

JUNE

SUPER SPORTS

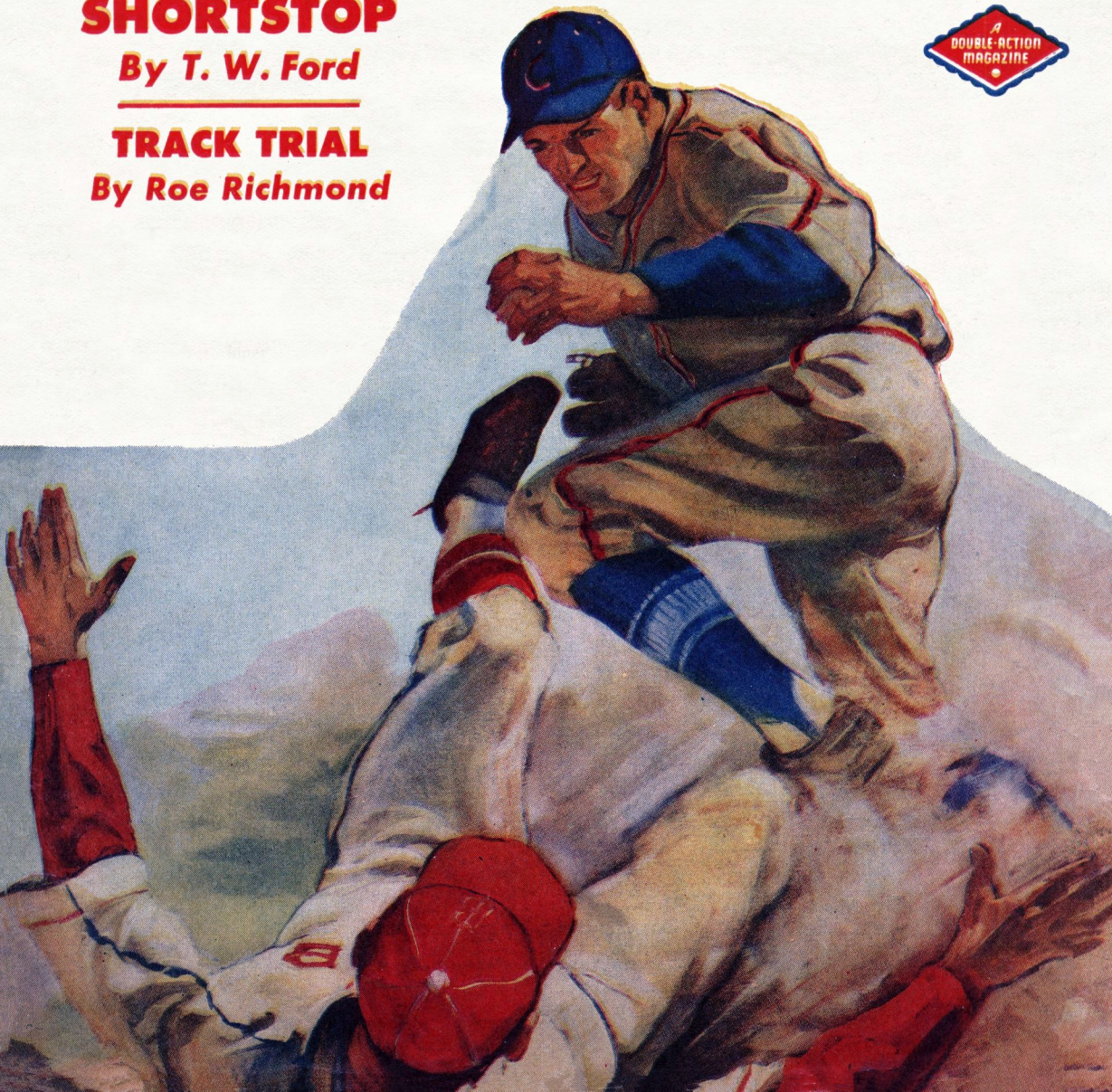
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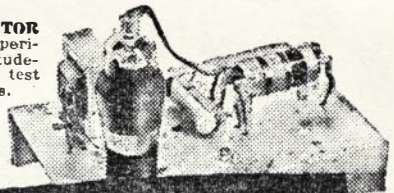
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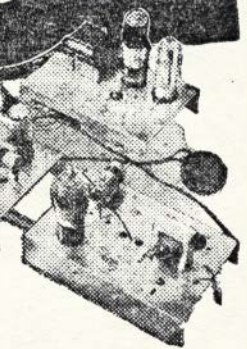
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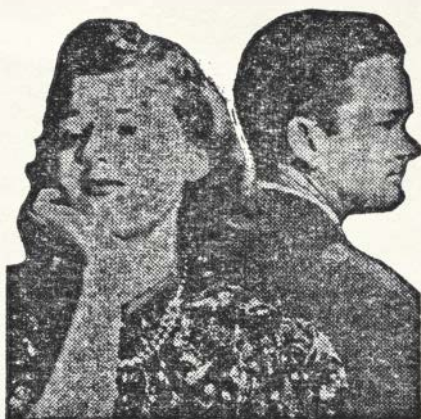
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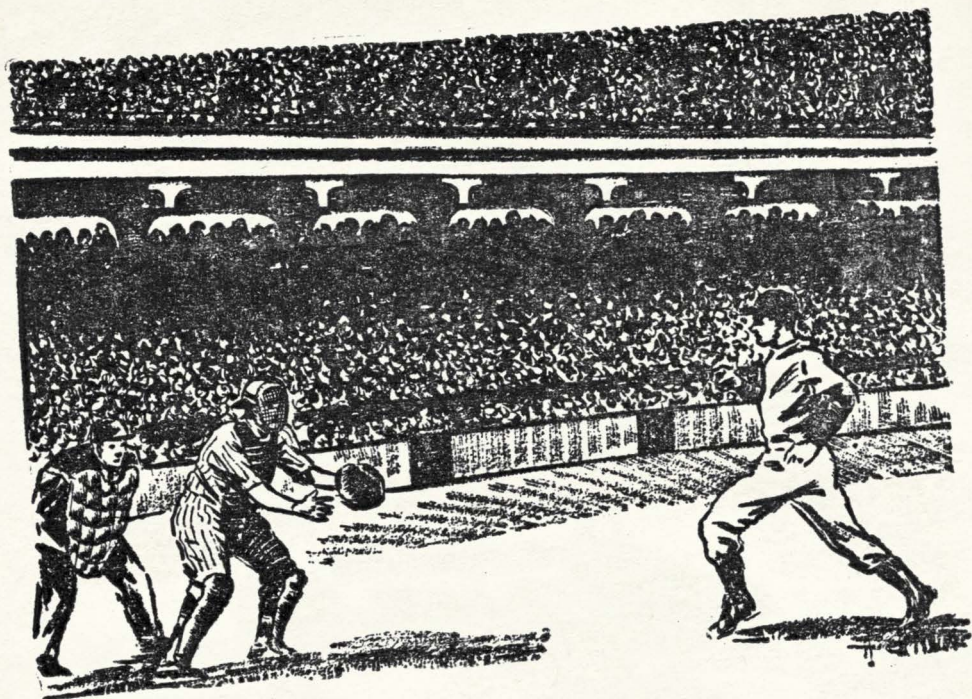
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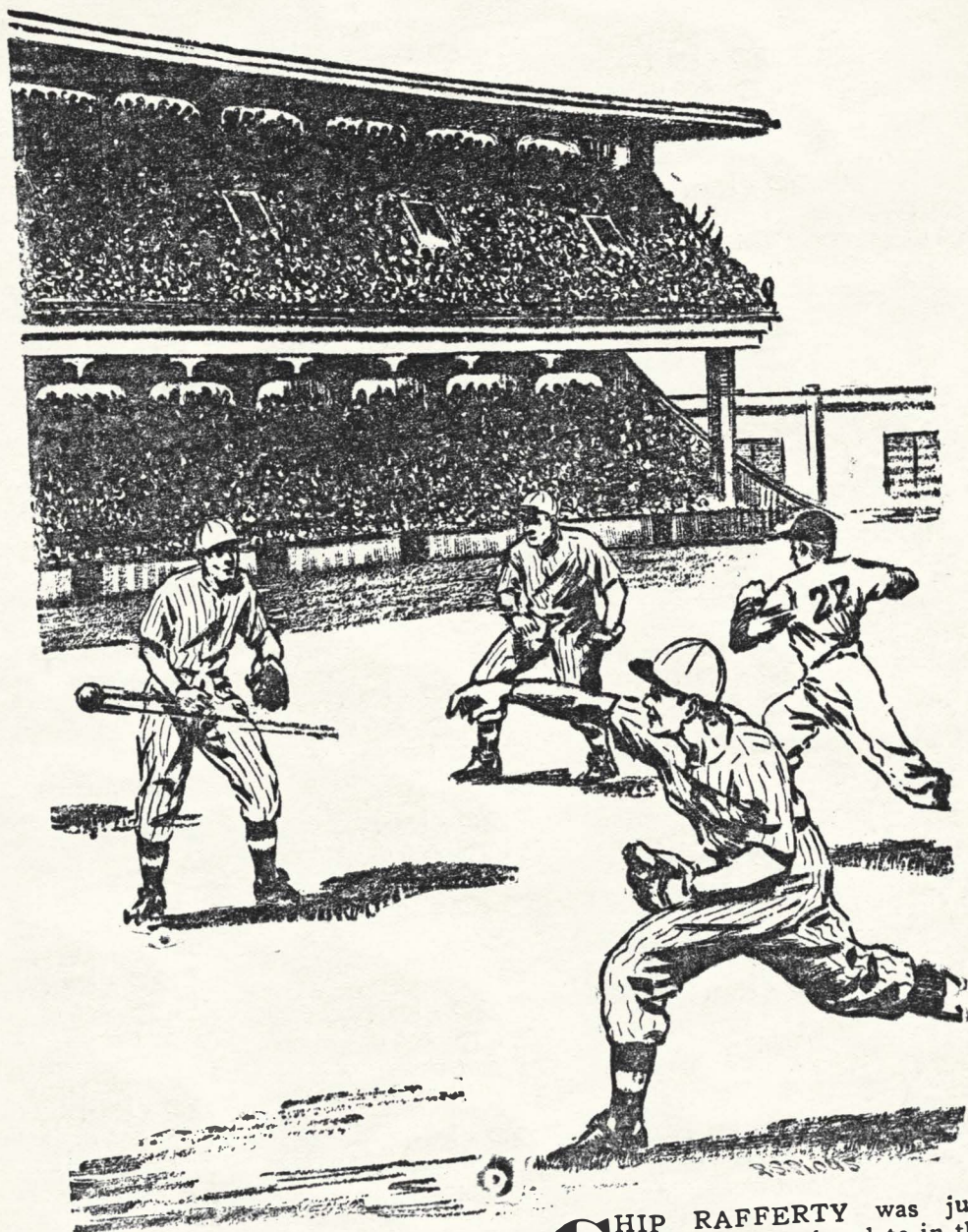


**Give It A Ride,
Rookie!**

**Complete
Novel**



By DUANE YARNELL



"It's not your fault, kid. You have the heart of a baseball player, but you haven't the build; it's the bones, the small fragile bones your mother had." But Chip Rafferty knew he would show his father something different. Then he got his chance, and went to pieces under fire!

CHIP RAFFERTY was just stepping up to the plate in the last of the ninth when his manager, Dan Andrews, came hurrying out with the news.

Andrews was flustered. "Don't look now, Chip, but there's a big league owner up there in the stands and he's got an eye on you..."

Rafferty shrugged and his eyes

went bleak. "You know how I feel about that, Dan. I'm interested in just one major league club. If they don't want me, then I don't care about any of the others."

That was when the veteran manager of the Kansas City Terriers began to grin. "Part my hair with a ball bat if I'm lying, Chip. But the guy watching you is Big Mike Rafferty himself. Your old man. What do you think of that?"

