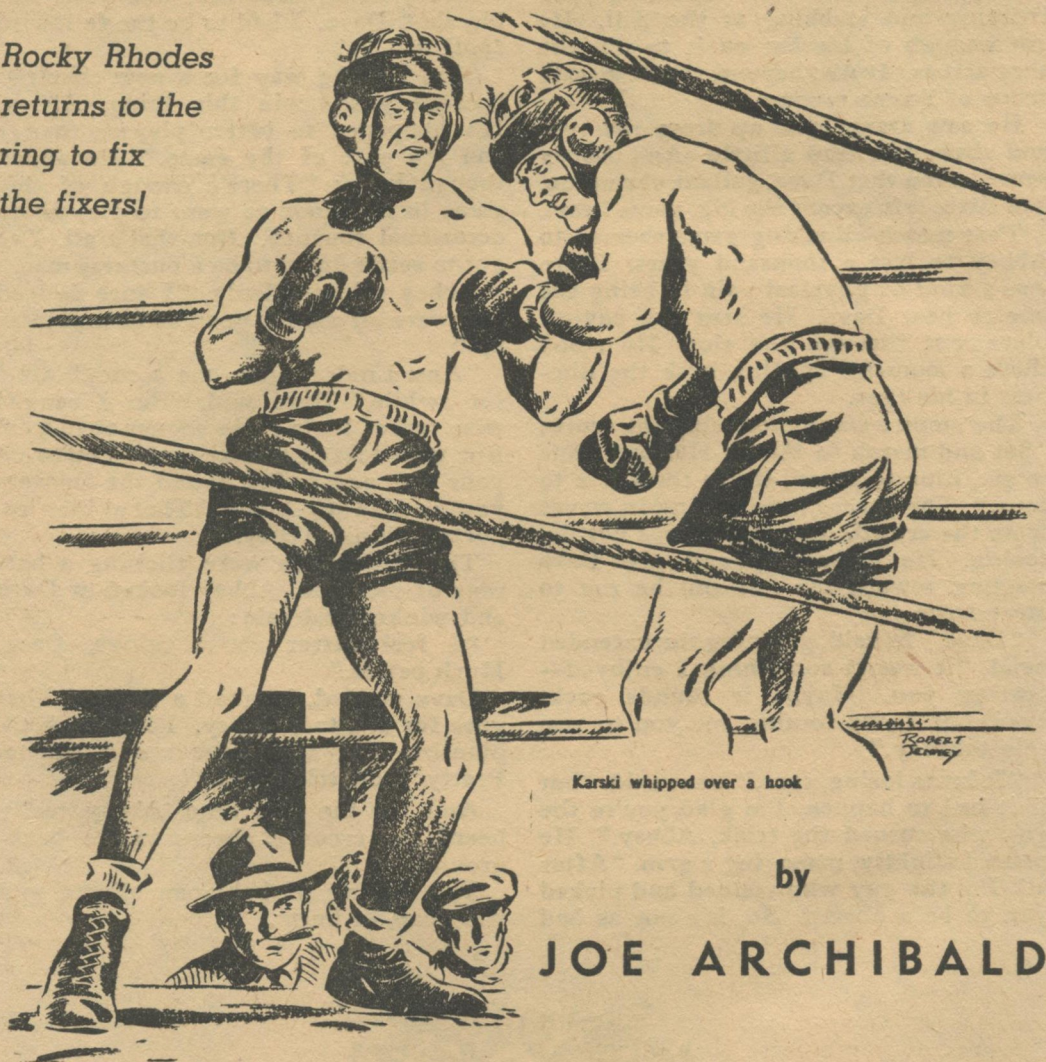
Hy accepted this bid joyfully and went through his stint without complaint even though bad weather held the expected surging crowd down to a mere trickle. But he didn't realize how few of his home townsmen had turned out until he got the check for his share of the receipts.

It came to \$4.25.

*Carter Sprague*

# Cauliflower Mutual

Rocky Rhodes  
returns to the  
ring to fix  
the fixers!



Karski whipped over a hook

by

JOE ARCHIBALD

**W**ELTERWEIGHT Rocky Rhodes came into the hotel room and nodded to the blond fighter sitting on the bed. Leo Karski got up and held out his hand.

"I've always wanted to meet you, Rocky," he said. "To tell you I figured you got a bum rap that time."

"Water under the bridge, Leo," Rocky said, his mind going back. "I see you signed to fight Sid Laverne. You sure came up fast. Conti must be pretty sure his boy can get by you."

"Listen, Rocky," Karski said, his eyes stormy. "If you mean I'd—"

"Horse feathers!" Rocky said, and sat down. "No more than I would, Leo. I guess there aren't too many contenders for Valo's crown. Sid needs a fight to keep him on edge and after all you don't figure to take him."

"I figure to try, Rocky. There is something on your mind."

"Plenty I'd like to get off, Leo," the welterweight said. He'd been away for over a year, ever since Commissioner Regan had suspended him from New York State rings.

Seven other commonwealths had followed Regan's action.

"You look in great shape, Rocky."

"I've had half a dozen fights out West and didn't have to try too hard to win," Rocky said. "Those meatballs weren't heading anywhere. Yeah, Leo, keep away from guys like Harry Kauf. I came up too fast from the land of the wet wash and smell of cabbage and the big gees impressed me. I went with a dame who advised me to get chummy with boys like Harry and his crowd. I knew what to do with my dukes but not with my brains."

"You come to preach, Rocky? Listen, let's have it."

"I want to work out with you at Stillwell's, Leo," Rocky said.

"You? A sparring partner, Rocky? The guy who they think is still better than them all, includin' Valo?" Karski said incredulously. "If you need a hundred, Rocky—"

"Me? Do I look as if I did? Out in Los Angeles I've got part of a drive-in that's paying me very nice and only this morning I called to see Regan. So I can fight now, I tell him, and laugh in his face. Thanks, pal. Maybe I will. It'll be tough, I said. They remember Rocky Rhodes as the guy wanted to take a dive. Most of them will always think that."

**K**ARSKI looked at the welterweight reflectively for a moment or two.

"I don't get the angle, Rocky," Leo said.

"You will. I didn't get your answer, pal."

"Sure, Rocky. It'll prime me for LaVerne, but you don't figure to slap me to make an impression. You know what I mean?"

"Okay, Leo," Rocky said. "So it is in your mind I'm a geezer. Leo, I will give you my word. That word was good during the investigation but Harry Kauf's was better. His and Sammy Bova's and Frankie Igoe's. Sammy met me outside Stillwell's that day and he said to come along with him as Kauf was throwing one of those parties at Club Seventeen. Big names there from the Broadway shows and the ball parks and even Park Avenue. It was a week before I was to fight LaVerne. I felt big, Leo, and went along. I had a cocktail that buzzed my head and then I am in a room with Harry Kauf and Sammy. Kauf tries me out and mentions twenty

grand. Sammy says how about it, Rocky?"

Karski cut in. "You don't have to sell me, Rocky. There's thousands figure they gave you the works."

"I want to tell it, Leo. I look at Sammy and then I belt him. Kauf takes me by the arm and says to forget it and hustles me out. He is stuffing dough back into his wallet when I open the door. There I see Ray Conti and Frankie Igoe, of *The Blade* who have joined the party but even then I smell nothing."

Leo gestured impatiently. "Yeah, I know. Then the boxing commissioner called you and Eddie to the carpet and Conti is there with that writer. Conti told Regan he didn't like what he saw at Club Seventeen. His boy couldn't get mixed up in no dive even if he wasn't in on the deal. There was an investigation, and they threw that rule at you. The number of it escapes me, Rocky, but it states that a fighter must report an attempted bribe to the commission within a reasonable length of time. They tossed you out."

"Sure," Rocky said. "That's all they did. A year out of a fighter's life is like twenty taken from the average guy's. Leo, LaVerne is to fight Valo for the title if he gets by you. He gets the shot I should've had but don't exactly want any more."

"What exactly are you gettin' at, Rocky?"

"Well, Sid got past me, didn't he? No matter how, he got me out of the way, Leo. Just as pretty as if I'd taken a dive. Or should I give the credit to Conti?"

Karski said, "You think I can beat him, Rocky?"

"I never saw you fight, Leo," Rocky said. "I'll tell you after I've gone a couple of rounds with you. With the big gloves. Tell your manager this sparring partner won't cost him a cent. All I want for now is to help you belt LaVerne out."

"I'll talk it over with Marty when he comes in," Karski said.

Rocky Rhodes left the contender's hotel and crossed over to Broadway. It was about the time of day he could expect to find people he'd known at Dempsey's. On Eighth he paused and looked over at the Garden. Three times his name had been over that marquee. In big bright lights. He felt the fever get into his blood and he nearly changed

his plans before he walked into Dempsey's. Somebody yelled, "Rocky! Why, you old so-and-so!" and he turned and saw Will Moger of the *Courier*. The veteran writer had gone all out for him during that trouble with Regan.

"Hard as nails!" Moger grinned as he gripped the return battler by the shoulders. "You're ready now, Rocky. They said you'd never come back. Got any plans, Rocky?"

"Maybe," Rocky said, and looked around. He grinned easily when he saw Ray Conti at a corner table. Sid LaVerne's brains had some cute stuff with him and a dame named Marjie whom Rocky used to have a little fun with at times. All of them had that look in their eyes as he walked over and shook hands. Conti's smile was badly forced after he'd said:

"You'll have to wait, Rocky. Maybe if Sid gets the title—"

"Sure, Ray," Rocky said and gave Marjie his attention. The fur coat she wore now was plenty real and her perfume had been imported from far away. There was a diamond on that certain finger.

"You've done fine, baby," he said. "Who is the lucky guy?" knowing all the time it was Rocky Rhodes.

"Tell him, Ray," Marjie smiled and sipped languidly at a martini.

**R**OCKY RHODES stared keenly at the girl. Well, he thought, she'd get a nice cut of Sid's purse whatever it would be.

"Congratulations, Ray. How's my pal, Harry Kauf?"

"Let's forget that, Rocky," Conti snapped. "Let the smell blow over for your own sake."

"Okay, Ray. But don't forget I can fight again. I'm in shape and I'm coming after you. Nothing can stop me from getting that title." He turned and walked away and saw Will Moger leaning against the bar, grinning widely. "I'm glad to hear you say that, Rocky. Copy has been blooie since you went away."

"You'll get some soon, pal," Rocky said and left Dempsey's.

It was the third real workout for Leo Karski at Stillwell's and most of the boxing writers in the big town were outside the training ring. Karski had his headgear on and he was not playing

with Rocky. Rocky looked lean and dangerous and he was not fooling either. Will Moger chewed on a cigar and watched this business and was puzzled.

In the center of the ring, Rocky said in a brief clinch, "Now, Leo!" He got away, came stepping in and he whipped a hard shot to Karski's stomach. The fighter from the Pacific Coast bared his teeth and came roaring back. Marty Price, Karski's manager jumped up and yelled crazily. Somebody said:

"The punk! This is his way to get at Sid LaVerne. The crooked tanker!"

Moger threw his cigar to the floor. It tasted sour. He stared at Rocky Rhodes going in at Karski, and Karski backed away, then set himself and whipped out with a hook that caught Rocky on the chin. Stillwell's was a bedlam when Rocky hit the canvas.