Chip was too giddy to think straight. He felt the back of his neck go red and he fought down the urge to turn around and take a quick gander at his father, whom he hadn't seen in three years.

Now, Dan Andrews was saying, "I always told you Big Mike was a square guy, Chip. Stubborn as blazes, but square. It took him a long time to come around, but from the looks of him, he's about ready to eat crow now. Go out and pole one, kid...."

In a daze, Chip Rafferty moved toward the plate. A few moments ago, this game had been just another spring training affair between two minor league clubs. Now, suddenly, it loomed more important in Chip's eyes than a world series finale.

As Chip glanced at the loaded bases, he realized that the situation couldn't be more made-to-order. Chip's Terriers were trailing by a run and two men were out. A solid bingle could mean a ball game.

From the standpoint of the spectators, most of whom had never seen Chip Rafferty in action before today. It seemed slightly ludicrous the way the enemy outfielders were backing away.

It was ludicrous because Rafferty was a slender, wiry, kid, a few inches under six feet, even on tiptoe; a few pounds under one-fifty, even with rocks in his pocket. But there he was, waving a light bat and scowling furiously, while the enemy outfielders took still a few more steps backward.

The flush left the back of Chip's neck and his narrow gray eyes grew cool and probing. He stopped shuffling, but just stood there with his bat cocked. Waiting.

The pitch was in there, a little

wide, a shade below the knees; but there was no hook on it. Chip's bat came around cleanly. His small wrists snapped through at the last instant and the impact of ash and horsehide sent a nice shiver racing through his arms and legs. It wasn't a hard smash, but it was where Chip wanted it. The ball screamed over third on a clothesline, bounced at the edge of the grass, then began to roll toward the outfield corner.

Chip grinned as he watched the left fielder race over, as the third baseman frantically rushed back. He was still grinning, a moment later, when he pulled into second standing up. Two runs had moved across the plate and still a third was scoring ahead of the hurried throw-in from the outfield. The ball game was over and, once again, Chip Rafferty had delivered in the clutch.

IT WAS A SMALL, Florida park and the stands were in close proximity to the diamond. Several local fans poured down over the bannisters, moved toward Chip to congratulate him. A few handed him baseballs to autograph and by the time he had finished, most of the rest of the players had left the field. But manager Dan Andrews was waiting.

"I just talked to your old man," Dan chuckled. "He was trying to seem uninterested, but it's my guess that the old boy was about to pop his vest buttons. He left word for you to get dressed. Said he'd be waitin' for you outside the park."

Chip Rafferty couldn't help himself. Suddenly, his small, dark face was aglow with a big, wide grin. "You think he really means business, then, Dan?"

"What do you think?" Dan challenged. "He's looking for a short-stop who can hit and you can bet your shirt he didn't come over here for his health...."

As far as Chip was concerned, those words had a symphonic ring to them. He turned and walked through the dugout, into the dressing room without seeing anyone or anything around him. He was too happy to think of anything, now, except the future that lay before him. He had gambled

three years out of his life but the gamble, it seemed, was about to pay off....

As Chip changed clothes, he recalled, again, those fine days out of the past when he and Big Mike had been so very close to each other. Those were the days when Big Mike was knocking down fences for the champion Manhattans, when sometimes, after he'd poled a home run, he'd come back to the dugout and drop a big arm around Chip's shoulders. In those days, Chip was bat boy for the club.

"Someday," Big Mike would say dreamily, "I'll own this club if I keep putting my money into Manhattan stock. I can see you, Chip, holding down the cleanup slot for me. And later, when I retire, you'll be stepping in there for me."

Chip would listen, his eyes round with pride, with wonder. Even then, in his early teens, he knew how much Big Mike was counting on him. To Chip, the future couldn't come fast enough.

Chip Rafferty grew like any normal kid, until he was fourteen. Then, suddenly, he stopped growing. He was not what you would call a runt, not by any means. But as a future baseballer, well, he had only to look at the baffled look in Big Mike's eyes to understand.

Finally, when Chip was 17, when he had attained most of his growth, Big Mike got it off his chest. "It's not your fault, kid," he said, trying to hide his chagrin. "It's the bones, the small, fragile bones that your mother had."

Chip held up his hands. They were small. The muscle was there, but there was no foundation. The hands of a surgeon, perhaps, but not the hands of a baseballer.

He saw Big Mike's disappointment and it was no greater than his own. "It might work out," Chip said doggedly. "At least I could give it a try. There had been little guys before..."

But Big Mike shook his head. "Without power in your arms, the outfield plays you close. With hands like yours, you'd always be knocking down fingers and splitting thumbs."

Big Mike took a deep breath, tried to smile. "A spade's a spade, kid, so let's get sensible. I've got all the dough I need and you'd better be fitting yourself out for something. What'll it be? Surgery? Or law? Or engineering? You name it, Chip."

Chip Rafferty couldn't turn his back on his dream. Stubbornly, he said, "I still want to give baseball a try. I think I'm that one guy in a thousand who can deliver."

Naturally, they wrangled. Big Mike, who had seen them come and go, was convinced that Chip could never fight his way up the ladder to the big time, that he'd be a fool to try. He told Chip as much, but Chip was adamant.

Strangely enough, there was no brawl when the break came. Nor was there any bitterness. Chip had one idea and Big Mike had another. There seemed to be no meeting ground.

Finally, Big Mike sighed and said, "You're my kid and if I thought you had a chance, I'd encourage you. But I know you haven't. So the sooner you get this nonsense out of your system, the sooner you'll be back and let me start you on a real career. I'm a soft-hearted slob and there's no point in my saying that I won't send you money if you ask for it..."

"I won't be needing money," Chip countered. "And I won't be coming back, either. Not until you come for me. It may be two years or it may be ten. But so help me, Big Mike Rafferty, you'll be looking me up one of these days..."

IN THE BEGINNING, they'd responded pretty regularly. But each of them had their pride and gradually, the gulf between them had widened. Big Mike had warned Chip not to come home until he was ready to launch an education. And Chip, just as stubbornly, had sworn that he would play the kind of baseball that would make Big Mike come running.

For Chip, it hadn't been easy. But he'd worked hard and he'd developed a natural, free swing that had been good for many a base hit in the minors. He'd moved up the scale. Class C, Class B, Class A. And finally, last

season, he'd hooked up with Kansas City during the last month and his sharp hitting had helped them to a pennant. This year, he was banging the ball harder than ever and he knew that, in Double A competition, he was just one step from the majors.

There had been a few quiet offers, but Dan Andrews had turned them down. Dan, alone, knew that only one offer would tempt Chip Rafferty; and today, apparently, that offer was to come.

As Chip finished dressing, he took two or three deep breaths, then hurried through the side exit. He saw the man waiting for him. The big, sunburned guy with temples grayer than Chip remembered them. Big Mike Rafferty himself.

They stood there a moment, staring at each other. Then Big Mike stuck out his hand and began to grin. "Good to see you, Chip," he said. Then, in a burst of candor, "Hell, it's better than that. It's wonderful. What a sucker I've been."

"We're both a couple of dopes," Chip admitted.

"It's that Rafferty pride," Big Mike said. "Think of the winters I gnawed my guts out, wanting you to go hunting with me, but too damned stubborn to get in touch with you."

"I'll buy a subscription to that one," Chip said.

Then, for the moment at least, the wall of reserve went crumbling. Big Mike slapped Chip across the back and the youngster took a playful poke at his old man.

"You're growin' up," Big Mike said. "Wouldn't be surprised if maybe you could manage a short beer."

"You found a customer," Chip laughed.

There had never been any bitterness between them, you could say that much. False pride, perhaps, but once that was gone, the old familiar feeling was easy to regain. After three years of waiting, they were right back where they had started, for that was the way it was with them.

CHAPTER II

THEY found a sidestreet clap-trap where the service was lousy and they knew they would not be interrupted. Big Mike ordered a platter of spiced shrimp and a round of ale. Then he leaned forward and looked straight at Chip.

"Don't let it get you worried," he said, "but I've got to get away from active management of the Manhattans—doctor's orders. That's why I've got to talk to you. . . ."

Chip felt a stab of apprehension, but before he could ask questions, Big Mike filled in the answers. "It's not too serious. . . .yet, Chip. But it could be. It's a combination of high blood pressure and a couple of other things. If I get out from under the gun and start taking life easy, I'll do a lot of hunting yet. On the other hand, if I keep driving myself trying to keep a pennant winner—well, I'd be asking for it. So, one way or another, Chip, I'm getting out of the racket."

Chip began to frown. "It's a shame," he said. "You've got a lot of your lifetime invested in the club. You. . . ."

"Don't feel so sorry for me," Big Mike said, grinning wryly. "Right now, the team's at its peak. In a year or two, it'll start falling apart and will need a lot of rebuilding. I can sell now, while prices are high and clean up. In fact, I've got an offer to sell before the team goes north. Two million is a lot of lettuce, Chip."

"What're you waiting on, then?" Chip asked hollowly.

Big Mike looked at Chip a long time. Studied him. "Don't tell me I sired a son who could be that stupid." But there was light mockery in his tone. "Look, Chip, you know what I'm thinking. If there's a chance in the world that you'll ever be able to take over, then I'd be a fool to sell."

Breathing hard, now, Chip said, "Why can't I take over? Not this year, perhaps. . . .but soon, anyway. . ."

Big Mike shook his head. "You know me, Chip. I've always said that a team should be run from the inside. An owner has to be more than a glorified desk jockey. He has to be able

to handle men. And the best manager in the business is the guy who has a long record as a player—in the majors. So, to be blunt, Chip, this is the proposition: If you're a good enough man to make the majors, you're good enough to run my team. You follow me?"

Chip nodded. "When do I get my tryout?"

"Tomorrow," Big Mike said. "I've arranged with Dan Andrews for a game between the Terriers and the Manhattans. And I may as well tell you the rest of it, Chip. You know Curly Gleason, my best pitcher? Well, he's been scouting you and he seems to think that you can't hit big league pitching. Curly'll be working for me tomorrow and if you can hit his stuff, you're good enough for me."

Chip again began to frown. "I get just one chance, then?"

Sorry to have to rush things," Big Mike admitted. "But this buyer won't wait; I have to give him a quick answer. If you click tomorrow, I'll bring you up to the Manhattans and put the team in charge of Tim O'Rourke until you're ready. Otherwise..." Big Mike didn't finish. But there was no necessity for it. Chip knew that tomorrow he was getting his big chance and that if he failed, he would have no one to blame but himself. In his heart, he knew that he was as ready as he'd ever be....

CURLY GLEASON was the ace of the Manhattan mound staff, a \$40,000 a year curve ball artist who knew more about the hitting ability of major leaguers than most managers knew themselves.

Curly was a tall, taciturn gent with a dull, beet red face and wrinkles around the eyes. His big, shining head was totally devoid of hair.

Just before the game, Big Mike made the introduction and after Chip had shaken the pitcher's hand, Curly Gleason said, "I know this means a lot to you, kid." He spoke softly, and with a smile. "We'd sure like to have you with the club—but, well, damnit, we don't think you can hit big league stuff. No offense, I hope."

Grimly, Chip said, "No offense,

Curly." Actually, Chip was watching Big Mike's expression at the time. He knew that Big Mike had a lot of faith in Curly's judgment. It was almost as if Curly had already administered Chip's last rites....

They flipped for position and the Kansas City Terriers took the field first. It was a warm, blamy day and after a quick warm-up, Chip Rafferty was drenched in perspiration. But he felt fine, and there was no nervousness in him.

Marty Blades came up to the plate for the Manhattans. He was swinging three big bats. He discarded a couple of them, stepped into the box and waved his club menacingly. Unconsciously, the entire infield dropped back—which was what the leadoff man wanted.

The first pitch was a fast one down the middle. Marty checked his swing, dumped a tantalizer down toward third. Dell Ryan raced in to make the pickup, but it was a futile gesture. The speedy Marty was already crossing first.