Rocky, although he knew what was going on and heard everything that was being said, took his time about getting to his feet. Sure, Karski, had held some of his power in check, but there was a buzzing in Rocky's head. When he got up, Karski hurried over and put an arm around him.

"Sorry, pal, you got ambitious," Karski said. "You've got to stand in line and wait your turn for the champ, Rocky. I'll let you know if—"

Rocky drew his old robe around him and went to the dressing room, the writers mobbing him and firing questions.

"Sure, I was tempted," he told them. "I wanted to see how good I was and I found out. I never was in better shape and this Karski puts me on the seat of my pants. Nobody's ever done that before."

"A sneak punch," Will Moger said sourly. "Like Pearl Harbor, and you could have ruined that boy. Maybe you should have kept away, Rocky."

"Sure, I'm a heel," Rocky said. "I'm glad I'm not fighting that Pole. All right, get out of here and let me have my shower."

They left him there alone and he breathed in the smells of the gym and compared them to the sweet air of the countryside outside L.A. There was a little redhead out there in the drive-in he knew was right for him. She had told him to hurry back when he'd said good-by. After the shower he dressed quickly and stuffed his ring equipment

into a bag. Nobody gave him a word when he left. When he'd come in a lot of young fighters had fallen over themselves to shake his hand.

The papers handled the story with the usual embellishments and the boxing writers used up all the superlatives at their command in describing Karski's punch. Two days later Karski's stock was skyrocketing. Rocky ran into Ray Conti at Linder's on the night the odds began to swing Karski's way, and the fight manager did not seem to be relishing his blintzes. Marjie was with Ray and she was jumpy. Rocky, from where he sat, watched the two snap at each other like terriers picking a bone. On his way out he stopped at their table.

"I thought you'd left town, you bum," Conti snapped, and Marjie's smile was sulphuric.

"Yeah? Tell Sid he's welcome to the Polack," Rocky said. "He's not for me. Marjie, your face is on crooked." He went on his way, certain of Conti's unease.

**T**HREE days later he met LaVerne's manager again at Fiftieth and Broadway. Now Ray had his oily smile back.

"Still looking for work, showboat?" Conti asked sourly. "Look, if you can borrow half a yard or a grand to put on this Karski, I'll cover it, Rocky. You've been shootin' off your mouth too much."

"I was away a year, did you forget, Ray? And it is wrong to bet on fights. I promised Regan I'd obey the rules."

"I'll see you around, Rocky. In about two years we might give you a shot at our title."

Rocky walked away from Conti and all at once he was reminded of something. He went to the nearest telegraph office and wired his partner, out in the drive-in near L.A.

INSURANCE PAYMENT DUE TOMORROW THE  
SIXTEENTH STOP TAKE CARE OF IT RIGHT  
AWAY SEE YOU BEFORE LONG.

ROCKY.

Insurance was a great thing. It got people over some pretty rugged spots. Even geezers like Conti believed in insurance. It was the backbone of the country. He wondered who was selling it now for Harry Kauf.

Well, it was Karski's next move.

He sat at the ringside up in the Park Arena in the Bronx that night watching two middleweights work on each other and both boys were well used up at the end of the fourth round. They'd been around for some time and would never go anywhere. The features they had brought out of the public schools were no longer apparent and what they had learned one time had been pounded out of their heads. Old cuts were opened and bleeding and one of the fighters had an unlovely lump under his right eye.

Most boxfighters came to this pass, Rocky thought. How many Leonards or Loughrans had there been the last twenty years? He thought of L.A. Azaleas out there. Cauliflowers here. He got up and left, sure of the days ahead.

It was just five days before the fight at the Garden that Leo Karski called Rocky up in mid-afternoon.

"Rocky? Tonight around nine o'clock you should drop around. How's things? You all cleared up with Regan and the others?"

"Practically, Leo. You should beat Valo easy," Rocky said. And Karski laughed and hung up. . . .

Rock Rhodes walked into the lobby of the Forty-Seventh Street Hotel just before nine and three men got up from a divan and came to meet him. Colonel Regan, the boxing commissioner, Will Moger, and a man Rocky figured to be from the D.A.'s office.

Regan said, "Right on time, Rocky. You've put us to a lot of trouble and you better be right about this." He consulted his watch. "Well, let's get upstairs."

Rocky said to the big man in the double-breasted blue suit, "You grab a lot of punks because of that modus operation business, don't you. You tell who did a job by the way it works out?"

Moger said, "Sure, a lot of crooks have one-track minds, Rocky."

They went into Room 340 and it was just under the one Leo Karski occupied. Rocky grinned when he saw the recording machine and the wire that had been strung there. Upstairs Leo would set the works going any second now.

"Yeah, Moger," Rocky said. "Conti wanted to bet me a grand Sid would beat Leo Karski."

Regan snapped, "Quiet!" A small whirring sound reached Rocky's ears and he grinned up at the ceiling.

They waited for a good ten minutes and then heard something fall heavily to the floor up there.

"The signal," Regan said. "Let's go up. Stay here with the recording, McGowan."

The three men walked up to the next floor and moved toward the door marked 441, and they heard a compote of voices, and Karski's nice laugh. They waited a few more minutes and then the door opened and two well-groomed characters stepped out.

The one in the camel's hair coat fell back on his heels and nearly swallowed the stub of a cigar.

Rocky said, "Well, if it isn't Sammy Bova, an' sellin' insurance again. Was it Kauf's Title Guaranty Company? How was the fix, Sammy?"

"Look, Rocky, I—" Bova stared at Regan and his dark skin became a milky hue. The meat on it sagged from its bones. "Fix?" he choked out. "Hah, that's a laugh!"

**L**EO KARSKI stepped out and handed Regan a handful of crisp new bills.

"All G notes, Commissioner. A dozen of them."

Bova spun half around and gaped at Karski.

"Yeah, you punk," the fighter said. "A trap."

The big man with Bova made a foolish move and Rocky hit him. It was a clean kayo.

Bova yelled dryly, "You can't prove I give it to this meatball, Commissioner!"

Regan grinned. "No? We've got a disc that has everything you said to Karski on it, Sammy. Every word spoken in this room the last fifteen minutes. You were wired for sound, Sammy. Conti wanted to be sure, didn't he? And it was Harry Kauf's money. Am I right or wrong?"

"You tell Sammy, Rocky," said Karski with a smile.

Sammy Bova turned his fear-stricken eyes toward Rocky. His miserable brain seemed to be groping for something. Rocky laughed at him and then turned toward Regan.

"Yeah, Commissioner, I took a dive. I went into the tank for Leo Karski in the gym! What is the rule about that?"

Sammy gasped, "You—then that punch was—"

"It kayoed Ray Conti," Rocky said. "It puts Karski in with Valo!"

Will Moger started laughing. He flung an arm around Rocky Rhodes and drew him heavily against him. He kept on laughing.

"Rocky, they'll love you for this. Didn't I tell you, Colonel, he got a bum rap that time? Kauf will have to tell you he did. All along I was right about this boy!"

**T**HE man from the D.A.'s office came up and he was carrying the recording machine.

"Jackpot, huh, Commissioner?" he asked.

Regan said, "Have Conti and LaVerne picked up, McGowan. And Harry Kauf. We've located the cancer in the boxing business of this city."

"You can't call Conti a gambler," Rocky said. "Nobody gambles when they play sure things. Ray got afraid of Karski after the Polack here put me on my pants and I knew he'd—"

"Okay, Rocky," Regan said. "Save it for the D.A." He held out his hand to the fighter. "Kid, I always felt you were framed but there was no proof. I had a job to do."

"Forget it," Rocky said.

McGowan took Sammy Bova and his crony away. Will Moger said, "Valo will have to have a lot of time to get ready, Rocky. It looks like the next fight in the Garden will be you and Leo. It can't miss. Maybe they'll even want it in a ball park because there's a million or so people who will want to welcome you back."

Regan nodded.

"And you can write your own ticket, Rocky."

"Okay, and it will be one to Los Angeles after I've seen them throw the book at certain characters," Rocky said. "I like my face such at it is and so does a certain redhead. When I take the train, I won't ever be coming back. Write that, Moger!"

"Sure, Rocky," the boxing writer said and shook his head sadly. "Then I'll get myself very drunk. A dive in the gym—now I've seen every angle. I should quit, too."

"If you're ever in California," Rocky said to Regan, "give me a ring." And he laughed as he walked down the stairs.



# THRILLS IN SPORTS

By JACK KOFOED

FAMOUS SPORTS COMMENTATOR

## YOU NEVER CAN TELL HOW A PRIZE-FIGHT WILL END

**T**HE two greatest finishes in the prize-ring were between a pair of flyweights in one ring and a pair of middle-weights in another. Let's look at the latter scrap first.

When Stanley Ketchel, "the Michigan Assassin" came East, he was heralded as the most deadly hitting, dynamic fighter of his day. A smashing hitter with either hand, "Steve" had flattened practically every opponent he had faced.

They matched him with "Philadelphia Jack" O'Brien, the cleverest boxer in any division. O'Brien was no slugger, but he handled sluggers as though they were children. That was his dish. The fight club where Ketchel and O'Brien fought was a horse auction during the day, and its odor was reminiscent of daylight business.

Jack had no fear of the "Assassin." From the opening bell, he stepped on the gas; jabbed, feinted, countered. He stepped around with the speed of a schoolboy. Ketchel was fast, too, but he had never encountered anything like the skill of the veteran Philadelphian. The harder Steve tried, the more he missed.

It was disconcerting, frustrating. Rounds slipped by, one after the other. In those days no decisions were rendered, but there could be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Philadelphian had won a decisive victory.

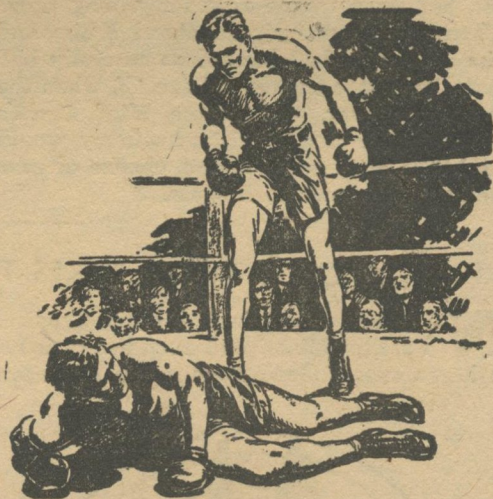
The tenth and final round came at last. It was Ketchel's last chance, and it did not seem to be much of a chance. He was young and strong and unwearied, but those assets didn't seem to count much at the moment. He kept trying and missing, just as he had for the nine rounds already gone by.

One minute . . . two minutes . . . one . . . then only seconds were left. In a last fury of effort, Ketchel crowded the master against the ropes. He let the right go, as he had a thousand times before . . . but this thousand and first, the last desperate shot in the locker, landed flush on Jack's chin. It

straightened him, and hurled him backward. He lay flat on his back, eyes closed, only the faintest twitch of muscle any indication he was even alive.

The referee began his count . . . one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . Panting a little, grinning with delight, Ketchel stood looking down at the man who had made him look like an inept child. His punch had triumphed.

At the count of six the bell shrilled the end of the fight. The Assassin's grin faded.



Four seconds more would have given him a K.O. over the cleverest man in the ring, and now he was robbed of that honor.

If you had been the referee, what decision would you have given? O'Brien had won every moment of the fight except the last one. Yet, at the finish, "Philadelphia Jack" was unconscious on the floor, and Stanley Ketchel was on his feet.

Then, there was the battle between little men, Jimmy Barry and Walter Croot, the English champion, in London. Barry had never been whipped. He was the most confident man in the world. Croot's reputation

was brilliant, but that didn't mean a thing to Barry.

When he arrived in England, Jimmy found the natives were almost unanimous in believing their champion would win, and had established him a betting favorite. That suited Barry right down to the ground. He had every dollar of his life's savings transferred to England, and bet the entire amount on himself. If he won, he would be set for the rest of his days.

Once in the ring, though, the completely unexpected happened. Croot turned out to be the fastest, cleverest man Barry had ever faced. He completely dazzled the American, ripping with an assortment of blows the like of which Jimmy had never seen in all his long career.

The fight was scheduled for twenty rounds. At the half way mark Croot had piled up an overwhelming lead. At the end of fifteen, one eye was closed, Jim's face was bloody; his body banded with crimson, where Walter's lashing blows had landed.

Barry began to experience a feeling of desperation. It was not just that he was facing the first defeat of his sensational career. He had been in the ring for a long time. There weren't many years ahead of him, and the money he had banked so carefully had been insurance against old age. If, when the fight was over, the referee lifted Croot's glove in the sign of victory, Jimmy would be broke, with not a remote chance of ever getting that much cash again.

He had never been a gambler on a big scale. He had risked everything this time, because he had felt certain of winning. There had not seemed to be any risk. Now, battered and sore, Jimmy began to understand what a high price he would have to pay for not beating the spunky little Englishman.

Try as he might, he could not make up lost ground. It was too far along to win a decision. If he won at all, it must be by a knockout. But, when nineteen rounds had been written into the records, not a soul in the huge crowd visualized anything but an overwhelming Croot victory.

The last round came up. It started just as the others had, with Walter jabbing and feinting and hitting. There were only forty seconds left when the little American, with all the desperation of his life behind the blow, let go a buzzing right. For the first time in fifty-nine minutes and twenty seconds of fighting.

Croot was caught off guard. He couldn't get his glove up in time, and Barry's fist thudded against his jaw. Down he went.

Barry knew what was back of that punch. He knew his face would not rise to continue the battle. He knew the money he had saved so carefully for the years was safe.

What he didn't know was that Walter Croot, lying sprawled on the soggy canvas, would never fight again. The little Englishman was dead!

## "GOOD TURN" TAKES THE LONG WAY TO FAME!

**N**OT many horsemen around Tropical Park in Miami had ever heard about a horse named Good Turn, when he began

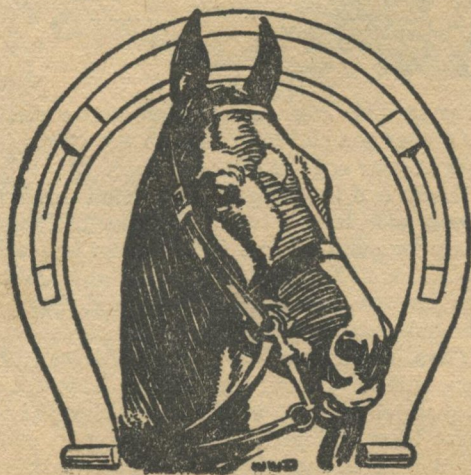
winning races. The reason why makes a good story.

Seven years before, a cowboy named Q. H. Marshall went to Florida to buy horses for his dad, who had a ranch near Lubbock, Tex., and Q. H. liked Florida so much he never went back to the Lone Star state.

He began racing quarter horses. They are speedy animals who can beat most famous thoroughbreds at a quarter mile. Marshall owned a little mare named Westy Barb, who showed her heels to everything in the Tampa area.

Then, a Mrs. Burns from Jacksonville came along with an animal she called Wimpy. Marshall bet \$500 that Westy Barb could beat Wimpy, and lost. Then he risked another \$500 on a "daylight handicap," meaning Wimpy had to win by open daylight. He lost again.

Marshall bought the horse for \$1000, and pretty soon realized he had something more



than a quarter horse. He shipped the animal to Tropical Park, and it was not until he read Guy Butler's column in the Miami Daily News that he realized what he had.

Wimpy's real name was Good Turn. He had won the Sanford Stakes at Saratoga in 1940 and the San Vincente Stakes at Santa Anita the following year. Then Vanderbilt, his owner, discovered Good Turn's legs were bad, and he retired him. Later, he gave the animal to a friend as a riding horse with

the stipulation that he was never to be raced again. Changing hands several times, this agreement was forgotten. When Q. H. Marshall bought the horse named Wimpy, he had no idea he'd purchased a fine thoroughbred who had been retired for half a dozen years.

Apparently the rest had done him a lot of good. His legs were all right, and he showed a fine turn of speed to win other events at Tropical Park. It was probably the longest way to fame any horse has ever taken.

## JOHN MCGRAW GIVES JACK SCOTT HIS COMEBACK CHANCE

**A**LL the world loves a lover. That cannot be denied, but every sports fan loves a comeback. There's a thrill in seeing a man, who has been considered washed up, prove there is some of the old dash and thrill left in him.

I was covering baseball back in the early 20s. A rawboned right hand pitcher named Jack Scott, from the backwoods of North Carolina, was a pretty good moundsman in the National League. No Christy Mathewson or Grover Alexander, but a capable, hard working guy.

Scott's arm began to wear out, and he went back to his little farm to make a living for his wife and kids. Baseball salaries were not large in those days, and what Scott had been able to save, he invested in his land and buildings. Good tobacco brings good prices, and Jack expected to do all right.

Fate has quaint ways of dealing with us mortals. He harvested and stored his crop, and was waiting for the auctions when his barn caught fire. It was a windy night, and the flames destroyed everything he had.

There wasn't a chance to get enough credit from the banks to rebuild. He was sunk, hopelessly stymied. Then, Jack had an idea. John McGraw, the peppery fighting manager of the New York Giants, was a gambler at heart. He not only gambled with money, but with men. He might give Scott a chance to prove there was something left in that leathery right arm of his.

So, Jack brought his family to New York, parked them in a dusty little rooming house, and travelled to the Polo Grounds. He was shabby and seedy, and sick at heart. McGraw knew him, of course. McGraw knew everyone who had ever played in the league.

Maybe he didn't really believe Scott would amount to anything. So what? He gave him enough money to take care of the family for a few weeks, and a locker in the dressing-room. Jack could work out with the team.

If he didn't show anything what was lost but a few hundred dollars?

Scott began to work the kinks out of his arm. Maybe a sense of desperation helped. He knew he couldn't last long under the big top even if he made good . . . only a season



or two. But, a season or two would provide enough money to rebuild his ruined home and barn, and buy the tools he needed.

McGraw gave him a chance to finish up several hopelessly lost games. The North Carolinian looked so good that the Little Napoleon started him. Again Jack clicked.

That October McGraw sent Scott into the third game of the World Series to face the Yankees. The man who only a few months before was not only washed up as a pitcher, but as a penniless tobacco farmer as well was getting the biggest chance in baseball.

I'm afraid that nine times out of ten there would be a sad ending to a story like this. The comeback often goes just so far, and then peters out. But, Jack Scott didn't. For eight innings he held the slugging Yankees in the palm of his hand. He led 3-0 . . . but in the last inning he would have to face the weight of the Yankee batting order.

Wally Pipp, Babe Ruth and Bob Muesel; guys who could ram any kind of a pitch out

of the ball park. The leathery faced North Carolina tobacco farmer must have had a lot on his mind in those minutes. It wasn't just the question of winning a ball game . . . even a world series ball game. The difference between winners' money and losers' money was a small fortune to Scott, who had lost everything.

That's where stamina counts. Jack put everything into the right arm baseball experts said was dead. Pipp hit a towering fly to center field. Ruth topped one of his mighty swings, and dribbled a grounder to the infield. Muesel did the same. The game was won, and the Giants were well on the way

to a World Series championship.

Yes, sports fans all love a comeback . . . but there is one angle the fan usually overlooks when he sees such a story enacted before his eyes. All honor to the comeback. He deserves it.

But, don't overlook the fellow who gives him his chance.

John McGraw might have given Jack Scott a fifty dollar bill, and told him there was no room on the Giants. That would have solved no problems for the North Carolinian. But, John had the seeing eye . . . and it was working in the case of the pitcher everybody else said was through.

## THE WORST BLOWUP IN GOLF HISTORY

**I**T IS always a pleasure for a mediocre golfer to read about one of the great stars having a horrible time on any given hole. I remember "Wild Bill" Mehlhorn taking a 10 in an Open championship at Winged Foot . . . George Duncan and Ben Hogan whopping up 12s on par three holes . . . and Sam Byrd's horrific 10 in the Masters'.

Though he failed to reach double figures, Sam Snead's eight on the final hole of the National Open at the Philadelphia Country Club was probably the worst blowup in history. The long hitting hillbilly had that championship in his pocket. There was no

have worried even, then. All he had to do was pitch into the fairway, and then knock one up on the green. It was as simple as that.

But, Sam decided to make a sensational finish. He took a wooden club, and with trees to his left and a bad lie and everything, tried to reach the green. He came up with a bad shot. His ball slithered off into a trap across the fairway, and lodged against the face.

Snead's nerves were beginning to jump. The situation was not desperate yet. If he could flog one onto the green and get his six, the title and money would be his. But, he hurried his backswing and lunged, and didn't even get out of the bunker.

Now there was coming up one of the most inglorious finishes in the history of golf. Snead had been hot as a flame through most of the previous seventy-one holes. Now he chilled like an icebox pudding.

His next shot took him out of the trap, but still left his ball short of the green. His hopes of winning were gone now. He had played five strokes, and had to hole out the chip in order to salvage the crown he had been ready to place on his head. But, by chipping close enough for a single putt he

*(Continued on page 109)*



pressure, because he could take a bogey, and still win; a seven and get no worse than a tie.