Chip Rafferty knew his old man like a book. He knew that the sacrifice would be on. So, with the pitch, he broke straight for the plate. He was half way in on the grass when the bunt came dumping down. His right hand shot out and he fielded the ball cleanly. Whirling, he underhanded to Mickey Flynn on second. The relay to first was in time to get the runner by a hair. It was a slick double play and the fans came to life with a bang. Over on the bench, Big Mike Rafferty was trying not to grin.

Fatso Rollins, the Terrier heaver, celebrated the twin killing by racking up three perfect curves for the third strikeout. The Manhattans were champs, but they had looked easy during the first half of the inning.

THE TERRIERS had plenty of fire. Keller, the leadoff man, teed off on the first pitch. It was a hot grounder but straight toward short. Out in short, Steve Hefflin set himself for the stop, but the ball took a bad hop and skittered over his head. It was one of those things: an easy

out was converted into a single for the Terriers.

Don Landon's sacrifice bunt moved Keller to second. Pete Mathers, a southpaw, tried to drag a bunt down to first, but was thrown out. On the play, Keller moved to third.

The local fans came to life as Chip came to the plate. The rumor mongers had been at work and the word was out that if Chip clicked today, he would move up to the Manhattan lineup. So, with drama in the offing, they gave him a nice hand as he moved in there.

Chip Rafferty was very cautious. With two away, it would take a hit to bring a man home. He watched the windup, saw the ball come zinging toward him. He stepped away, just as the ball broke over the handle for a close strike. Chip frowned. He knew that Curly wasn't going to give him anything good to look at.

The second was a ball, a little low, a little wide. Then another ball. Out on the mound, Curly Gleason studied him, pumped twice, then fired. It was a letup pitch and Chip checked his swing too late. Strike two, now.

Suddenly, the tension began to build up within Chip Rafferty. He watched Curly wipe the perspiration from his forehead with his sleeve, watched him glance at the runner, then quickly bring the ball around. Chip couldn't believe his eyes. The ball was floating toward the plate, letter high—and as large as a grapefruit. Eagerly, Chip leaned toward the pitch. His bat came around sharp and fast. But at the last instant, the ball floated up under Chip's hands. He went all the way to his knees and it was a strikeout.

Back of the plate, Doc Bogus grinned as he held up the ball to Chip. "You're a sucker for a curve, kid. You missed that one by a foot." Meanwhile, Curly Gleason came in and there was a kind of sadness in his eyes. "I hated to do it, Chip. But the old man told me to treat you like all the rest of them. . . ."

As Chip walked slowly back to his position, he felt a wave of apprehension. He'd been a sucker for that "fat" pitch and he'd looked foolish

on his strikeout. Of one thing he was certain—he'd never been forced to face such pitching in the minors. For an awful instant, he wondered if Big Mike was right when he insisted that Chip could never hit major league pitching. Then, philosophically, he told himself that he would bat three or four more times this game, that he would make up for everything. . . .

But Chip Rafferty was whistling in the dark. It was still early in the year and the teams were far from perfect shape. There was considerable hitting on the part of each team. But as the innings rolled around Chip Rafferty, the cleanup batter continued to go down swinging. And once, when the bases were loaded.

The strikeouts baffled Chip. Eventually, they unnerved him to the extent where he began to make errors. In the first of the ninth, with the teams tied at 4 and 4, Chip rushed in to field a slow roler. He whirled to make a try at cutting down a runner at third. But his peg was wild; it soared for out into left field and the runner came home. The score stayed that way and when the Terriers came up for their last turn, they were trailing 4 to 5.

IT WAS very quiet, now. The sun was dropping in the west and you could hear little but the rustle of palm fronds in the light wind. Don Landon opened the inning by skying to left. Pete Mathers, up next, watched the fourth one slip past him to get on base.

Chip came up slowly, his dirty uniform damp from perspiration. It was now or never with him. He watched Curly work, but he wasn't satisfied with the wide assortment of curves. He didn't take his bat from his shoulder until the count reached three and two.

Quickly, Curly Gleason stepped into the box. As he did so, the runner started down. Chip set himself, dug in. Once again, he saw the fat one coming. Once again, he could not believe his eyes. Carefully, he watched the ball, then broke his wrists around. But right in front of him, the ball seemed to go crazy. It floated in

toward Chip's body and it was too late to check the swing. He went all the way around for the strikeout. But that wasn't all of it. Back of the plate, Doc Bogue whipped a perfect strike down to second and the runner was nailed. The game was over and the Terriers had been bamboozled out of a game that might as easily have been won....

Chip Rafferty was as low as a man could reasonably expect to get when he finished dressing. He'd played his heart out this afternoon, but his five strikeouts in the cleanup slot, plus his one big error, had more than anything else been responsible for the Manhattan win. He hated that which he was about to do, but there was no other alternative.

Chip walked over to the Manhattan dressing room. As he walked in, he saw Curly Gleason coming out. Curly was with Doc Bogue. The pitcher and catcher nodded to him.

"I'm really sorry as hell," Curly Gleason said. "No hard feelings, Chip?"

Chip didn't know why, but for no apparent reason, his scalp began to prickle. He saw Curly and Doc Bogue exchange glances. He saw, too, that Curly Gleason's expression did not match the tone of his half-apology. Curly's eyes were filled with a kind of gloating look. And at that instant, *Chip Rafferty knew that the pitcher was not sorry at all, that he was, at the moment, about as satisfied as a man can be.*

But why, Chip wondered? What difference did it make to Curly whether Chip took over? As long as the guy drew his gargantuan salary, why should he care who ran the team? Chip was on the verge of asking just that question when Doc Bogue grabbed Curly's arm and dragged him away. Puzzled, Chip watched them leave. Then, sighing, he turned into the dressing room.

Several of the Manhattans offered him condolences but he brushed them aside. They told him that Big Mike was in the inner office. He opened the door and went in without knocking.

Big Mike was talking to a young,

smooth skinned guy in a bright, flamboyant sports ensemble. They didn't even notice Chip.

"I'm ready to do business," Sports Ensemble said. "But after the way your club looked today, I think your price is too high."

Big Mike howled like a wounded bull. "You're just trying to beat my price down, Owens."

Sports Ensemble shrugged. "It's all in the business."

Big Mike said, "Tell you what, Owens. In three days, we meet the Sox—the team they say may win the pennant. You watch that game. If we take 'em, you've got to admit my price is right...."

"I don't want to wait," Sports Ensemble muttered.

"But you don't want to meet my price, either. You want to chisel me down...."

Finally, Sports Ensemble said, "Okay, I'll wait three more days. But if you lose to the Sox, I'll expect you to split the difference between my price and yours. Fair enough?"

Big Mike sighed, heavily. "We'll see how it works out. But one thing sure, I'm getting out of this business before the season opens. I think we'll be able to get together...."

"I'd still like to deal now," Sports Ensemble said.

"Three more days won't matter," Big Mike said wearily.

The man in sports clothes turned around. Chip saw the satisfied look in the man's eyes and somehow, it reminded him of the look he had seen, a moment earlier, in Curly Gleason's eyes.

After the man left, Big Mike looked down at Chip. "Well, that's that." He was trying to grin, but the effort wasn't very satisfactory.

Chip laid it on the line. "Mike, about today...."

"It's tough," Mike admitted dolefully. "But why be maudlin about it? Some have it, some haven't. Anyway, Curly Gleason had already prepared me for it...."

"Curly Gleason again," Chip said softly. "Somehow, I can't get that guy out of my mind...."

"A good pitcher," Big Mike said. "The best."

"And the only guy I ever faced who pitched a curve that could break in two directions," Chip said.

Big Mike's head swung around fast. "An alibi, Chip?"

Chip colored. After all, what did he really have to go on? Still, he had the feeling in the back of his mind that something was phony, that he wasn't half the bust he'd been made to appear this afternoon. Too, he realized that he still had three days to make the grade, provided he could get Big Mike to give him another chance.

So, Chip broached the subject, "Look—why not give me a chance against some of the rest of your mound staff. I..."

Big Mike slowly shook his head. Warily, he said, "And suffer tortures of the damned every time you struck out?" The old man's voice softened and he came over, dropped his arm over Chip's shoulder. "You're a good kid, Chip, and as game as the devil. But let's face it; you'll never be a major leaguer..."

"You've made up your mind, then?"

Big Mike nodded and that was that. Chip saw the torment in Big Mike's eyes and he saw no point in making it worse. So he nodded, briefly, then turned and walked out of there. But in the back of his mind, a thought began to throb. In three more days, Big Mike was going to unload his franchise. In three days, a lot of water could go under the bridge...

CHAPTER III

IT WAS GROWING dark when Chip reached the hotel. He found boss Dan Andrews going through the motions of reading the evening paper in the lobby.

Dan Andrews was a square guy, a former major league star himself who knew most of the baseball answers. He'd been Chip's friend and he'd shared Chip's confidences. Now, as he looked up, his sympathy was evident.

"Maybe it was," Chip said. "And again, maybe not."

Dan regarded Chip with renewed interest. "Do you know something that I don't?" he demanded.

"Just a hunch," Chip said. He changed tack. "Look, Dan, I'm not the greatest hitter in the world, but I've got a feeling that the kind of pitching I was facing today was not exactly the McCoy. Tell me—how much do you know about Curly Gleason?"

Thoroughly curious, now, Dan Andrews said, "Well, to begin with, Curly's got a rep for being a close man with a buck. Nobody ever saw him grab a check in his life. Another thing, he's a good pitcher, but a close mouthed guy—not very friendly with anyone..."

"Keep talking," Chip said. "You haven't hit me with an idea yet."

"Followin' up the tightwad angle," Dan added. "I remember once when he got suspended back in the early days for playin' in the Cuban league under a phony name, just to make a few extra bucks."

.. "Wait a minute," Chip said. "Somebody else was telling me that story. It was Pancho Gonzales. He used to play against him." Suddenly, Chip snapped his fingers. "I think I've got it, now. I just had to be sure that I was on the right track. I wonder where Pancho is?"

"In the dining room. I saw him go in a few minutes ago."

They went into the dining room. Pancho Gonzales, the Cuban utility man of the Terriers, was inhaling a steak when Chip leaned over the table in front of him.

"Pancho, what about Curly Gleason, that year you faced him in Cuba? What did he have on the ball besides his usually good curve?"

Pancho grinned. "Heem t'row spitter up here, hunh?"

Chip was grinning, now. He picked up Pancho's check and said, "This one's on me." Then, to Dan, "Come on, let's get out of here."

ONCE they were outside, Chip laid it on the line. "I knew, from the way those pitches were sailing that it was an illegal pitch. I had a hunch it might be a spitter, but I'd

never heard that Curly could throw one. That's why I wanted to be sure. But now I know what he was doing...."

"Well, I'll be damned," Dan Andrews exploded. Then, a vague, apprehensive look crossed the Terrier manager's face. "But I don't see how he got away with it. Doc Bogus is a good catcher and he'd have noticed it."

"Doc Bogus was in on it," Chip muttered. "Those two guys are as thick as fleas. As for the umpires—well, to them, spring training is pretty much of a holiday. Besides, Curly was only tossing his spitter in the clutch...."

"I don't see how he got away with it."

"He was using perspiration off his forehead," Chip said.

"Sensible," Dan Andrews admitted. "But it still doesn't make sense. Why should Curly Gleason give a damn whether your old man wants to leave you the team or not?"

"I... I'm not quite sure," Chip said. "But I can go this far. I'm convinced, now, that Curly made every effort to make me look silly so that Big Mike could be induced to sell. I know that he had to rely on a spitter to get the job done. So, if he's underhanded about one thing, he'll be underhanded about another. Maybe, before the night's over, I'll have my answer." Chip suddenly clammed up on that subject, then shifted the conversational note. "Ever hear of a guy named Owens—someone who might be able to spend two million bucks for a baseball franchise?"

"That would be Deak Owens," Dan said. "He inherited a flock of oil wells a couple of years back. I hear he'd like to get into baseball."

Chip said, "You've done your good deed for the day. I may be a little late tonight, but if I get what I think I'm after, I'll beat on your door until you open it...."

Before Chip left the hotel, he called the railroad station and had Big Mike paged. He caught Big Mike just a few minutes before the Manhattans boarded the train back to St. Augustine.

"One question," Chip said. "Has Curly Gleason every intimated that he'd like to be manager?"

The question caught Big Mike off guard. "Plenty of times. But he's not the type. Say, Chip what are you driving at?"

"You'd turn purple if you knew," Chip said. Then, "By the way, is Curly going back with you?"

"Dunno what difference it makes," Big Mike said testily. "But it happens that he isn't. He has some friends in this burg...."

"That's all I wanted to know," Chip said.

HE WENT outside and hired a cab. It was still early evening and the small town contained only half a dozen really good eating places. Chip made a tour of the sports. After four had yielded nothing, he began to get worried. Had his hunch been wrong, after all? But at the fifth, he found his quarry. Seated near the window, at the front table, was a tall, taciturn guy whose head was as hairless as a cue ball.

It was very obvious that Curly Gleason was waiting for someone, for a menu was lying open across the table from him. When Chip sat down, Curly's face turned crimson. And when Chip showed no inclination to leave, Curly said, very pointedly. "Look, chum, I know a local wren in this town. If you'd let her have that seat, I'd...."

But the local wren turned out to be a guy wearing a bright sports suit. Deak Owens frowned as he recognized Chip Rafferty and it was very evident that Deak remembered having seen Chip earlier in the afternoon. There was none of the who-the-hell's-this-guy in his manner.

Chip grinned at the discomfiture of the two men. He gave them no time to recover. "Isn't this cozy," he said. "Imagine meeting the prospective owner of the Manhattans in business conference with the prospective new manager...."

Chip's thrust scored a bull's-eye. Curly Gleason turned a beet red as he came half up out of his chair.

"What in hell are you talking about, Rafferty?" he demanded.

Chip shrugged. He felt fine, now. "Let's talk in circles. Just for the devil of it, we'll assume that there's a nice old gent who has to retire from baseball. He'd like to leave the club to his kid, but he thinks his kid can't hit major league pitching. Now, enter the villain, a guy with a lot of bucks who wants to buy the team, but who knows he can't get it if the kid really has the stuff to make the grade...."

"You must be out of your mind," Deak Owens gasped.

Ignoring the man, Chip continued. "Now, we shift to another angle. On the club is a guy who's burned up because the boss won't make him manager. He knows that if the old man's kid takes over, the same situation will apply. So, to make damned sure that he gets a break, he approaches the prospective buyer with a proposition. He says, in effect, that a few spitters thrown at the right time might mean the difference between the old man keeping, or selling the club."

Chip was watching the two men very closely. He knew, now, that he'd found the truth. Guilt was written all over their faces. As he stopped talking, both men started blustering at once. But he didn't listen to them.

Chip stood up, bowed low at the waist, then, grinning, went out through the back door. He had a reason for that one and it soon paid dividends.

No sooner had he gone out into the alley than did the door open and two very agitated diners came out. Chip was hiding in the shadows of the opposite doorway. Curly ran one way and Deak Owens ran the other. Chip needed no more pointed information than that. The pair realized that Chip had solved their plan and right now they were trying, frantically, to delay Chip before he could get to his old man. Anything to keep him from spilling the beans until the deal could be consummated.

Once the two men disappeared, Chip went back through the restaurant, climbed into the taxi and drove

off. At a telegraph station, he sent a wire to his old man to be delivered at the station in St. Augustine. He wired:

NEW EVIDENCE INDICATES A PLOT TO MAKE YOU SELL CLUB TO OWENS STOP GIVE ME YOUR SOLEMN PROMISE BY TELEGRAPHIC ANSWER THAT YOU WON'T MAKE DEAL UNTIL I TALK TO YOU STOP WIRE TONIGHT STOP
CHIP

SATISFIED, Chip drove to the hotel. He found Dan Andrews waiting in his room and after a brief explanation, the Terrier boss was well versed on everything that had happened.

"What're you going to do now?" Dan asked quietly.

Chip said, "First, I considered going to see Big Mike. Bit there's always the chance that he'd think I was coming up with an alibi. Besides, he still wouldn't be convinced that I could hit major league pitching." Now, Chip began to grin. "You used to be with the Sox. How well do you know their owner?"

"We're damned good friends," Dan Andrews said.

"Good," Chip said. "Now, listen to this plan...."

For fifteen minutes, Chip talked. For every objection that Dan voiced, Chip came up with a counter-objection. In the end, Dan said, "I agree with you that if Deak Owens is that kind of a guy, the majors don't want him as an owner. And I think the Sox owner would feel the same way. So I'll do it, Chip. But Lord help you if you fail this time...."

"I won't fail," Chip said grimly.

Dan Andrews made the phone call to the boss of the Sox, the team that was scheduled to play the Manhattans at St. Augustine in three days. When he made his pitch, he got the answer he expected. He hadn't even cradled the receiver when the telegram came. It was from Big Mike, a few miles away in St. Augustine. It said:

WIRE RECEIVED STOP AGREE TO WAIT UNTIL

YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH
ME STOP IF NO WORD
FORTHCOMING, WILL GO
AHEAD WITH BUSINESS
DEAL RIGHT AFTER GAME
GAME WITH SOX STOP
WHY ALL THE MYSTERY
STOP

MIKE RAFFERTY

Chip studied the wire and began to smile. He could hardly wait to see the expression on Big Mike's face, three days from now. This was going to be good....

CHAPTER IV

THE GAME between the Manhattans and the Sox was completely sold out long before the two teams took the field. Down in the Sox dressing room, manager Mel Torkle was making an introduction.

"Gents," he said, "I want you to meet Chip Rafferty." The Sox manager waited for Chip to acknowledge the nods. Then, he continued. "I wish I could tell you the whole story, but I promised a guy I'd keep it under my hat. But it's enough to tell you that, for today at least, Chip is playing short for us against the Manhattans. And he's also batting in the cleanup slot. Are there any questions?"

The Sox club was a well run outfit. The word of their manager was good enough for them. There were no questions.

"One more thing," the Sox boss said. "You'd better get with the boys and learn a few of our signs." Grinning, Mel Torkle added, "Not that we won't change 'em before we go north—because I've got a pretty good hunch that if we didn't, you might be usin' 'em against us...."

Chip Rafferty got the implication of that statement and he flushed to the roots of his hair. Then he went into a huddle with Rube Jones, the catcher. When it came time to go out onto the field, he was ready.

The capacity crowd gave the Sox a nice hand when they came out. The Manhattans were already working out and Chip was much more inter-

ested in their reaction than that of the crowd.

The reaction was not long in coming. Big Mike, standing in the third base coaching sport, saw Chip first. His mouth flew open and he did a double take.

"What's the big idea of the Sox getup?" he demanded.

Chip said, "They hired me for a mascot," then turned away. Deep down inside, he had to admit that he enjoyed the sight of his old man's slow burn. Big Mike was curious, he was upset, but Chip was telling him nothing. If Chip's plan proved successful, Big Mike wouldn't have to be told; he would be shown....

The Sox took the field and went through a brisk warm-up drill. Chip Rafferty was in fine fettle. He handled everything that came his way and some of his fast underhand tosses to first brought shrill screams of joy from the crowd.

As Chip walked off the field, the Sox manager met him at the edge of the field. Mel Torkle looked worried. "I don't know what it's worth, Chip, but Dizzy McGrath was supposed to pitch for the Manhattans today. But I heard Curly Gleason tell Big Mike that he needed a little more work. It looks, now, like Curly's going to pitch."

Chip said, "Yeah, I figured that'd happen."

"And you're not worried?"

"Why should I be?" Chip demanded. "The umpire knows enough to watch for that spitter after what we've told him."

"There's another angle," the Sox boss said. "One that you oughta be thinkin' about."

"Such as?" Chip asked quietly.

"As I get it," Mel said, "your whole idea is to prove to your old man that you're really a ball hawk. Right now, he doesn't think so. Suppose something happens before you get your chance?"

Chip whistled softly. "I see what you mean. But there are a lot of people out here today. I don't think Gleason is that brave."

"Anyway," Mel warned. "I'd keep my eyes open."

THE ADVISE was sound. But Chip Rafferty, in his exuberance, refused to take it seriously. Thus, it was that the stage was set for Chip when he came to bat in the first half of the first.

With two away and a man on second, Chip dug in to nail one. He was hugging the rubber close and the first pitch came without a windup, without warning. It was a sailor pitch, one that came in fast and hard, straight at Chip's head.

Chip had been dusted off before. But this time, as he fell to the ground, the ball took a fast drop. He tried, desperately, to twist away from the pitch. But the ball was right out there in front of his face, growing larger, larger.

Splat! He felt the impact, felt the shock and the pain of it as the ball smashed against his jaw. Then briefly, he saw a myriad of stars in broad daylight before the gray haze settled over him. Soon, he was no longer conscious of pain. For that matter, he was no longer conscious. . . .

There was water, like the stream from a firehose slapping against his face. He shook his head, choked, opened his eyes. A crowd had gathered around him. Someone was holding a bucket and someone else was feeling Chip's jaw. It must have been a doctor for the man said, "Right on the button. But it isn't broken. Come on, kid, you'd better get in the shade."

It came to Chip then as he looked up, saw Big Mike's white, strained face. If he left the game now, Big Mike might never know how Chip could stand up under big league competition.

Chip leaped to his feet. He felt nauseated for a moment, but he shook away the hands that tried to hold him. "I'm sticking," he said stubbornly. Then, before they could stop him, Chip began the slow, painful jog to first.

As he stopped at the initial sack, the crowd gave him a great hand. But Chip hardly heard them; he was staring again at Curly Gleason, at the man he had so grossly underestimated. Next time, he wouldn't be making the same mistake. . . .

THE Manhattans went to work with a vengeance. Marty Blades opened with a single. Paul Davis hit into deep short and Chip had plenty of time. But even as he reached for the ball, another wave of nausea hit him. He slapped at it, knocked it down. Quickly, he reached for the ball and tried to flip it to second, but the ball went into right field. By the time it could be returned, there were runners on second and third.

Over on third, in the coaching box, Big Mike Rafferty took a good look at Chip, then turned away. Chip kicked dirt and whirled back to his position. Maybe he was a fool for not telling Big Mike all he knew. But he remembered that, for three years, word had not been enough to persuade the old man. The only thing that Big Mike understood was that which he saw on the baseball diamond.

Al Sawtell, the next hitter, struck out. But Steve Hefflin caught the first pitch on the nose and drove it into the palmetto scrub on the fringe of the outer garden. It was one of Hefflin's famous four-masters and the Manhattans were leading 3 to 0.

That was the way the inning ended. It was still that way when the Sox came up in the first half of the third. The Sox leadoff hitter crossed the infield by laying down a perfect bunt. Curly Gleason, weakening momentarily, issued a free ticket to the next hitter. Ed Lukas made a perfect sacrifice to put runners on second and third.

Chip was just picking up his bat when Mel Torkle stopped beside him. Mel said, "How about it, Chip? Why knock your brains out if you don't feel right?"

Chip said, "The dizziness is gone.

It was a new Chip Rafferty who went out then. A guy with a belligerent cast to his jaw, with icebergs in his eyes. He glared at Curly Gleason as he pounded his bat against the plate. "Just toss anything but that spitter," Chip challenged, "and I'll drive it down your throat."

Curly Gleason reddened and there was anger in every motion of his windup. The ball came blazing through, hard and fast, a little on the outside. But Chip was set for it. He leaned forward and laid his weight against it. He felt the sweet, solid shock as his bat met the ball. It was a grass cutter, right through the mound. Curly Gleason's follow through had pulled him off balance. Curly saw the ball coming and was in no position to field it. He leaped flat on his face and the ball was still rising when it passed Curly, headed for center field.