The hole is a reasonably easy par five, and an average birdie for a slammer like Snead. He hooked a smashing drive into a bad spot in the rough. That was a bit on the sad side, but the potential champion shouldn't

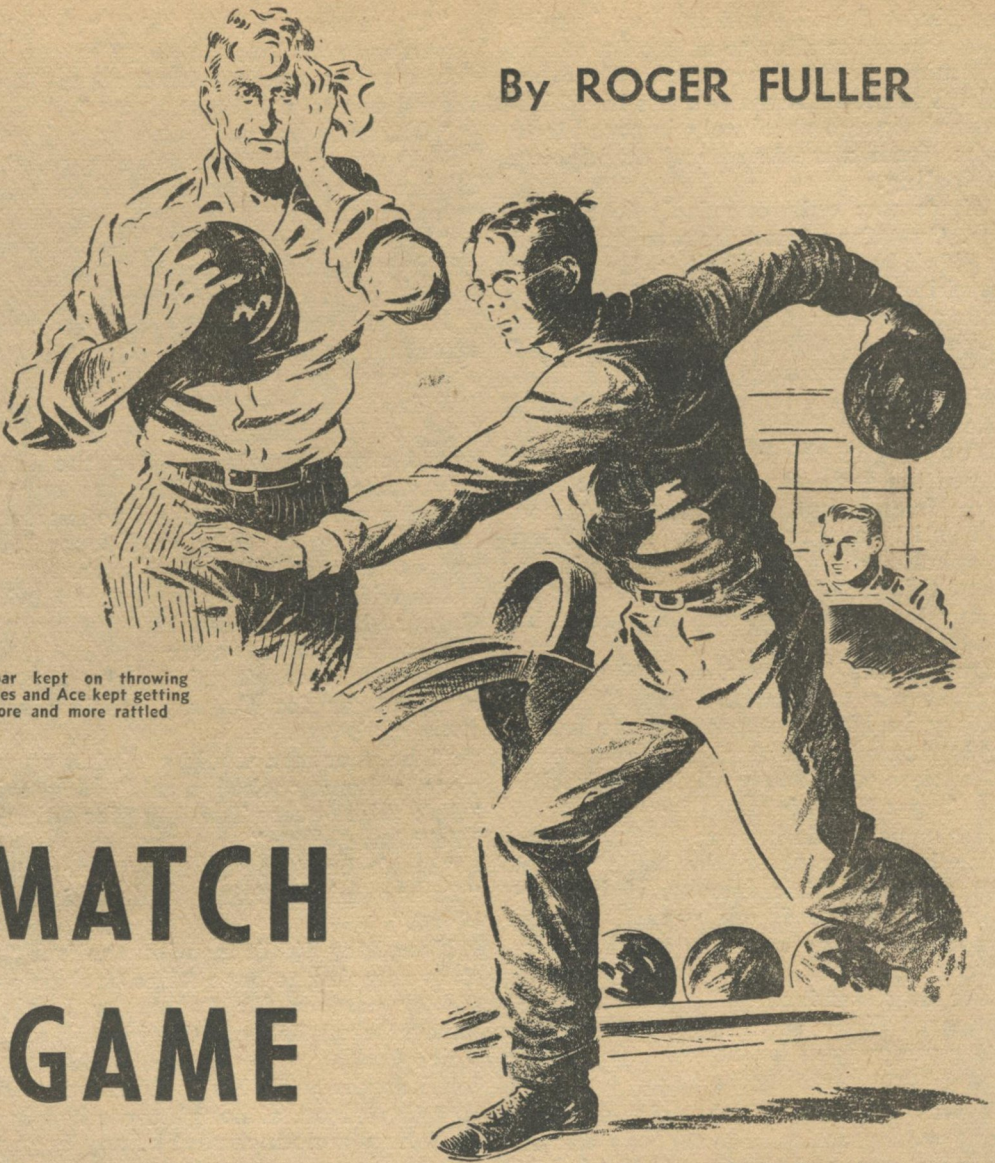
**POWER OF WEST POINT, a Grid Novelet by HERBERT L. McNARY—  
OFF MY CHEST, by RAY BARBUTI, famous football official—and many  
other football stories and features in the gala Fall issue of—**

# EXCITING FOOTBALL



On Sale Everywhere—A Big Quarter's Worth!

By ROGER FULLER



Caspar kept on throwing strikes and Ace kept getting more and more rattled

# MATCH GAME

**S**OME towns have a basketball team they're proud of. Other places favor golf or tennis or football. But in our town we like bowling in a big way.

Nobody knows exactly how Hoopertown got to be such a red-hot kegling center but as long as anybody can remember, Hoopertown bowlers have been rolling them down the alleys in sizzling competition that has developed some ace maple knockers. There hasn't been a National Bowling Congress in

decades that didn't have some Hoopertown bowlers entered, and plenty of times our boys and girls have walked off with individual and team titles that rank with, say, the National Open title in golf, in the minds of the bowling gentry.

Our top bowling man, for years, was Ace Gustafson, a big Swede with a wide pair of shoulders and a hook shot that seemed to put eyes on the ball, at times. It was almost uncanny, the way Ace could manipulate those maples, cutting

*Little Caspar's a shark with a bowling ball but he loses his bite when "Ace" Gustafson's around!*

one pin at the side and sending it spinning across the alley to snip off a couple that might be standing over on the other side. I've seen him make shots in exhibitions that were absolutely impossible to make, from a mathematical standpoint, no fooling.

There was only one fault to find in Ace. Gustafson knew he was good and he didn't hesitate to admit it. He was no shrinking violet. When his opponent made a bum shot, Gustafson's loud horse laugh echoed through the alleys. And when he had a stroke of bad luck himself, you could hear him moan a half a mile away.

You might think that a man who played the game that way wouldn't have many friends but, since Ace Gustafson was still a pretty ten pin roller, Hooperstown was ready to forgive him a lot of things. We all pointed with pride at our local boy who beat the best the country had to offer.

During the late war, one of the big aircraft plants located a branch parts factory in Hooperstown and we had a big business boom. And among the out-of-towners who swarmed into our city was Caspar Hendricks.

His name would have to be Caspar because he was cast in the same mould that produced that famous, if ineffectual gent in the funny papers. Caspar was small and he was thin and his chin never could have been called jutting under any standards. He was a mild-mannered little guy, as friendly as a setter puppy, and he was forever apologizing for something he didn't do.

I was working at the plane plant, along with practically everybody else in Hooperstown, and Caspar got put in my department, which was drafting. He was a good draftsman and a conscientious worker. I found out later that he had been turned down by every branch of the armed forces. Unable to wear a uniform, Caspar regarded his plane factory job as the next best thing he could contribute to the war effort.

**I** CONSIDERED him the best man I had in my department and one day when I told him as much, I'll never forget how he blushed.

"It's very kind of you," Caspar told me, "but there must be half a dozen fellows in the department who are better draftsmen than I am."

"There may be," I said, "but they haven't proved it to me, yet. I've got you down as department head when I get moved out to the West Coast."

"Oh, heavens, no!" Caspar objected. "I—I'm not the executive type, Mr. Blaine. I couldn't possibly give orders to other people."

"Look, Caspar," I said. "Stop belittling yourself. Modesty is all very well, but it can be carried too far."

He blushed again and murmured something about his realizing his own shortcomings.

I don't know why I took a liking to Caspar Hendricks, but, somehow, I found myself looking after the little guy more and more. He was such a friendly cuss and he seemed so lonesome not knowing anybody in Hooperstown except the men he worked with.

My wife, Meg, suggested that I bring Caspar home to dinner, during the Christmas season, after I'd remarked about how it wasn't going to be much of a Christmas for Caspar, in his dismal rooming house.

"The poor man would probably appreciate a home-cooked meal," Meg said. "Ask him over Tuesday for dinner. We'll have steak."

"Don't broil it too rare," I cracked. "Caspar might faint at the sight of blood."

Now, Meg didn't mention the fact that she was going to have Alice Graham as a dinner partner for Caspar or I might have steered her off the idea. Because Alice Graham was regarded in Hooperstown as the probable bride-to-be of big Ace Gustafson, although there had been no formal announcement of any engagement.

She was a pretty girl, tall and with a fine straight back and long, slender legs. Everybody agreed that she would make the ideal wife for Ace, if they ever got around to being married, both of them being fair-haired and with Scandinavian coloring. She was quite a bowler, too, and she and Ace usually cleaned up the mixed doubles matches they entered. Yet Ace never hesitated to bowl her out whenever she rolled a bad one.

"My gosh!" he would holler. "Is that the way I taught you to throw ten pins? My grandmother could throw a better ball than that!"

Alice was at the house when Caspar and I arrived for that steak dinner. Cas-

par had insisted that we stop off at a florist's place on the way home and pick up about a bushel of roses for Meg, plus a box of candy and a couple of bottles of wine.

After Caspar had handed over his gifts to Meg and murmured something about her being awfully kind, Alice came out into the hall from the kitchen where she'd been helping my wife. I happened to be looking at Caspar when he first laid eyes on Alice and his eyes lit up and for the first time since I'd met him he forgot to stutter or stammer or even blush when he shook hands. He kept his eyes fixed on her. It was easy to see he thought she was the most beautiful thing he'd every seen.

The dinner was quite a success. In Alice Graham's presence, Caspar unfolded like a rose under a June sun. Before we were past the onion soup he had developed into an interesting conversationalist.

Also I'd been plenty wrong about him fainting at the sight of rare steak. For a little guy, he certainly did pack away his share of meat and that, of course, made him tops with Meg, the wife.

We were in the living room, after dinner, when the subject of bowling came up.

"Do you bowl, Mr. Hendricks?" Meg asked. He waved a deprecatory hand.

"I've done a little," he said. "I'm not very good at it. You bowl, Miss Graham?"

"She's one of the best women bowlers in these parts," I put in. "Alice and Ace Gustafson make quite a team. You know Ace, don't you, Caspar?"

"I—er—have met him," Caspar said. "I—uh—dropped in at the Phoenix Alleys downtown one night, and Mr. Gustafson was there doing some bowling."

"I tell you what," I suggested. "Suppose we go down to the alleys and roll a couple games."

Everybody was agreeable, so we went to the Phoenix, dropping by Alice's place to get her shoes and then stopping off at Caspar's rooming house so he could get his shoes, which was a surprise to me, him owning a pair. The alleys weren't too crowded and we didn't have to wait long before they squawked our name over the loudspeaker and we started off. I looked around for Ace but he wasn't there.

**W**E PAIRED up, Meg and I against Alice and Caspar, which was even, I thought. Meg was an average 90 bowler and I figured Caspar in about the same class, while Alice and I both averaged about 120. That might be a high average in a lot of places but not in Hooperstown, where we take our ten pins seriously.

Meg rolled first and took an eight. Alice spared and I had to be satisfied with a nine which would have been a spare if my second ball hadn't missed the three-pin clean. Then Caspar Hendricks got up on the line. He'd taken off his coat and he looked skinnier than usual in his shirt sleeves. Then he took his three steps, and sent the ball down.

It was a skidding twister that started down the right gutter and then cut across the alley, pointing into the spot between the head pin and number two. It was a strike from the moment it started to cut in and when that ball hit, there were pins crashing all over the place.

"Very lucky," Caspar murmured, apologetically. "I probably couldn't do that again in a hundred years."

He did it again in the third frame, and again in the sixth, and once more in the ninth. And when he wasn't scoring strikes, he was rolling spares. At the end of the game he had so many marks that it looked as though some kid had been using a heavy hand with the crayon, just scribbling for his own amusement. His final score was a neat 197 and that's really rolling in any league.

"I thought," I said, after he made his last pin, "you told us you weren't very good at bowling, Caspar. What were you doing, laying back for a bet?"

His face got red and shook his head. "Oh, no!" he said. "I wouldn't do anything like that! It's been some time since I bowled last and I'm a little rusty."

"Rusty, huh!" I said. "Why, you can outroll ninety-nine out of a hundred men here in Hooperstown right now."

At this moment, there was a commotion at the entrance to the alleys and Ace Gustafson barged in. It didn't take long to discover he'd been bowling in Masonville, a few miles away, where he'd won all his matches.

"It's getting so there's no fun to bowling around here any more," he bellowed. "I can't keep my game up to par unless

I get some real opposition."