Chip was rounding first when he saw the center fielder make the pickup. The ball was fielded in shallow territory and the play was going to be at the plate. Chip kept going and as he made the turn at second, he saw the cloud of dust at the plate, saw the flat palms of the umpire, signalling that the second run had scored.

There was a mixup back of the plate and Chip kept going. He heard the cry of warning from the crowd, saw the third sacker pull over to take the throw from the catcher. But he also saw something else. As he moved toward the bag, Curly Gleason was racing over to back up the play. But Chip was wary, and even as he launched his slide, he saw that the three of them were coming together fast. So, as Chip slid wide of the bag, then reached back to hook it with his hand, he didn't take his eyes off Curly Gleason. Even as Chip's hand hooked the bag, Curly's spikes ground down toward the hand.

But Chip was faster. He pulled his hand away, bounced to his feet. The quick booping from the crowd indicated that not too many people had missed the little by-play. But Chip wasn't thinking of the crowd. He was thinking, instead, that a man could put up with only so much before he defended himself.

HE WAS on his feet, now, and he met Curly Gleason as the man turned around. Curly knew what was coming and he brought his knee up in the general direction of Chip's

groin. But Chip evaded the knee and his hand pumped hard in under Curly's eye. Curly's head snapped back and the shiner that began to grow thereon would provide nourishment for a family of leeches for many nights to come.

It was a hard, driving smash and Curly went down on his back. Chip was moving in for more when the players surrounded him, pulled him away. The crowd was cheering like mad. About the only unhappy guys were the umpires. They seemed to have ideas about Curly Gleason and why it was advantageous for him to take an early shower. That was when Big Mike came up.

"What the hell is this all about?" he demanded loudly.

Chip said, "See if you can't make a deal to keep Curly in the game. We've got a little unfinished business...."

Big Mike had seen enough to get the idea that perhaps Chip had a good idea. He looked hard at Chip, tried not to grin. Then, in his best persuasive manner, he had words with the umpire. In the end, a glowering Curly Gleason stayed in the game.

The ruckus settled down. Curly went back to the mound. He toed the rubber, started the windup. Chip Rafferty had taken a long lead and with the windup, he legged it for the plate.

Curly's eyes bugged as he saw the runner already halfway to the plate. He checked his fluid motion, hesitated, then fired frantically. But the ball was in the dirt and Chip made a nice hook slide around the bag. He got the green light and the local fans went wild. The score was tied at 3 and 3 and once again it was a ball game.

The rest was a dogfight. Curly Gleason seemed to realize that the jig, for him, was up. So he settled down and pitched some real baseball. In the meantime, Swiftly Shane was mowing down the Manhattans.

The game was a lulu until the Manhattans threatened in the last of the eighth. With one away, they had runners on second and third. Chip didn't think he had a chance, but he

gave it the old try. He made a diving, twisting leap to his right and his bare hand held the ball. He had moved in almost to the baseline and there was the Manhattan runner legging it past him for third.

Instinctively, Chip tagged the runner for the second out. He saw the batter moving to first and he threw with a whiplike, side-arm motion. Ed Lukas had to reach for it, but he took the ball in his glove webbing, inches ahead of the runner. It was a double killing and the score was still tied.

A DEADLY QUIET settled over the park as Chip stepped into the box. Chip was bristling while, on the mound, Curly Gleason's eyes were filled with a venomous look. You knew, as you watched, that this time both men would pull all the stops.

Chip fouled off the first one. An inside pitch followed, driving him to the dirt. Chip got up, swearing a little. Two more wide ones followed. Then, a swinging strike. It was three, two, the big one coming up.

Curly Gleason's windup was very slow, very deliberate. You could feel the tension as the two men squared off against each other. Chip saw the ball coming. It was near the outside, perhaps a ball, perhaps a strike. He didn't care. He didn't want to take the chance. He took a little hitch and he had to lean forward as he swung. Chip went all the way around and he caught the ball out near the sweet zone of the bat. He heard the sweet music of a solid knock, saw the ball soaring down the third base line, rising, rising, hanging against the sky, then dropping lazily, slowly. The left fielder was back near the palmettos. Then, with a hopeless gesture, he shrugged and walked slowly back toward the diamond. Chip Rafferty was grinning broadly as he made the lazy circle of the sacks. . . .

That was all for Curly Gleason. Dizzy McGrath came in and Dizzy put out the fire. But the damage was done. The Sox had moved into a 4 to 3 lead and they were hot. They held the lead. Swiftly Shane, working in

mid-season form, set the Manhattan pinch hitters down in order. The ball game was over.

Chip was very satisfied, very tired as he walked off the field. Dan Andrews was talking to the boss of the Sox as Chip came up. Mel Torkle was saying, "All I can say, Dan, is that if you change your mind, I'll buy the kid in a minute. Boy, what I couldn't do with him in there at short!"

Big Mike Rafferty came up, roaring like a bull. "Over my dead body," he screamed. "Listen, Dan, you know the promise you made me. Now. . . ."

Dan Andrews chuckled. "Don't get excited, Mike. I've been on your side all the time." Dan turned, then, saw Chip standing there. "During the seventh inning, Chip—I told Big Mike all that he needed to know. I hope you don't mind."

Chip looked at Big Mike. The big guy was trying to look stern, trying to give Chip the business. "Listen, you crazy guy!" he cried. "If you had all that dope on Curly and his connection with Deak Owens, why didn't you just out and tell me?"

Chip grinned. "I've been tryin' to tell you that I'm a baseball player for the past three years. But you keep laughing at me."

"Well, anyway," Big Mike said lamely, "you could at least have given me a chance to believe you. What if Curly *had* brained you? What you did was stupid!"

"Yeah," Chip needled. "It seems to run in the family!"

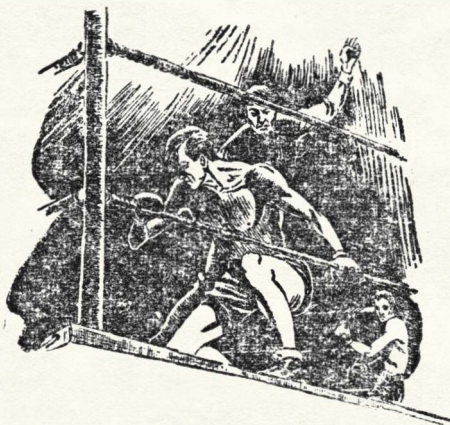
Big Mike looked hard at Chip. His face relaxed, then began to grin. Then, for no reason at all, Big Mike Rafferty had his arm around Chip's shoulder and he was howling with laughter. When he got his breath, he said, "Come on, kid. I know where they got shrimp as big as your fist. A quiet joint where we can also talk some business."

"You found yourself a customer," Chip said.

THE END

Them Dressin' Room Blues

By RICHARD BRISTER



Eddie had come up the long road with Doc, and now when he needed the the old man most. Doc wouldn't be on hand!

THE WAY that fool crowd kept stomping and yowling and whistling upstairs there, Sam thought with disgust, you'd think Mr. Jacobs done got Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey and John L Sullivan in the ring all at once for a free-for-all with bare knuckles.

Wasn't really nothing but a couple of no-account prelim boys busting away at each other up there, but the crowd was making such an all-fired ruckus that Sam hardly heard somebody thump on the door. He walked over—a tall, slope-shouldered colored boy with sad gentle eyes in a battered face—and cracked the door open an inch.

It was Mr. Matlock. He had a toothpick in his teeth, and he was looking mighty hard in the face.

"Sam," he said, "I stood alla damn' nonsense I'm goin' to. I'm comin' in there."

Sam stepped out quickly and clicked the door shut behind him. "Mist' Matlock, Ah'm beggin' yo' pahdon. You jus' cain't come in. Mist' Eddie, he say he know what's best for him. He say he the one got to

fight, and he got a right to be alone if he want to. He gonna meet you up in the ring."

"Lissen, I'm his manager now, ain't I? Is the kid goin' crazy?"

"He be all right, once he get in that ring. He jus' feelin' blue. He got misery in him, don't want nobody aroun'. 'Cept me," Sam shrugged. "Ah' Ah ain't nobody."

The toothpick jerked up against Mr. Matlock's fat nose. "Dammit, he's gotta snap out of it. He's got the toughest scrap of his life comin' up in ten, fifteen minutes. We got the title in the palm of our hands, and the kid..."

"Mist' Matlock, don' you worry. He just feelin' blue. He don' wanta talk to nobody. We be seein' you up in the ring." Sam pushed the door open behind him, backed apologetically through it, and closed it.

He turned around with a soft sigh of relief. Mr. Eddie was still sitting hunched over on the bench in front of the lockers, looking mighty blue. mighty blue, with his head resting down on his hands, his face half hidden behind his spread fingers.

"Mist' Eddie," Sam said worriedly, "You got to stop grievin'. You got to come outta them funks. Boy, is you listenin' to..."

"I'm all right, Sam. Forget it."

"Why don' you move aroun'? You gonna catch a chill. That ol' bathrobe don't cover up nothin'."

"I wish Doc was here, Sam. That's all. I wish Doc was here."

"Now, they ain't no use needlin' your hair about Doc. Doc daid an' buried. You got to forget Doc till you gits done with this fight."

"There wasn't nobody like Doc, Sam." Mr. Eddie's eyes came up slowly behind his spread fingers. "Was there?"

"Doc cain't he'p us none now, boy."

"Doc was the best damn' manager in the fight game, Sam. Everyone said so." He was running his hands through his wiry black hair, looking sad as a hound dog. "I got to keep thinking about him. I got to remember everything Doc ever told me."

SAM GROANED. "Ah wish this fight was over. Ah wish you was champeen already. What gittin' into you, boy? You go up there grievin' your haid about Doc, an' you gonna forget to block one o' them punches."

Mr. Eddie just sat there hanging his head as if he didn't hear.

"Remember how Doc taught me to throw a left jab, Sam? By tying my right hand down and siccing you on me, so I had to left hand you away or get belted?... Remember the campaign Doc doped out, round by round, when I fought Maxie Davis? And it all panned out just like Doc figure. Doc sure could spot a man's weakness. I felt like I could lick anybody with Doc calling the shots. He always had the right answer."

"Mist' Eddie..."

"I wish he was here, Sam. Just this once more."

"Mist' Eddie," Sam sighed, "he ain't here. You take Mist' Matlock, he ain't like Doc, but he know his stuff. He ain't gonna steer you wrong."

"How do ya s'pose Doc would want me to fight this McCracken? Would he want me to pile right in at the bell? You know, keep boring in, rush

him blind, and throw a scare in him?"

"Boy, if you'd jus' forget Doc, an' do what Mist' Matlock say, he gonna see you through 'thout no trouble. You gonna be champeen, if you just..."

The boy didn't move. "Remember the night I fought Kelly, Sam? Doc thought it would be a pushover, an' got drunk before the fight; they wouldn't let him in my corner. And I folded up like a wet pancake. Remember?"

Now why, Sam thought worriedly, do he have to remember *that* fight, come a time like this?

"The only licking I ever took, Sam. The one time Doc wasn't with me." His voice got stuck in his throat, as if he was going to cry. "Doc won't be there tonight, neither."

"That don' mean nothin'," Sam said. "You gonna bust this McCracken. You gonna straighten him up with your left, an' belt him one on the chin with..."

"Remember how guilty Doc felt after that Kelly fight? What was it he told me? 'Eddie boy, if I ever let you down again, booze won't have nothing to do with it.' And I said, 'It's okay, Doc, forget it.' But he shook his head. 'No, I mean it. If I touch another drop while you're fighting for me, you can tear up our contract.' And he went off the stuff, and stayed off."

THAT FOOL crowd up above was making more racket than ever now. Not much time, Sam thought, not much time, and this boy still sitting here grieving about Doc. That McCracken ain't grieving. That McCracken just got a headful of notions how to belt his boy flat on his back and hang onto that title.

"Mist' Eddie," Sam said, "come over here an' lay down on this table. Ah'n gonna rub your laigs. You gonna freeze yo'self settin' on that ol' bench."

Mr. Eddie looked up like a man in a dream. Then he stood up and walked across the small room and lay face down on the table. His legs felt cold as ice under Sam's expert fin-

gers. He was trembling.

"Jus' you lay quiet," Sam said anxiously, "an' don't think about nothin'. You gonna do yourself proud. You gonna kill that McCracken."

"I wish Doc was here, Sam. Matlock's all right, but I'm still not used to him. I don't have any faith in him. If I knew how Doc would want me to tackle McCracken, so I could get past this one, I'd be okay. I'd learn to trust Matlock. I'm scared, Sam." He looked up sickly. "Dammit, I'm scared."

Oh, Lawd! Sam rolled his brown eyes toward the ceiling and silently prayed. Do somethin', Lawd. This boy scared. Shakin' like a leaf. He gonna disgrace himself, ef you don' do somethin' for him. He don't know what to do. He don't know how to fight this McCracken. His heart done jump out of him, an' less'n it jump back wheer it belong right quick. he—

Some damn' fool was thumping that door again, busting in on his talk with the Lord. Sam walked over and peered out impatiently at a fat man with a bald head who blinked foolishly at him.

"What yo' want?"

"My name's Corey. Look, is the kid in there?"

"Sure he is in there. We goin' up pretty soon. What yo' want?"

The fat man stood there as if he wasn't sure what to do, then he took a letter out of his pocket. "Give this to him. And make sure he reads it before he goes up. It's important."

Sam turned the letter gingerly in his hand, frowning at it as he closed the door.

Mr. Eddie looked up from the rubbing table. "What's up, Sam?"

"Man name' Corey done brought you a letter. Don' know ef you should read it, time like this."

"Corey!" Mr. Eddie sat up straight. "He was a friend of Doc's, Sam. Doc was always talkin' about him. He was with Doc at the hospital. Let's see that."

Sam gave him the letter and watched him rip the envelope open and flick his eyes over the paper. The boy looked up, gulping. "Come around here, Sam," he said strangely.

"Read over my shoulder."

Sam walked around and peered at the letter. "Eddie boy," it said, "I'm lying here in the hospital waiting for the sawbones to haul me upstairs and operate on me. They tell me my chances are fifty-fifty. So I've doped out a plan for your fight with McCracken, like when we fought Maxie Davis. Corey says he'll deliver it to you before you go up, in case... well, you know.

Now you got the title sewed up, kid. You can kill this McCracken. All you got to do is go out at the bell and left hand him crazy. Stay up on your toes. Go on the bike when you have to. Keep that chin down like I told you, and wait him out. McCracken looks flashy, but his legs are tinny. And in the second...

The boy looked at Sam with tears in his eyes. But he was smiling. "It's a chart, Sam. It's a blueprint. Poor old Doc. He said he'd never let me down again, didn't he?"

Sam turned away and wiped a hand over his eyes. "He sure did."

"We'll take the letter up with us," the boy said happily. "You can feed me the dope between rounds, Sam. It'll be almost like havin' Doc with us."

There was a knock on the door and a voice yelled through it: "Time, Eddie."

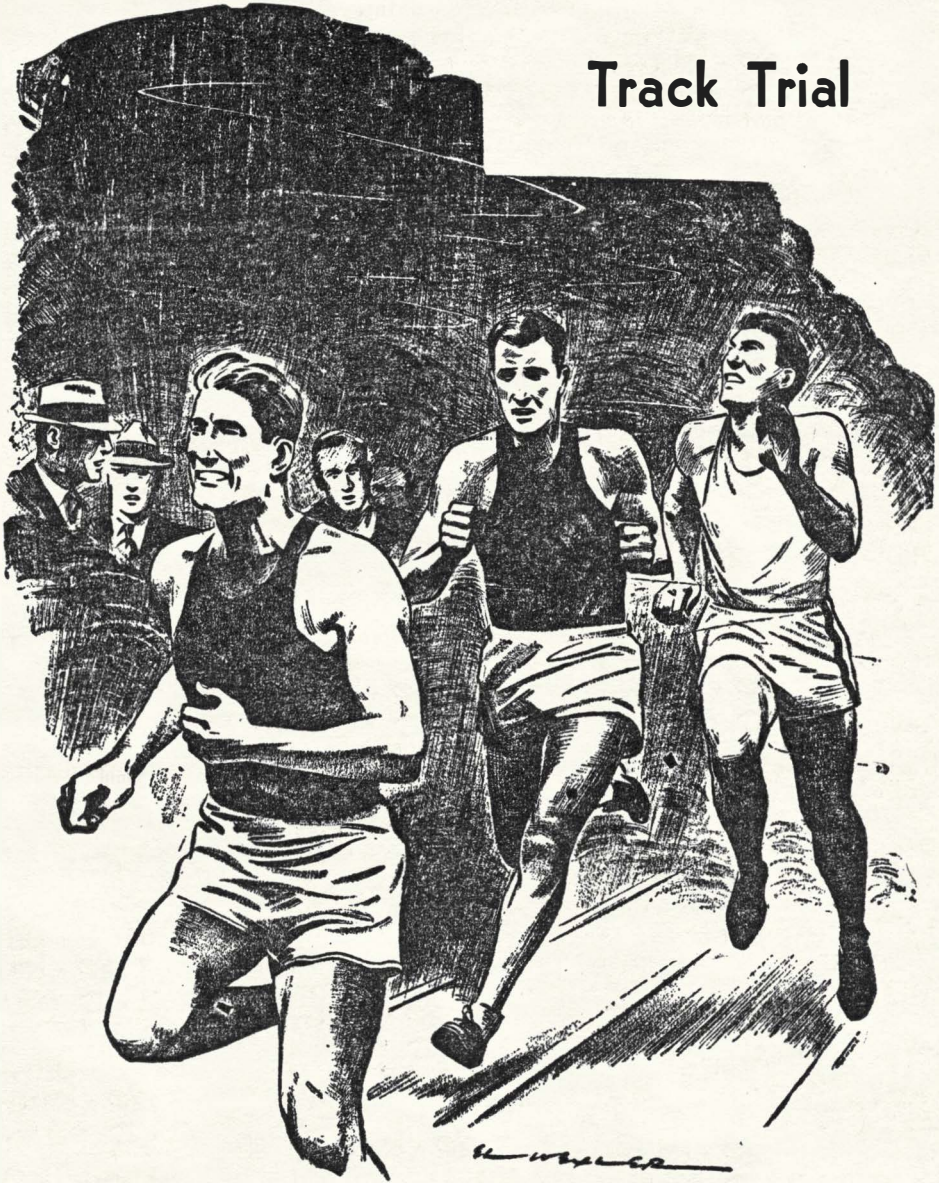
The boy held out the letter, smiling. "Okay, Sam?"

"Yes, suh!" Sam grinned. "We's ready now, Mist' Eddie."

Thank you, Lawd, he whispered, taking the letter.



Track Trial



By ROE RICHMOND

"You've got a natural ability that these other boys sweated blood to build up, Dudley - - but you're soft. No guts. You won't try to do better than what's easy for you!"

DUDLEY STOOD easily waiting at the end of the cinder runway to the broad-jumping pit, a tall indolent figure with hands on hips. His turn came and he measured the distance, swung forward into smooth effortless stride. He didn't hit the take-off right and his jump lacked height and drive, but it didn't matter much. He'd hit it in the meet.

"About twenty-one, Dud," an assistant manager said.

"Yeah, my timing was off," Dudley said carelessly.

"And that's not all, Dudley," said Coach Hoyt, a lanky angular man with an old cap pulled over his sharp-beaked face. "You'll never do better than twenty-four in your life if you don't get more speed into your run and develop that scissor-kick in the air."

"Twenty-four's usually good enough in the Conference," Dudley said smiling.

Hoyt shook his head impatiently. "But why be satisfied when you could do a lot better? What's the matter with you, Dudley? It's the same story in the high-jump. You'll never be much better than six feet because you won't work at it. With your ability you ought to break records."

"I like to win," Dudley said. "But I don't care much about breaking records."

"I wish something would happen to wake you up, Dudley. I'd like to see you go all the way out sometime, but you're too damned lazy, I guess. It comes easy for you to be a fair jumper so you let it stop there. With a little spirit and drive you could be a *great* jumper, boy!" Hoyt's voice was fierce like his narrow eyes. "This meet today is going to be close, in case you care."

"I'll give you two firsts," Dudley said casually. "That'll help some."

"You'll give them because you can do it without much effort," Hoyt said tightly.

"They count just as much," Dudley reminded. "Just as much as if I strained my heart and guts out for them, the way Cookie does."

"You could learn a lot from that boy Cook," Hoyt told him grimly. "At least he's got the heart and the guts to give."

"I could learn to be a sucker from lots of people," smiled Dudley. "But it seems to me there are enough suckers in the world already."

Coach Hoyt grimaced with disgust, knotted his fists, and walked away. Dudley laughed quietly and took another trial jump. This take-off was timed to perfection and he got height and better distance, but he didn't bother to try the kick.

"About twenty-four, Dud," the manager said. "None of these guys can touch that."

DUDLEY PULLED on his crimson sweat-suit and nodded matter-of-factly. He was a good-looking boy with a clear face, sensitive mouth, and a proud head. His eyes were mild and level and gray. His wavy dark hair was cropped short.

"Let's try a couple high-jumps, Dud," suggested Bonar, a serious, stocky Italian boy. Bonar had little natural talent as a jumper, but he worked hard and poured everything into his efforts; and he usually placed in both events.

"No, I guess not," Dudley answered. "They haven't got anybody who can go six feet."

"You could go four inches over six, Dud," Bonar said, "if you'd practice more."

"So what?" drawled Dudley, turning to survey the stands that were bright with feminine color under the spring sunshine.

"So you're a loafer," grinned Davies, the dash man. "You get your points without working up a sweat. We have to earn ours."

"Strong legs and weak minds, you mean," kidded Dudley. "Can I help it if I'm smart?"

"You used to sprint in high school, Cookie tells me," Davies said, earnest now. "Cookie says you used to run under ten seconds."

"Sure, but I didn't enjoy it much."

"We need another sprinter, Dud."

"You've been doing all right, Dave, seems to me."

"My leg still bothers," Davies said. "That muscle I pulled. It still catches and hurts like hell, cuts my speed. I'm kind of worried today, Dud. Why don't you try the dashes?"

Dudley shook his head. "I'm a specialist now."

Laughter boomed over them, coming from Moose Mitchie, the giant weight-thrower. "A specialist in soft-living," scoffed Moose. "A super sis-sy, that's Dudley."

"Don't make me mad," Dudley drawled. "We can't all be piano-movers, Moose."

Captain Cook, distance runner, joined the group of Crimson track-and-field stars. Cook was tall and thin and gawky-looking, with a pale chinless face and pale frightened eyes behind glasses.

"How's your leg, Dave?" he asked. "Moose, you'll have competition today. Of course Dudley here has his two firsts in the bag already."

"How about you, Cookie?" asked Dudley. "They say Gregory is hot."

"One of the best in the country," Cook said. "It'll be tough winning from him."

"You'll do it, Cookie," said Dudley with gentle mockery. "Or burst a lung trying."

"Yes, I guess I will," Cook said in utter sincerity. "Dud, you ought to enter the dashes today. Dave is lame, and we need you; we need those points. You used to break ten seconds in high school."

"I haven't sprinted for years," protested Dudley. "Forgotten how to start. It might hurt my jumping, too."

"What the hell?" Moose Mitchie growled. "Jumpers ought to pay admission to these meets."

"Easy now, Muscle Man," chided Dudley. "Just because you happened to inherit the strength of a horse or two—"

Davies said nervously: "I got to warm up, it's almost time for the hundred. Wish you'd come in, Dud."

"Sorry, Dave, but I wouldn't be any help. Probably get left at the post or fall on my face or something. You'll breeze in."

"Hope so," Davies said frowning, and moved away.