He spotted Alice, then, and headed in our direction, a confident grin on his broad face. When he got up to her, he put an arm around her shoulders.

"Doing a little bowling?" he asked Meg. "Y'know, I was watching you the other night, Meg, and that husband of yours has been teaching you all wrong."

Meg bit her lip before she said: "I certainly had a bowling lesson tonight. Mr. Hendricks showed all of us how a game should be rolled."

Ace looked contemptuously down at Caspar. His smile had the suggestion of a smirk as he looked at little Caspar's skinny frame.

"So?" he asked, "and what did Muscles here roll? A classy seventy-five, maybe?"

"A hundred and ninety-seven, Ace," Alice said, quietly, "and he hasn't been bowling for some time."

Ace's eyes went a bit wide at mention of the score. Then he gave a brief laugh and slammed his big paw down on Caspar's shoulder.

"That's a fair score for a little man, Hendricks," he said. "How about rolling me a game? I'll give you a point a frame, if it would make things more interesting to you."

Caspar started getting tongue-tied again. "I—I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to give you much of a game, Mr. Gustafson," he stammered. "I was lucky in that last game. Er—perhaps you'd better choose another opponent."

"Shucks!" Ace laughed. "What're you afraid of?"

"Go ahead," Meg said, suddenly. "Show Ace that he's not the high roller in town."

She said it with a smile but I knew she was hoping with all her heart that Caspar could beat Ace at his own game. You could tell that Caspar was very reluctant to bowl against Ace but, after all, Hendricks was never one to say no to a lady. He shrugged and moved back into the alley.

"You roll first, Mr. Gustafson," he murmured.

Ace rolled and it was a savage strike that spilled the maples all over the alley, making the pin boys duck. Ace was a power bowler and when he really put on the pressure, the pins sounded as though they were being shattered to little pieces.

CASPAR murmured something about it being a beautiful shot, and rolled his first ball. It was a trickler that wobbled down the alley and finally managed to clip two pins off the right side. Ace Gustafson gave his haw-haw at that.

"Have you folks been kidding me?" demanded, in his loud voice. "Nobody ever rolled one ninety-seven with shots like that."

Caspar bit his lip while Meg glared at the big Swede and Alice turned away, displaying mixed emotions. I knew that Alice had been favorably impressed by Caspar's sad-eyed adoration.

Caspar's second ball wasn't much better than his first. He wound up with a six for the frame.

Contempt was written all over Ace's face when he rolled his next box. He missed a strike by one pin and clipped that off with a sizzling hook to give himself a spare, with 20 for his first frame. Caspar, looking as though all this was entirely new to him, managed to knock down another six.

"Heck," Ace growled, "I thought I was going to get some competition, Hendricks."

"I—er—told you that first game was lucky," Caspar said. "Do you want Mr. Blaine to finish out the game for me?"

"Nothing doing," Ace said, grimly. "You asked for it, and you're going to get it, my friend."

He got it, all right. Ace seemed spurred to new excellence by the terrible showing Caspar was making. He threw several strikes and spares while Hendricks fumbled around with sixes and sevens and an occasional four or five. It was a slaughter that was pitiful to watch. I felt sorry for the little guy, even though I could have given him a boot in the pants for curling up to Ace Gustafson that way. I decided he just didn't have any backbone. While he was among friends, he had bowled a darned good game. Now that he had Ace Gustafson riding him, he fizzled out completely.

I forget the score of that game, but it was pretty lopsided, as you can imagine. Caspar's pink face was a study in embarrassed misery as Ace Gustafson made the alleys echo with his roaring comments on little fellows trying to play with real men. It got so bad, finally, that even Alice spoke up.

"Quit it, Ace," she said, in a low voice,



"You've won your game. Why not let it go at that? Why rub it in?"

Ace squinted at Alice and his grin took on an ugly curve.

"Since when," he asked, "have you been sticking up for my opponents? Seems to me you were mighty anxious to have this guy beat me. And how come you had a date with Muscles, here, huh?"

She met his eyes steadily as she said: "Yes, Ace. A date with Mr. Hendricks. Any objections?"

Gustafson's broad face got red and he transferred his glare to Caspar. Hendricks looked like he wanted to sink through the hardwood floor.

"Listen, Muscles," Ace growled. "Maybe you're new to this town, but Miss Graham and I have been going together for a long time."

Caspar started to stutter as Meg took Alice by the arm and led her over to the soft drink bar, away from the curious glances being directed at us from other parts of the alleys.

"I—I didn't know," Caspar muttered. "You see, I was a dinner guest at Mr. Blaine's home."

His voice petered out. Ace looked at me, scowling.

"And just what are you trying to do, Blaine?" he demanded. "Trying to bust up things between Alice and me?"

His arrogant voice, the way he had of speaking your name as though you were a hunk of dirt, got under my skin. Usually I'm an even-tempered sort of a guy.

"Look, Ace," I said. "You're not engaged to Alice. Until you are she can accept invitations from other men."

"You know, don't you," Gustafson said, with that sneer, "that I could have you thrown off the five-man team"—he snapped his fingers—"just like that? You get stiff with me and maybe that's what I'll do."

Now, I was proud of being a member of Hooperstown's five-man team. I'd worked hard to get up there and it had been worth all the effort it cost. In our town, belonging to the five-man squad really meant something.

Ace was right when he said he could have me thrown off the squad. He ran the whole shebang and what he said went. If he fired me, it wouldn't be the first time he'd canned somebody off the team because of personalities.

I KNEW all this. I liked being on the team and I wanted to stay on the team, but a guy has his pride, too.

"You know what you can do with my place on the five-man squad," I told Ace Gustafson. "I won't stay on a club team that's headed by you."

Caspar Hendricks was bleating around behind me.

"Oh, dear, no!" he said. "Don't do anything like that, Mr. Blaine. Please, Mr. Blaine!"

"You," I told him, "keep out of this. Ace, you'd better get yourself another man. I'm through."

And with that, I turned on my heel and walked away from the big Swede, toward the place where Meg and Alice were waiting. Caspar Hendricks trotted along beside me, still bemoaning my action.

"Let's go," I told Meg. "These alleys are too crowded."

"I heard you," Meg told me, "and I think it was swell, Grant. I've been waiting for years for you to blow up and tell that big boor off."

"Sure," I said, bitterly. "Now Ace Gustafson will see to it that I don't get a chance to bowl in any other league."

We got in the car and started home. Alice Graham didn't say anything on the trip, although Caspar Hendricks kept up his chatter about how sorry he was that he'd made Mr. Gustafson mad, caused trouble all around. I held my tongue, even though I was tempted to tell him to shut up. Being friendly to a little lonesome guy is all very well, but I was wondering whether it was worth losing my place on the five-man team. I was beginning to think it wasn't. No more trips, with all the fun that went with them. It was going to be mighty dull, I thought, without those weekly sessions at the alleys.

We dropped Alice off first. She went through the motions of thanking us for a delightful evening.

"If you want me to," she said, at the end, "I'll talk to Ace. Maybe I can persuade him to—"

"Never mind," I said. "What's done's done. It was my own temper that got me into the mess, anyway."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "It was Ace's big mouth, as usual." She looked at Caspar. "Maybe you'll take me bowling again, Mr. Hendricks, and teach me how to do that split shot you

did so well tonight."

When Caspar found his voice, he started babbling about what a pleasure it would be to go bowling with Alice, anywhere, anytime. He was still stunned, I think, when he shook hands with her and watched her go up the steps of her house.

"A wonderful girl," he breathed, as we drove away.

Now, don't ask me how a girl like Alice Graham, pretty, intelligent, competent, self-assured, could fall in love with a mouse like Caspar Hendricks. I gave up trying to dope out why women fall in love some time back when Meg admitted that she didn't find me exactly loathsome, in fact. But that's what happened. Alice fell for Caspar and she made a complete job of it, too.

Maybe it was because she had had so much of Ace Gustafson that it was a welcome relief to go out with a man who didn't spend most of his time bragging about how good he was. Maybe it was the mother instinct. Maybe she got tired of Ace embarrassing her at the bowling alleys, in front of everybody.

But for a man like Ace, with his super-go, to be given the mitten in favor of a skinny half-pint like Caspar was a blow to Ace's vanity that rocked him to his heels. I got the word from here and there that Gustafson refused to believe at first but, after he'd phoned Alice and called on her and coaxed and threatened and pleaded with her to let him come back, all to no avail, he was a changed man. He still hollered and bragged around the alleys, he still pitched a good game of ten pins, but there was something about his laugh, his swagger, that seemed to carry a false note.

As for Caspar, he was in seventh heaven, of course. I could see the change in him at the office. Having a girl like Alice Graham in love with him had given him a new confidence and now, instead of creeping to his drafting board with shy little ducks of his head to the other men in the department, he walked in with his puny chest stuck out and his chin in the air and he had a real "hello" for everybody he met. He began acquiring some gumption in his makeup, mild at first. Soon his apologies for himself got fewer and farther between and there came the day when he actually went to bat with another draftsman about some disagreement and came out on top.

**B**UT I wasn't doing much bowling in those days. In the first place, it wasn't much fun going to the regular alleys and getting pick-up matches while the team, the bunch I'd always bowled with, were having their regular matches down the line. There were other alleys in town, but I didn't know many fellows there and it wasn't the same.

I guess maybe I put too much importance on the whole thing. Meg said I did. A man my age ought to be able to take something like that in his stride and go out and find another bunch to bowl with, but, as I've said, making Ace's team had been one of the most important things that had ever happened to me and I couldn't shrug it off.

I was mooning around the office one evening, wondering what movie Meg and I could see that night, when Caspar Hendricks came up to my desk.

"Alice and I, would like to take Mrs. Blaine and you bowling tonight, if you're not busy."

I had half a mind to refuse, at first, but finally I said okay. I was hungry for the feel of a bowling pin ball in my hand and I knew Meg had missed our weekly bowling sessions.

"We'll pick you up around eight," Caspar said. "I managed to talk the priority board into giving me the okay for a car."

I wondered at that. Caspar deserved a car as much as any civilian, his work being what it was and him doing a lot of traveling, but I never thought I'd see the day when he'd face that tough board and argue them into giving him the precious priority. That just went to show how he'd changed.

The alleys were pretty crowded when we arrived. Ace and his bunch were down at the far end, using the boards that were always reserved for the Hooperstown team, and they didn't spot us for some time after we reached the place. It was after Caspar made four straight strikes and the gallery began to congregate around our slot that Ace found out we were there.

"If it isn't Muscles," we heard him boom. "He's the guy that can roll a good ball every time, until he comes up against me. Then—phooey—right down the gutter."

I saw Caspar's face go red and some of the assurance in that new set to his shoulders seemed to evaporate.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Cas," Alice Graham said, quickly, in a low voice. "He'll quiet down if you ignore him."

Caspar rolled a ball and knocked off a natty three pins to put the curse on that string of strikes. I could see that his hands were trembling when he reached for his second ball. Ace Gustafson's haw-haw sounded through the alleys.

"He gets buck fever if I only talk to him," Ace boomed. "I've sure got the Indian sign of Muscles."

Caspar's second ball went into the gutter. His face was white and strained as he poised himself again. Ace kept up his chatter, for all to hear.

"Right in the same place, Muscles," he bellowed. "Show them that the other ball wasn't a mistake."