Cook clutched Dudley's arm with surprising strength. "That boy's sprinting on a leg most men wouldn't even walk on. You watch him, Dudley."

DUDLEY watched. It was obvious that Davies' leg troubled him considerably. Warming up he had a little hitch in his stride and his face was set in harsh lines. A faint prickle of guilt touched Dudley, but he shook it off with impatience. If a guy was crazy enough to run with a bum leg it was his own fault. Western's best dash man was a powerful Negro named Sampson. Even if Dave were right it was doubtful if he could match the driving speed of Sampson.

The start was pretty even with Davies a bit slow and the other shooting out front. Dave pumped furiously away to draw even at the halfway mark, his face all twisted out of shape. The others fell back leaving Sampson and Davies to fight it out. The big one had tremendous leg-drive that pulled him ahead. Davies gave all he had but it wasn't enough. That break in his stride slowed him a lot. Sampson snapped the tape two yards ahead of Davies. The time was announced as 9.7.

Some impulse sent Dudley over to slap Dave's heaving shoulders and say, "Nice trying, boy." It was something he had never done before. In fact he had secretly ridiculed those athletes who did do it.

Davies was shaking his head and swearing, his face drawn and etched with pain. The big Sampson, surrounded by Western men, was laughing and joking loudly, and Dudley felt sudden anger against him. Sampson was sure to take the two-twenty also. In his quick flare of feeling Dudley thought of entering the two-twenty and pictured himself leading Sampson to the finish line. But this died out abruptly. The competitive spirit was not keen in Dudley; he had grown soft.

Coach Hoyt was talking to Davies: "You better not run again, Dave. That leg is bad, and you might make it worse."

"It's all right, Coach," Davies said.

"Probably can't win, but we can use another second place."

They lined up for the two-twenty. Sampson was strutting and flashing his white teeth, powerful black body gleaming in the sun; Davies looked small and weak beside him. This time Dave got off fast and led the first hundred yards. Then Sampson started moving up, black legs driving, driving. They ran almost even the second hundred, but the effort cost Davies dearly. His face was knotted into a grotesque mask. His stride faltered and the other streaked ahead of him and won by five yards. But Dave got that second place the Crimson needed.

Davies flopped on the turf and they worked on his leg while he sobbed silently and bitterly under his shielding forearm. Sampson was laughing and jabbering happily nearby, ringed with admirers.

WHEN THEY got ready for the running broad-jump Sampson was among them, and Dudley started with surprise; the big boy grinned at him.

"They tell me you're the man I got to beat. I never did much jumping, but I reckon I can go twenty-four feet or more."

"Make it interesting anyway." Dudley said coldly.

"Sure will," chortled Sampson. "Don't you worry about that."

Dudley was upset by the unexpected presence of the hard-driving Sampson; he timed his first take-off poorly and jumped only twenty-two feet seven inches. There was a chill, sinking sensation in his stomach. Sampson had little form and finesse, but he attained great speed in the take-off and hurled himself into the air like a huge projectile. Twenty-three nine, more than a foot over Dudley's mark. It was between those two it seemed, until Bonar leaped twenty-three six, the best he had ever done.

"I got that kick," Bonar said with quiet satisfaction. "Took me a long time but I got it."

For the first time Dudley knew the fear of failure. He wished he had

perfected the kick now, recalling Hoyt's words: "If you'd get more speed for the take-off and use that kick in the air you'd go twenty-six or better."

Dudley tried too hard on his second attempt, misjudging the distance and changing his stride, but springing off his left foot with a mighty effort to sail high over the long pit. Twenty-three eleven, even with a bad take-off. Still it wasn't enough to be safe.

"Pretty good jump," conceded Sampson, before driving himself down the runway and hurtling into the air. Twenty-four feet two, and he was out front.

Dudley was sick and empty with panic. His stomach fluttered and his legs quivered. He was used to winning his two events without too much trouble. The unaccustomed dread of defeat turned him weak... Bonar jumped with feet sawing the air and made twenty-three seven. Dudley thought: *At least I've got second place.* He had never done better than twenty-four four in his life, and now he had to do better to win. Suddenly he realized there was no consolation in placing second. He had to win; nothing else mattered.

Dudley gathered himself for his last try and raced forward with smooth speed, gaining momentum with every stride. His left foot found the board squarely and he sprang up and out with supreme power. Flying through the air he knew it was a good jump, he could feel it, and the gasp of the spectators confirmed it. Dudley knew exultance before they measured the distance. Twenty-four feet eight inches. He had come through under pressure.

"Where you get them wings on your feet?"

There was still a chance that Sampson might better Dudley's mark, but it was a thin one. Bonar said: "Great going, Dud, you've got him. Wish I could cop second."

SAMPSON made a gallant try and cleared twenty-four again, but only by an inch. With training, though the big powerhouse would do

twenty-five or more consistently. Dudley saw the necessity of improving himself. If Bonar kept gaining he'd be number one instead of Dudley for the Crimson. Now Bonar launched himself in a desperate final attempt, pedalling hard in the air to get those precious extra inches. He made twenty-four feet three inches and took second place from Sampson by an inch.

"Attaboy, Bone, attakid!" Dudley let himself go with such unusual freedom and spirit that Bonar looked surprised. "That's jumping."

"It'll help some," Bonar said simply. "Surprised me too, Dud."

They walked together to check on the points of other events, and people crowded round to congratulate them. Western won the four-forty. Moose Mitchie captured firsts for the Crimson in the shot-put and hammer-throw, breaking the Conference record in the latter. Western took the javelin toss, but Dixie Lee scaled the discuss to victory for the Crimson. The meet was very even and close. Dudley realized that he had never paid so much attention to other events and team scores as he was doing today. The teams split even on the low and high hurdles.

"We've got to take the high-jump, boys," Coach Hoyt said. "They tell me Sampson does better than six now."

"We'll push him higher than that, won't we Bone?" Dudley said, and Hoyt's leathery face showed slight surprise. It was probably the first time Dudley had thought and expressed anything in terms of We instead of I.

Contrary to his usual custom Dudley shed his sweat togs and started jumping immediately without waiting until the bar was raised a few notches. He knew he was going to have a tough time with Sampson and he wanted to be ready. As the bar reached five-nine they began failing and dropping out. At five-eleven there were four men left: Dudley and Bonar for the Crimson, Sampson and Lundeen for Western. At the six-foot level Lundeen was eliminated, and Bonar barely cleared it on his third try.

Sampson was still jumping easily with a natural grace; Bonar had reached his limit and only nerve and will could carry him higher. Dudley himself had never done much better than six, but today there was a new incentive in it. He was no longer jumping for himself alone. Cookie had told him to watch Davies, and he had watched and learned. Bonar had given him another lesson. Dudley was jumping for all of the gang, Cookie, Dave, Moose, Bone, Dixie Lee, Van Orden, Coach Hoyt, and the rest, and for the points they needed.

"I hear you boys don't go much higher'n six," grinned Sampson.

"We go higher if necessary," returned Dudley.

At a half-inch over six feet Bonar squirmed over without a thing to spare. Sampson's mighty drive and spring carried him over on the second try. Dudley soared across safely in his first jump.

THE BAR STOOD at six-one. Bonar failed to clear it, just brushing it off with his arm on the last attempt. Bonar felt bad, but Dudley told him he'd done a swell job. Bonar had never made six before today. Seeing what hard work and intensive drill could do, Dudley regretted his own laxity. He could have perfected his timing, increased his leg-power, smoothed that body twist, and gone inches higher. He would do exactly that hereafter, but it didn't help him now. All along he had heeded the challenge that Sampson offered.

Sampson went over at six-one and seemed to have plenty left in reserve. "I feel like jumping all day long," he said.

"You'll have to if you win this one," said Dudley. He missed his first try at six-one and landed rather awkwardly in the pit. It jarred his body and shook his confidence momentarily. But when he started forward for another take-off he felt fine, swift and strong and unbeatable. He gauged the distance and timed his spring, going up in clean sure flight, twisting at the top of it, and dropping lithely into the soft

pit, the bar still secure on the uprights.

It went up to six-two and looked impossibly high. Sampson topped it with his vast bouncing power and his teeth shone in a grin. Dudley missed once, missed twice, and had a bitter foretaste of failure. He was sweating and dust-smearred from the pit. With a steel will he shut out all thoughts of failing and everything else but going over that bar. And he went over it with supple coordination and an inch to spare. Sprawled in the pit he felt a warm happy glow.

It was at six feet three inches when Sampson was forced out. He grinned at Dudley and said: "You're better than I am at this, I guess, but I'd sure like to run you a race."

Dudley took off too far from the standards and knocked the bar off on his first chance. He was getting tired now, and he shouldn't be, he knew. Sampson had run two dashes and he was still fresh and strong. That was something else Dudley had to do, whip himself into real condition. That would add inches to his jumping. He hit the second take-off just right, swung high and steep, writhed his body desperately in midair, and dropped safely on the other side.

The crowd was cheering him, he found, but that didn't matter one way or another today. He had done his job and the Crimson had another first place. The officials asked him if he wanted to try it any higher, but Dudley shook his head and waved the idea aside. Once he might have gloried in the opportunity.

Dudley usually headed for the showers after the jumping events but today he stayed out there, wanting to see how this meet came out. He rubbed himself down with a towel and then relaxed while Baldy massaged his legs.

"It's awful close, Dud," Baldy said as he worked. "Good thing you won them jumps for us. Cookie lost the half-mile. That Gregory is a running fool, and Cookie don't feel good anyway. He's still half-sick from that gripe he had. He ran a nice race, but Gregory had too much for him."

"He ought to quit running if he's sick," Dudley said.

"Him quit?" Baldy scoffed. "That boy won't quit until he's dead. He maybe looks like a sissy but he's all heart and guts. He's still got the mile to run."

"Don't, it makes me tired to think of it," protested Dudley. "Cookie's a glutton for punishment all right."

"Listen, Dud," Baldy said, "and don't get sore. But if you had what Cookie's got with what you got yourself, you'd be a one-man track team."

Dudley laughed. "No thanks, Baldy, that's too big an assignment for me."

"You could do it," Baldy said. He looked up and across the field. "Well, Van Orden came through in the pole-vault. It's still running pretty even. If Cookie could only win the mile, but that Gregory's too good. I'm afraid. Then there's just the relay left, and that'll probably decide it."

THE MILE-RUN was on and Dudley moved over near the finish line. He had never had much respect for distance runners and little or no interest in their races. It seemed a dull, plodding, colorless sport, for boys like Cook who had no real athletic ability. But it took guts to run the half, throw up your lunch, and come back to run the mile. Dudley and Cook had been in high school together. Dudley had been the school hero, while Cook was a nobody, nothing at all, the school joke.

The runners were bunched the first lap, but on the second Gregory and Cook pulled ahead. Gregory was rugged and compact, looking strong enough to run the frail Cook into the ground. But when they came round the third time Cookie was still sticking at Gregory's shoulder. Gregory was running easily. Cook's face had a tortured look and he was beginning to labor. The pace was cruel.

The last lap. Gregory and Cook were well ahead of the field. Gregory began to increase the already killing pace, and somehow Cook stayed with him. Gregory put on

more pressure and Cook matched it stride for stride. The strain was terrible. Gregory was laboring now, and Cook's thin face was a mask of agony. It was painful just to watch it. Gregory tried to draw away, but Cookie stayed with him. The stands were roaring and Dudley caught some of the excitement and tension. They were in the stretch now running side by side. Something had to break now. Flesh and blood were strained to the limit and beyond.

Gregory's spikes seemed to catch and he stumbled a trifle and broke his stride. Cookie passed him and spurted for the tape with a superhuman kick-up. Cookie breasted the tape and collapsed into waiting arms. He had won and he had broken the track record.

Somebody said: "That must make it about even. It all depends on the relay now."

"Western'll sweep that all right, with Sampson and those other sprinters they've got. Davies'll have to run anchor and he's crippled with a charley horse."