And darned if that wasn't where Caspar put it—right down the gutter. The little guy turned back from the foul line, his face all twisted up in a sort of grimace that was half smile, half scowl.

"I—I'm sorry," he faltered. "Alice, really I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, Cas," Alice said, simply. There was something in the tone of her voice that made Meg and me stare. "I'm sorry," she went on, "that you're still afraid of that big baboon and his loud mouth. I thought—I hoped—you'd changed, but I see you haven't."

"I—he unsettled me," Caspar muttered.

"Is he always going to—er—unsettle you? Alice asked, in that calm voice. "Are you going to go to pieces every time you hear him yell?"

"It's the wrong thing to do," Caspar said, desperately. "Any man with the least modicum of bowling etiquette wouldn't do a thing like that."

"Etiquette!" Alice burst out. "All your life, I guess, you've abided by the rules of etiquette. You've never learned that there are people in this world, situations, that can't be handled by being polite."

She waved a hand.

"Oh, I know," she said, "that this is just a game, but it's more than that, too. I suggested that we come down here tonight because I knew Ace would be here, I knew he'd yell at you. I wanted to see how you'd react—whether you'd let him rattle you to pieces or whether you'd fight back. You see, Cas, it was dreadfully important that I find out—

before it was too late."

"B-but what do you mean me to do?" Caspar asked. "Certainly you don't want me to walk down there and p-punch him!"

HE gave him a look that must have made Caspar Hendricks' soul curl at the edges.

"No," she said. "No, I certainly didn't want that. But I thought that somehow—some way—you could show him—oh, never mind!"

And so saying, Alice Graham suddenly and amazingly buried her face in her hands and turned and walked out of there. Fast.

Meg went after her, leaving Caspar and me on the alley we'd been using. The people who'd congregated while Caspar was making his four-strike run, began drifting away, buzzing among themselves. I didn't know exactly what to say, or do. Doggone it, I told myself, every time I come bowling with this guy I wind up in a situation.

"Do you want to finish out the string?" I mumbled. "Or have you had enough?"

"I—I—" Caspar said.

"Don't take her too seriously," I managed. "Women get dizzy ideas sometimes. Nobody expects you to tangle with Ace Gustafson, with fists or on the alleys or anywhere else. He's just too big and too good for you, Caspar. Nobody's blaming you."

"Hey, Muscles," Ace roared from the other end. "What happened to your partner? Couldn't she take that snappy three you just rolled? Haw-haw."

Caspar stiffened. The color came back into his white face and his eyes blazed. His hands balled themselves into fists as he looked at me.

"But he's not too good for me, Mr. Blaine," he said, in a low, intense voice. "He might be bigger than I am, and stronger, maybe, but he's not better than I am—not when it comes to bowling."

"He's the best there is in town," I protested. "He'll slaughter you, especially when he starts riding you and you go off your game. Like he said, he's got the Indian sign on you, Caspar."

"Had!" the little man said, firmly. "Alice was right. I'd be no good as a— a husband to Alice if I can't stiffen my backbone enough to take his—er—big mouth and still bowl as well as I

know how. If I fail in that, I might fail in something more important. And I've got to prove it to her. Come on!"

"Wait a minute," I said. "No sense in—"

It was too late. Caspar Hendricks was pushing his way through the crowd, straight for Ace Gustafson. I followed because there wasn't anything else to do. I couldn't let Caspar play this hand alone, without somebody backing him up, no matter how feebly.

The big man saw us coming and arose from the bench where he was sitting. The other members of the team stopped whatever they were doing and watched Hendricks walk up to Ace.

"Mr. Gustafson," Caspar said, in his piping voice, "I take it you think you can beat me at ten pins."

"Any time," Ace roared. "I could probably do it using my left hand."

"And I," Caspar squeaked, "say you can't beat me using both hands and both feet and your big mouth."

Ace's face darkened and he doubled his big hands.

"Why, you wart!" he said, taking a step forward. Caspar didn't back up.

"You probably could thrash me," he admitted, in a calm voice, "seeing that you were built when beef was cheap, but you can't beat me on the alleys. You never could, you know, unless you upset me with your wise cracks."

Ace's eyes narrowed.

"Maybe you'd like to make a little bet," he suggested.

Caspar shrugged.

"If you like," he said, indifferently. "Whatever you propose. I'm going to take a lot more than just money when I win your measure, Mr. Gustafson."

A bet was arranged and one that made me shudder a little. I didn't know how much Caspar had saved out of his earnings but I did know his salary and I knew, too, that he couldn't afford to be throwing away any amount like that. I tried to talk him out of it, but he shook me off.

"And now," he said, when the bet was fixed, "suppose we raise the stakes. Suppose, if I win, you'll agree to apologize to Mr. Blaine here and give him back his position on the five-man team. If I lose—well, I don't want to bandy a certain young lady's name around here, but I agree to bow out of the picture completely if you beat me."

Ace's grin widened.

"That's a bet," he said. "If I can't beat a squirt like you, I'll step aside and let you run the Hooperstown team, Muscles. Let's go."

**I**T WAS a one-game affair, with Ace leading off. He threw a strike. I held my breath as Caspar poised the ball and made his three steps. It was the old skidding hook and when it landed there wasn't a pin left standing. Ace looked at him and then spent some time selecting his next ball, while the pin boy put them up.

Play had stopped on every alley in the place and the crowd was standing on the benches, craning to see what might develop into the biggest match ever held in Hooperstown.

Ace threw his second ball. It landed in the right spot, but there is luck to bowling, too. One pin, hit hard enough to send it scaling ordinarily, obstinately refused to go down. It wobbled, it teetered and then, as the crowd sucked in its breath, it juggled itself upright again.

"Don't make it too easy for me," Caspar said, in a muted voice. "We ought to give the crowd a run for their money."

Ace gave the little guy a black look and then picked off the standing pin for a spare. Caspar seemed almost disinterested as he sent that hook down the alley again. Strike!

"Maybe you're lofting your ball too much," Caspar said, pleasantly. "Maybe you're pressing too hard."

"Don't tell me how to bowl!" Ace roared.

"Just trying to be helpful," Caspar murmured. "You seem to have so much advice for everybody else, I thought it only fair to reciprocate."

"Shut up and bowl," Gustafson yelled. "Your turn, I believe," Caspar said. "You've got a spare, so you'd better make this one good."

Ace stepped up and slammed the ball down the alley. It was too straight, too hard, too far over to the left, too everything else. It rifled through the end pins and took out three of them. Ace grated out a curse and reached for his second ball.

"Watch the gutter," Caspar said, innocently.

It was impossible that Ace Gustafson, the great Ace Gustafson, could send a

ball into the gutter but he almost did. Instead, he clipped the end pin off the right side. A single pin.

"You nearly hit the foul line that time," Caspar said. "I'm afraid in a match like this, I'll have to call things like that."

"If you don't stop talking," Ace said, wildly, "I'll lodge a protest."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Caspar said, politely. "I thought you liked to talk while you bowled. Seems to me I've heard you carry on quite a conversation, at times."

Somebody in the back of the crowd snickered. Ace's habit of keeping his lip flapping all the time his opponents were bowling was too well known for the crowd to let that little sally go unnoticed. Ace crimsoned again.

He marked down a four for his part of the frame, but that four didn't look so hot when Caspar followed it up with his third strike.

"Ever bowl a three hundred?" the little man asked Ace, as he turned back from the line.

"No!" Ace barked.

"I have," Caspar remarked, pleasantly. "Twice. Tonight, I think, will make the third time."

"Mullarky!" Gustafson snarled. He rolled a strike.

"You're catching on," Caspar said, encouragingly. He sent a lazy ball down the alley that, somehow, seemed to *circulate* among the pins until not one was left standing. Ace stared and went back to the chalk cup. Perspiration was beginning to drip down the big man's face and his shirt was sticking to his back, even though the alleys weren't noticeably warm. He rolled and left three pins standing. He missed a spare by one pin and warmed up with a nine. There's nothing wrong with a nine, ordinarily, but in this particular match it looked disastrous.

Caspar threw his seventh strike. He had 150 in five frames, now, while the big Swede had a whole lot less.

"Maybe you do better left-handed," the little man said, smiling. "You mentioned something about using your left hand to beat me."

That's the way it went. Caspar kept throwing strikes and Ace kept getting more and more up in the air. Like most big men who can dish it out, he couldn't take it, especially when the brand of

ribbing that Caspar was feeding him was so subtle, so subdued, that Ace couldn't exactly lay his finger on it.

Gustafson's face kept getting redder and redder and the perspiration kept flowing faster and faster. By now, the crowd was laughing openly at Caspar's remarks and practically jeering at Ace's heavy-handed returns. When Caspar threw his eleventh strike, the bunch broke into a cheer.

**G**USTAFSON turned around, his face twisted, and bared his teeth at the crowd.

"So you all want to see me lose, huh?" he asked. "You all are glad to see this pipsqueak set me down, are you? Well, to the devil with all of you, then! I ain't bowlin' no more for Hooperstown. I gotta chance to move to Masonville and I'm gonna do it. I'll show you what this town will be like without Ace Gustafson bowlin' for it. You won't be able to win a game, without me there, carrying the rest of the bums."

There was a second's silence and then, from somewhere in the crowd, came the unmistakable br-r-r-ack of a Bronx cheer.

"Your roll, Mr. Gustafson," Caspar said, politely, "but I'm afraid you can't possibly overtake me. I've got two-seventy plus, you see, and you've got one-thirty-six. I'm afraid the margin is too wide, even for you."

Ace jerked around and walked to the ball trough. He picked up a ball and threw it, not rolling it, down the alley. The ball hit about halfway down the alley and bounded high, crossing into the next alley. It skidded a moment and then curved toward the pins that had been set up there. It hit exactly right and the ten pins tumbled for a perfect strike.

You should have heard the crowd, then. They roared, they hooted, they cat-called.

"That's the way to do it, Ace!" they yelled. "Nice strike, even if it was in the wrong alley!"

"If you can't beat him on this alley, beat him on the next one, Ace!"

Ace Gustafson didn't wait to hear the rest. He shouldered his way through the crowd and out the door, still in his bowling shoes. When a guy with as much self-esteem as Ace had loses it, it's not a pretty picture. The big loud-mouth

look like a deflated balloon, somehow, as he walked out.

He had been king pin for a long time and now he knew that he never had had any real friends, anybody who would stand behind him when the going got rough. He knew now that all those jeering slurs he'd thrown for all those years hadn't bounced off the man jeered at, that, secretly, all Hooperstown had been waiting for him to have his ears beaten off. And to have a little squirt like Caspar Hendricks do it made the revenge a lot sweeter to everybody who was looking on.

I'd have spent more time feeling sorry for Ace Gustafson if there hadn't been a commotion right about then. It was Alice and she threw herself into the little man's waiting arms.

"I knew you could do it, Cas," she half sobbed. "I knew that if you got enough of a jolt, you'd forget your inferiority complex and beat Ace. And you did."

Caspar beamed up at her, the happiest man in Hooperstown that night.

"You've still got one ball to bowl," I reminded him, after I thought the clinch had gone on long enough. "You might as well run out your string."

"Oh, that," Caspar said. He detached himself from Alice long enough to pick up a ball and negligently toss it down the alley. That was the big ball, the one that counted, the one that would tell the story of whether Caspar was going to roll a perfect game or just a stupendous one.

The ball was a lazy floater. It caught the apex of the triangle, just to one

side and wandered through the pins. Everybody held their breath. One pin looked like it was going to refuse to go down. As Ace's reluctant pin had done earlier, it teetered and tottered, slanted over on its side and straightened.

Then, when I'd about given up hope, it suddenly flopped and rolled in a brief circle.

The crowd went wild. It was the first perfect game ever bowled in Hooperstown, the first any of us had ever seen. They pounced on little Caspar from all directions, pounding his back, yelling in his ear, shouting predictions of what Hooperstown would do to any team Ace Gustafson might get up in Masonville.

He finally tore himself loose from the crowd long enough to make his way back to Alice. When he faced her, he looked like the old Caspar Hendricks, the little man who was always sorry about something he thought he had done.

"Alice," he said, hesitantly, "I've got a confession to make. I told a lie. I told Mr. Gustafson that I'd bowled two perfect games before this. That wasn't true. I only told him that to—er—unsettle him. I'm sorry!"

"Caspar Hendricks," Alice told him, sternly, "I don't ever again want to hear you apologize for anything you've done. Never!"

And, so far as I know, Caspar hasn't. If you want to see a bantam rooster in human form, drop around to our town some day and meet C. Bill Hendricks, captain and high-roller of the Hooperstown Bowling Club, champs of this part of the country.



### *Next Issue's Headliners!*

**A COACH FOR CINDERELLA, Football Novelet by JOE ARCHIBALD**

**TURN ON THE HEAT, Baseball Novelet by ROY LOPEZ**

**GENIUS OFF THE GREASE, Lacrosse Novelet by ROGER FULLER**

# Feller

## NEEDS NO FRIENDS

Baseball  
is his business,  
and Bob keeps  
his mind on  
the job—  
that's why  
he's the tops!

by

NAT BENSON



**I**T'S quite an experience to see Bob Feller pitch for the first time. But it's even more of a thrill to spend an hour or so talking with and listening to the Pride of the Indians. For he knows and can communicate a great deal about the heroic art of pitching, can this Fire-ball Thrower who is the Mathewson of Modern Times. Experts who saw them both say Bob throws a much faster ball than "Big Six" ever did, faster than that grand old Walter Johnson's fabulous smoke-ball.

Just for fun, we asked the informative Bob how fast his fast ball actually was. Did he or anyone else really know? Of course, he did! This amazing Feller knows darn near everything about the sport in which he's such a potent superstar and he rattles it off with an easy glibness.

"Scientists who've measured and timed it have told me my fast ball actually travels at ninety-six and four tenths miles an hour," he told us with a ring of pride in his voice.

## MEET THE PRIDE OF THE INDIANS!

## He's Not At All Shy

Perhaps you'd imagine that Cleveland's great moundman might be a shy inarticulate country boy. After all, he was born in a tiny Iowa village called Van Meter. But you'd be dead wrong if you picture the Rousing Robert as a gawky self-effacing lad from the back fifty. Not the Bob Feller of 1948—not by the entire distance round the bases!

He's tall, dapper, trim and somewhat terrific in appearance. Lean-waisted, flat-stomached, keen and eager, alive and galvanic in every muscle. His tremendous shoulders bulge the back of his natty and expensive gray suit. He's lean and handsome in a hard-bitten outdoors sort of way.

There's a definite glitter, a kind of awareness, in his walk, his stance and his whole manner. In a crowded roomful of forty newspapermen, he seemed to be able to watch and anticipate the wants or the moves of each of them, just as he'd watch and forestall the men on the bases in a tough inning.

Watch him a moment—even at a press conference, you'll see an unbelievable alertness in every single move he makes. An alertness that suggests a keen-nosed hunting dog or an Indian, not a Cleveland Indian, but a genuine red Indian on the trail. Eager, taut and awake in every physical sense—that's Bob Feller.

## Feller Is Always Alert

His sharp, narrow oval face, with the high-planes of his cheekbones, his dark straight hair, his prominent sensitive nose suggest the Indian a little too. The constant restless working of his strong-lipped mouth, the vigorous movements of his whipcord body suggest some extraordinary physical power that might be both aboriginal and a part of some instinct that operates faster than mere thought. His electric vitality gives you the feeling that here is a genius of a very definite kind, a tense steel-muscled performer of startling deeds, whose physical co-ordination is as instantaneous as that of the great cats of the jungle.

Add to these powers the fact that he's never at a loss for a word. Voluble, eloquent, self-assured, 100% self-confident, he thinks no nonsense, talks no bilge. His answers zip out fast as his

famous fast ball cutting the corners of the plate.

## Famous Pitchers

"Who are the four best pitchers I ever saw?" Feller says. "I'll name them for you. Number one, the great Carl Hubbell. Red Ruffing of the Yankees, number two. Big Lefty Grove of the Athletics in his prime, three and I'd call Mel Harder of the Indians, number four. Each of them was tops in his own way.

"I think the most difficult hitters I ever pitched to are Ted Williams and Joe Di Maggio. I'd better put Yogi Berra and Joe Medwick up there too. They'll hit anything—almost anything at all. It's a real job to get a ball past any of those boys—good balls or bad ones. Berra, for instance, will smack a bad ball just as readily and just as far as one down the alley."

## Colorful Players

"Whom would I call the most colorful ball-players I ever saw? Well let's see. That's not too hard. The most colorful players are not necessarily the very best. I'd pick Johnny Allen and Lefty Gomez. They were both great pitchers too. Most of Allen's famous tantrums were caused more by sheer showmanship than bad humor. And Gomez was a card, if I ever saw one. He had a world of stuff, too."

Bob Feller is so compact and straight he doesn't look the 185 pounds he weighs. It's so perfectly distributed on his lean greyhound six-foot-one-inch form. At 29 he looks 22 or 23, like a slick big-city university senior. There's a peculiar non-stop intensity about even his thinking that must make it hard for him to relax. Not, of course, because he's jittery. Far from it. He radiates physical power as well as mental independence and know-how. He's extraordinarily well-balanced. Like Gene Tunney, Rapid Robert is in complete mental control of the situation all the time. He knows just what results he wants to achieve, at an important business conference or with the bases loaded. And he has an equally clear notion of exactly how he means to achieve these results.

All in all, Bob Feller is a pretty unusual character. He realizes his own



unique abilities to the full, without being noisy about them. He knows what he is and who he is. He knows, too that physically he can't go on forever and he has turned himself into a one-man corporation for the best possible means of selling that unique merchandise called Bob Feller.

He strikes you as being a very adroit high-pressure man in the realm of big business. He's both eloquent and forceful, dynamic in his mental drive and thinking, but a courteous and gracious host too. A man with an infinite capacity for putting his guests at their ease, and a man with a furious capacity for concentrating on the particular problem of the moment. He bears down on a business problem the way he bears down on a batter.

### *An Important Job*

He has a big business job now, a noble as well as a profitable one—helping the public-minded Popsicle people spend \$100,000 on combating juvenile delinquency in eighteen states. No more popular idol than Bob could be chosen to spear-head such an assault on one of the nation's most serious problems. You can imagine that Bob will wheel into action in this major struggle with the same tense intelligent power that he brings to bear on the Yankees "Murderer's Row." And he has a pretty good "team" to help him fan Kid Delinquency too, a five-man Advisory Committee who will help him carry out the fine ideals of this much-needed nation-wide Youth Campaign: the one and only Bob Hope (another Indian supporter), Bishop B. J. Sheil of Chicago's CYO, Perry Como, the teenagers' singing idol, Walter White, national Secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and until his recent death, Father Flanagan, founder of "Boys' Town".

Bob Feller is a mighty good choice to lead such a serious crusade. Because underneath the great twirler's boyish exterior is a very sincere and serious-minded young man. That big dimple in the strong Feller chin may indicate good nature, but it is no hall-mark of any light or shallow thinking. He is deliberate, unexcitable and intent on whatever he's doing. Believe this observer, he takes himself, his professional occu-

pation, his national eminence as a great sports hero in a country where sports heroes have often been all too playful, very, very seriously indeed. He means Business, Big Business with two capital B's.

He answers every question you ask him seriously. Never carelessly never off-hand, never uncertainly. If he doesn't know the answer, he bluntly says so. If he does, he gives it in short powerful clipped words.

### *Baseball Secrets*

"I'd say a youngster can best get started in baseball by taking it seriously," he says. "He should eat, think and sleep baseball. He should keep his ambition foremost in his mind and in his actions. He should make a point of finding out what he can do well and can't, and then getting the best possible information from recognized experts on those things that he isn't too good at."

"I'd advise a young fellow coming up in the game as an amateur, sandlotter or semi-pro to play as much as he can with better older players, against better smarter teams. And he should pay most particular attention to all the good things that he sees and hears said around him. Every game, if he analyzes it right, can teach him something that can make him a bit better and smarter player than he was yesterday. I had great teachers and I know that to be a fact."

"I'd say the ablest teacher or directors I ever had were my dad and Cy Slapnicka, the Cleveland scout and executive. My father's teaching powers were devoted almost exclusively to developing me, but plenty of others have told me how much they learned from the shrewd Cy Slapnicka.

"I'd say baseball can teach a young fellow a lot of things aside from throwing, hitting and fielding. He learns good sportsmanship, the value of team play, the need to respect the ability of his team-mates and to be able to foresee the moves of his opponents as their skill permits them to outdo him. Everyone likes to win; it's easy when you win, but you learn to take the bad with the good, to do your best when you don't feel much like it, to make your will-power conquer over any injuries or physical weaknesses you have. A young player

learns how to handle money, to understand what it will do, how far it will stretch. He learns how to meet people, to be gainfully employed, how to get along with all different kinds of people; he learns how to handle himself on the field and how to handle business matters too."

### **Baseball is a Business**

Bob feels that baseball is a business, and not one to be taken lightly. At twenty-nine he's president and personnel of an amazing money-making machine, a one-man business, the business of being tops of his kind, as the leading pitcher in baseball. Certain harsh critics have implied that Bob thinks a shade too much of himself. The truth is that he is far too intelligent and sharp in an economic way ever to underrate or overestimate the quality of the superlative products he has to sell—his own superb skill and his instinctive knowledge and understanding of the great game he plays so well.

We'd predict that when Bob meets a pitcher greater than he is, Bob will be among the first to recognize this paragon as an invaluable article, as saleable in the big markets as Bob himself. No man ever to hide his light under a bushel, he is conversely no man to feel that he has to set the bushel afire to reveal his own talents.

His talents and records are legion. It was in 1946 that he tallied one of his greatest achievements, an all-time record of fanning 348 batters in a single season. He eclipsed the record of that immortal southpaw eccentric, Rube Waddell, which had stood for nearly thirty years.

Although not yet 29 years old, "Rapid Robert" has accounted for 158 Cleveland victories and a lifetime earned-run average of less than three with a ball club that has frequently been well below the .500 mark.

Despite the loss of four full playing-years while serving in the Navy, he has been selected five times on the American League All-Star team, and has yet to be beaten in that competition. He also holds the major league mark of 18 strikeouts in a single game, the record for whifflings in two consecutive contests, and tie for the most consecutive strikeouts (6).

### **High Man In Victories**

During 1947, for the fifth consecutive time, he reached the twenty mark in victories—something no other American League hurler was able to do. And this despite a back injury that might have shelved some athletes for many weeks.

Despite his league-leading victory total, 1947 was not a "lucky" summer for the great fast-baller. In addition to the knee and back damage, which must have cut at least three or four wins from his record, he was not blessed with an abundance of scoring support by the Indians. Four times he was the victim of shut outs and in only three of his eleven setbacks did he have more than three runs to work with.

Once recovered from his double injuries, Feller became the peerless performer who is one of the all-time greats. After mid-August he was almost invincible in 1947—he was beaten only twice, 3-2 on a error in the tenth inning, and 1-0 in the season final.

Bob was a big league sensation at eighteen. Once in 1936 he struck out eight Cardinals in three innings of an exhibition game. That sort of super pitching undoubtedly caused his speed to be compared early with all of the "fog-'em-through" artists, past and present. From Amos Rusie and Cy Young, through the fabulous Deans, Van Mungo, Dazzy Vance right down to Hal Newhouser and "Fire" Trucks, they've all been compared to Feller and he to them. A few say he's the fastest pitcher who ever lived.

Dick Bartell, famous old Giants' short-stop said emphatically not. Bartell, though he never hit the size of his hat against the Van Meter Meteor, always belittled Bob's speed, even though Bob bore down a little harder than ordinarily to fan Dick thirteen out of sixteen times at bat in a post-season barnstorming series.

### **Wonderful Control**

Feller has incomparable control of that same blinding speed, and a world of stuff on the ball too. A few very honest hitters have avowed that on his good days Bob's terrific curve is simply unhittable. Now he's developing a "slider," and like the wise boy he has always been, he is working assiduously on the

master-moundsman's final masterpiece: the perfect change of pace, so slick a weapon for a pitcher who in his thirties may feel less inclined to bear down incessantly than he did ten years earlier.

Bob asserts: "Baseball is a mighty good life for the young fellow who has realized that he has most of the coordination he needs, the power to run and throw and hit and field. From there on, he should take careful steps to make every month count in developing his own particular strong-points and learning to develop new potential ones by watching and listening to older experts in their line."

"Sometimes," he says, "I don't think good college players come on as fast as they should. They get stale from lack of Grade A competition. They're always playing with and against very inferior men. Oftener, too, they don't have the chance to profit by the best kind of coaching. They get shut off and boxed in, and get several years behind the good young comers who can't afford college or have no intention or desire to go.

"These fellows, on the contrary, develop far faster. Baseball is part of their livelihood. It sometimes pays in their work and jobs to be better semi-pro baseball players. They mix with big leaguers on the down grade; they stack up against sharp young semi-pro competition and they have to get better to make themselves noticed by big league scouts, and so get on to good farm teams."

### Instinctive Technique

Bob Feller thinks like he pitches. With amazing control. He has very definite progressive ideas on all kinds of angles in baseball just as he has very definite ideas and habits in pitching. While pitching, he takes his time. He walks well forward of the mound, assumes that peculiar intent, peering, crouching stance to make sure that he and his receivers are wholly in cahoots. Then being quite sure of what is decided, he walks back behind the mound, takes a moment to get squared away, then mounts the rubber, for that far-

[Turn page]

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bent-back windup that catapults into his delivery, and masks the first part of the ball's flight.

All this technique is almost mechanical now, but it all adds up to the same kind of care that a master technician like Golfer Bobby Locke will take to see that every shot is correctly made, no matter how exasperated the galleries or the opposition may become in the process of waiting and watching. To Bob Feller, who is no unfair or fanatical adversary, the opposition is still something to be mowed down as rapidly and painlessly as possible.

"Just get rid of 'em as fast as you can, but take all the time you need to work on each man. They're all good and they're all dangerous with a bat, otherwise they wouldn't be facing you. Even a weak-hitting pitcher can break up a ball-game unless you're careful in how you pitch to him."

"It's quite a poser to tell you where I'm headed. Some day I might be a manager or an owner. Could be. I love the game and I'd enjoy managing a team, I think. The game still has a tremendous future, but one direction I do hope it's headed toward is more day games. Night games are harder on the players and harder on the kids in the stands too.

"The longer you play ball, the less you like night games. Baseball is a game that was meant to be played in the sunlight, so that everybody, the fellows in the stands and the bleachers as well as the fellows on the field, can get the greatest possible enjoyment out of playing and watching. Yes sir, my parting shot is that I hope the game is definitely moving toward more and better day baseball."

## Sports Combat Crime

"Oh, yes," he said, smiling as he shook hands with a warm powerful grasp, "you could say that I've always believed and I believe more now than ever that organized sport is the most effective weapon of all that we have against organized crime in this country—and this year I'm going to do everything in my power to prove I'm right on the

beam about that big truth. For a young fellow who has his mind full of the aim of excelling in a sport that he loves has no time or no desire to entertain any bad ideas which could make him a juvenile delinquent.

"Too many of us older people all over the country are shrugging our shoulders and turning our backs on some of the most important pleas and needs of young people. If we're to have a better America for our kids to grow up in, then proper citizen training ought to begin now. Our young people need far greater understanding. All of us ought to get pretty deeply concerned with the fact that when a youngster goes wrong, an oldster has likely been at fault in the first place."

## THRILLS IN SPORTS

(Continued from page 92)

could still get into a playoff . . . and be given another chance.

The play was comparatively simple; one Sam could have executed perfectly ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Not this time, though. He had cracked. The chip was short . . . the putt was missed . . . an eight was written on the score-card, and Sam Snead, who, to all practical appearances, had been National Open champion on the seventy-second tee wasn't even a runner-up as he walked off the seventy-second green.

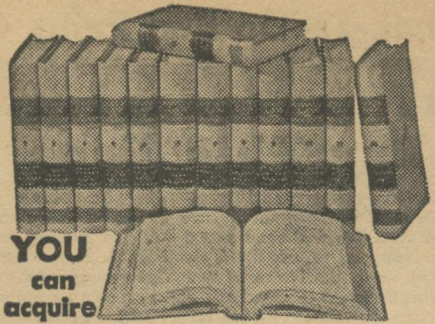
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Pretty nearly everyone will tell you Mrs. Zaharias is the greatest of all time. Maybe so. In the records there is only one other name that comes close to matching hers.

It belongs to Louise Armaindo. Never heard of it? Naturally enough, for the Canadian girl has been dead many years, and

[Turn page]



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in her day the newspapers didn't give as much space to sports as they do now.

Folks indulged in different games when Louise Armaindo was in her prime. She was utterly unlike Babe in physique, small and compact, with thick legs. She was the outstanding woman at bicycle racing, weight lifting, long distance walking and various other sports that could become very rugged under pressure.

Long distance walking races became very popular and drew large crowds. This was particularly true when women competed, for they were novelties, indeed. The only trouble was that Louise beat every one she met with such ease that there was no real competition.

Finally the promoters figured out a stunt. They matched Miss Armaindo against Carrie Howard and Nellie Worrell, lean and angular women, the best pedestrians in the West. The trick was not only to walk a twenty-four hour match, but Louise had to compete against the other two, working as a team.

They could take turns resting, but the little Canadian had to cover as much ground as the two put together. For the first twelve hours she held her own easily enough. Then, the sawdust of the arena settled around her ankles and heels, scraping the flesh raw. The pain was frightful, but she kept going.

Louise had not been off the track since the start of the race, but something had to be done. She went to the sidelines, where her wounds were washed and bandaged. Fresh stockings were pulled on, and in twelve minutes she was back at the grind.

The Misses Howard and Worrell, inspired by their opponent's misfortune, began to spurt. They relieved each other every few laps, trying desperately to wear Louise down, but they failed. Miss Armaindo was six miles ahead at the finish.

The firm fleshed Canadian girl had ridden six day bike races . . . run long distances . . . lifted weights that shamed strong men, but this was her greatest feat. She was all right when the grind ended, Carrie and Nellie were carried to the hospital, completely exhausted.

Babe Didrikson is certainly a marvelous athlete, but I wonder if she could have matched accomplishments that Louise Armaindo make look so easy.

More THRILLS IN SPORTS by  
JACK KOFOED Next Issue!

## THE SIDELINE

(Continued from page 9)

success in one of the roughest of all games can be won purely by mental application.

It is a nightmare for Coach Frank Dobbs, who finds himself up against problems in handling the self-styled genius no college coach ever faced before in any sport. For, to everyone's horror, Elroy is good—when he happens to have his mind on the game.

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A full measure of short stories, dealing with these and other sports, are also on the October docket—along with Jack Kofoed and his classic **THRILLS IN SPORTS**, your Cap and a whole slew of other fact features. The issue looks good.

## LETTERS FROM READERS

As usual, the mail sack is loaded with quips and queries, some of which we shall do our best to answer here. The first of import—

### WHY DON'T YOU—

by Barry Serviss

Dear Cap Fanning: I have been a reader of **THRILLING SPORTS** and its companion magazines for quite some time now and I like them, on the whole, best of all sports magazines. But I have one beef.

Why, instead of giving us a group of novelets in each issue, don't you publish a single long novel and

[Turn page]

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fill it out with shorts? A lot of my friends and I like to stay with a story longer than the ones you give us lets us. How about it?

—West Point, Mississippi

At one time or another, in the past, we have tried the long novel scheme along with every other you can name, Barry. The trouble with it is that, while it brings satisfaction to the fans of the particular sport which takes up most of the issue under such conditions, lovers of other sports gather on the fences at night and make sleep impossible with their howling.

I know it seems impossible for a baseball fan, say, to believe that there are folk who care less for baseball than for, say, tiddledewinks, but believe you us it's true. We'll go along with things as they are for awhile and get some sleep—to say nothing of fatter circulation figures.

## ROCK ME TO SLEEP

by Ernie Johnson

Dear Cap Fanning: A bunch of us got in an argument over fighters the other night. I claimed that just about every boxer on the records outside of Gene Tunney has been knocked out at some time or other in the course of his career. My pals say lots of fighters have come through without taking a count. Who is right?

—Ashtabula, Ohio

In the strict sense of the word you're both wrong. Of the close to 500 boxers whose rec-

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By BILL ERIN

In the August

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ords are listed in Frank G. Menke's colossal ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SPORTS, 58 have no kayos registered against their names.

Most important of them are, in alphabetical order, Sammy Angott, Joe Baksi, Bill Brennan, Tom Cribb, Jack Dillon, Sixto Escobar, Al Gainer, Mike Gibbons, Pete Herman, Beau Jack, Gorilla Jones, Fidel La Barba, Jem Mace, Jack McAuliffe, Packy McFarland, Ray Miller, Bob Montgomery, Willie Pep, Barney Ross, Bobby Ruffin, Lou Scozza, Billy Soose, Gene Tunney and Pancho Villa.

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Furthermore, not all of them are light-weights by a long shot. Baksi, Brenna, Cribb, Gibbons, Mace and Tunney were in there trading them with the big boys all the way.

And that winds up the session until next time. We'll be on hand then and hope to hear from you. So long.

—CAP FANNING.

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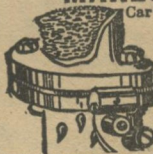
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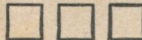
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