Dudley shouldered his way through the milling crowd to where Coach Hoyt, Davies, and others were gathered about Captain Cook. They all seemed surprised to see Dudley there.

Dudley said: "Great race, Cookie boy." Cook tried to smile but it was more a ghastly grimace. Cookie looked like a corpse.

"Coach, I'd like to run in the relay," Dudley said simply.

Hoyt looked up, studied him, and nodded. "Okay, that's fine. We can use you all right."

"Thank you," Dudley said.

"Dud," panted Cookie with difficulty. "I'm—glad—to hear—that. Awful—glad."

"And I want to thank you, too, Cookie," said Dudley.

DAVIES SAID: "We've got to take the relay to win. Dud, you better run anchor in my place. I can't go on this leg. You'll be running against Sampson most likely. Make it three straight over him, Dud."

Dudley nodded gravely. "I hope

it's Sampson." Seeing those clean tanned young faces around him, grim and earnest and set, shining with faith and hope, Dudley was ashamed of his past indifference, his selfishness, his proud isolation. What the hell did he have to feel superior about? They were all better men than he was. But at least he was one of them now. Giant Moose Mitchie clouted him on the back and cursed him fondly. Dixie Lee grinned and insulted him good-naturedly. Bonar pressed his arm, Van Orden gave him the thumbs-up salute.

"I never ran the quarter much, Dave," Dudley admitted.

"It's just a prolonged dash," Davies told him. "A long sprint. If your man is in front stick close to him. If you get the baton first just run like hell and keep running."

"Hope I don't drop in the stretch."

"You won't you'll be all right. Do you know how to take the wood?"

"I used to. Maybe we'd better run through it a couple times. And say, are my spikes long enough, Dave?"

Davies bent to examine them. "Yeah, they're long enough, and it's better to use your own shoes. You're used to them, Dud. A strange pair might throw you off. Now you start running and you take the stick like this, Dud..."

The Crimson team was to run as follows: Sherman, Dixie Lee, Davies, and Dudley. Hoyt talked to the four athletes. He said on paper Western had the fastest team, but this was going to be run on cinders. He said in many ways this had been a significant afternoon. Striking examples had been set by Captain Cook, Davies, Moose Mitchie, Van Orden, by Dudley and Bonar. Perhaps the most important thing was that Dudley had really joined the track team for the first time. The relay runners could welcome him by giving him a lead over Sampson in the final lap, a lead he would need.

Dudley, who had scorned emotion in athletics, felt a queer hollow singing in his chest. His eyes smarted and blinked, his throat felt tight, his legs trembled tautly, and his spine prickled coldly. The earnest sim-

licity of Hoyt's speech got him.

The runners took their positions. The watching thousands were tense and silent. Sherman and the Western first-lapper crouched for the start. The gun bopped and they were off in the mile relay. The Westerner led all the way in that first quarter, but Sherman pressed him hard and the difference was small.

Dixie Lee, running like wildfire, regained the lost yards and built up some additional ones for the Crimson, knowing that Davies with his bum leg needed an advantage. Davies took the baton fifteen yards ahead of his opponent, but the Western flyer cut that lead bit by bit as they circled the cinderpath.

DUDLEY AND Sampson were in position waiting now. The Negro grinned at Dudley: "You beat me jumping; I'm going to run the legs right off'n you and win this here meet."

"Maybe," Dudley said shortly. He didn't dare to talk much because he knew his voice would crack.

The lame Davies was fighting a great fight but losing his lead foot by foot. Dudley knew what every step was costing Dave, and the knowledge fired his blood. It was almost a dead-heat, but Dudley's fingers closed on the wood before Sampson got his baton, and Dudley was off to a slight advantage.

At the first turn Dudley could feel Sampson closing up on him, and he strove to keep his stride smooth and steady, and not yield to any frantic premature spurts. Sampson came abreast on him and they raced along side by side. The noise of the crowd beat across the field like distant surf. Dudley strained to increase his pace. The other rose to the challenge and stayed beside him. And then slowly but surely Sampson crept to the fore, his long black legs flashing faster. A yard ahead, two yards, three long yards... Dudley poured everything into closing that gap.

Dudley's lungs were bursting with fire and there was a dinning in his skull. Plying legs and arms with increased fury he kept his eyes fas-

tened on that powerful running dark figure ahead. They were in the stretch now and the surf boomed nearer. Four hundred and forty yards was too far to sprint. But Cookie ran a losing half, was sick, and came back to win the mile. Cookie, the teacher's pet. Dudley lifted himself forward with every ounce. The other was closer now. Dudley's spikes chewed the cinders even faster, brought him up nearer to Sampson, kept him clinging there.

Sampson sensed the threat and half-turned his head; for a vital instant he lost his rhythm and wavered in his sweeping stride. Dudley drove harder and swifter with legs that already felt numb and dead. He came along-side of Sampson and strained to pass ahead. Dudley's chest was crushed, his head bursting, but a white flame lashed him on. The finish line was close now. The roar of the crowd was inseparable from the pounding in his skull. Sampson was still with him. With a mad urgency Dudley leaped into a final spurt. Sampson was gone all at once, and Dudley was running free and wild and all alone.

Dudley never felt the tape against his straining chest. He only knew that his legs stuttered and melted, faces blurred and swirled before him, and he felt cinders under his palms and his knees.

Coach Hoyt was with him, saying: "You did it, Dud. I knew you could do it, boy. You ran the greatest quarter I've ever seen."

Dudley shook his hot dripping head. "I'm rotten-shape," he gasped out. "Awful. Ashamed—of—myself—no good."

"You can change that quick enough, Dud," Hoyt assured him. "You won the meet for us."

"I'll—change—all right," sobbed Dudley.

"Sure, and you'll run the hundred and two-twenty for us."

"Damn right," panted Dudley. "I will. And broad-jump—twenty-six feet. And high-jump—six-six. And—maybe more."

THE END

Big League Stage Fright

A Complete Novelet

TUFFY AMBERS chirped some encouragement from the short-stop position. Big Redmond ran over a few steps from first and called something. Wild Ed Tolman on the hill for the Blues nodded to him. He had already okayed the sign from his catcher, Murray. Wild Ed hitched at his pants, checked the runners on first and second, then went into his stretch. It was the seventh inning with the Blues leading the visitors, the Stars, by a 4-2 margin. But anything could happen now.

Wild Ed could feel the cold sweat worming its way down his spine inside his monkey suit. He was fighting against tightening up. Then the wide mouth of his young red face flattened and he fired in that curve on the outside Murray had called for. His curve broke too soon. The batter saw it was going to be wide and refused to fish. That made it ball two, a 2 and 0 count. Ed thought he could hear the pounding of his heart.

"The busher is blowing up—again!" bawled one of the Star base coaches. "He's coming apart at the seams, the bum! He's all through!"

"Take it easy, kid," yelled Tuffy Ambers. "We're all behind you, ol' boy. Remember, you got a club, eight men, backing you up, kid!"



He was Wild Ed, the wonder-man up from the minors, fresh with fifty-seven varieties of rave notices. But now, in his big chance, he found himself going to pieces and he knew he wouldn't get another break. Nope—when a touted rookie flops as bad as he was flopping, he's through for keeps!



Wild Ed hunched his broad rangy shoulders, put on a grin. He appreciated the encouragement, and he knew they were behind him. But, too, he knew himself. And he was afraid. Right then, he wished he were back in the minors. Back in the minor league where he'd earned that name of Wild Ed because when the breaks went against him, when he got in trouble, he used to just rear back and glare at the hitter and wheel that thing in there. Back in the minors where he had a reputation for coming up with the big third strike. Now, things were different.

An infield boot and a wind-twisted drive to the outfield had put him in this hole. It wasn't his own fault; he had been working a slick game. But that made no difference to him as he tried to close his ears against the verbal lashes of the rival bench jockeys; he was in the hole and tightening up. Since he'd been bought by the Blues this Spring, he'd developed that one big weakness.

Squatted back behind the bat, Lou

By **CLIFF
CAMPBELL**

Murray called for a fast one on the outside corner. He was working on the basis the "take" would be on, that the hitter would figure it for another curve on the outside. Wild Ed tried to recover his former tough-minded attitude, tried to tell himself there was no reason he couldn't do it, no reason why he couldn't get away with it.

"These guys still have to put on their pants one leg at a time, just like in the minors," he said to himself. And then he winged it in there with plenty of hop on it.

IT WAS TOO fat, the pitch too good. Afraid of throwing another called ball, he'd come in with it well inside the corner of the plate. The Star hitter slashed at the big pitch. Chuskowski on third made a wonderful diving try, did succeed in knocking it down, but the ball dribbled away out into left. Before it was retrieved, one run came in and the other runner was around to third. The hitter was camped on first. And there was only one down. Ed heard a couple of relief men start thudding them into a catcher's glove out in the bullpen. And Lou Murray called time and came out for a word.

"Keep your chin up, kid," the veteran backstop told him. "You had these birds eating out of your hand. They just got lucky. But, for the luvva Pete, quit throwing up that fat stuff!"

Wild Ed Tolman nodded. "Sure, I'll get these bums!" But they were empty words because he was not convinced himself he could. Or would. He sneaked a look at the bench. Red-haired half bald Deacon Vernon, Blues manager was sitting in there in the dugout with his eagle-eyed stare fastened right on Ed.

This was the big test game for him, Ed Tolman knew. He had come up to the Blues, highly touted and with terrific press write-ups as one of the hottest things to come out of the American Association in years. The Blues had paid a fancy price for him as well as throwing in two players. Great things had been expected of him. In May he had looked like the sensation he was predicted to be.

He'd hooked up a winning streak of six straight, dropped one, come back to win two more. And then the big trouble had started.

Some expert called him a front runner, said he was hot when he was winning. But that when he got in trouble, he blew, he choked up, and began coming in there with those fat pitches that could really be bludgeoned. Opposing clubs got wise. And while Wild Ed knew he didn't choke up, he did realize that the pressure of major league competition did get to him. When he got in a jam, he started to lose confidence in his ability to shave the corners and came right in there with his offerings. Then the boom-boom would begin.

"Okay, boy," Ambers called from short.

Murray gave him the sign, then shifted over to the extreme edge of the catcher's box. It was going to be a deliberate walk to load them up, then go for the double play. Ed sent four wide ones up there and the hitter threw away his lumber and jogged up to first to put three on. Wild Ed put his glove under his arm and rubbed the palms of his hands on his pants. He was sweating so his hands were greasy. This was it.

A PINCH hitter stepped in there. Murray called for a curve just below the knees. Ed Tolman delivered it. She snapped in sharply, but the batter refused to bite. A ball. Ed had all his stuff, had control, had the hot pitch with his usual hop on it. But there was the one thing he had to be afraid of in the clutch. He looked around. Over in the box behind first was his new girl, Louise, a statuesque brunette. He sure didn't want to look bad before her.

His infield was talking it up, but the whole park was in such a bedlam now he could barely hear them. He toed the rubber. Murray flashed the sign for a pick-off throw to first. Ed fired it over with that deceptive motion he had to Redmond. But the runner had slid back, and Redmond bulletted it across the diamond to third, a special play the Blues had.

Chuskowski dropped the ball though. Wild Ed had that sinking feeling. Murray gave him the sign for the pitch. The hitter fouled it off. Another ball. Then Ed came through with the fast one on the hands for a called strike. Ed let go his breath; for a moment, he'd thought he'd missed the plate. Murray called for the big hook on the inside to break over. Ed stretched and uncorked it.

The hitter's bat came around. There was a sharp crack. Tuffy Ambers at short made a terrific try as he went deep. He knocked it down but it was a hit and the runners from second and third dashed over the plate to knot up the score.

The stocky Lou Murray pulled the mask off his tomato-hued face and came out to talk to Wild Ed again. "Look, kid! These guys want a hit. Make 'em; but don't give them anything good. Don't come in with that fat pitch!"

Wild Ed nodded, the inside of his mouth feeling like something that had been dehydrated. He knew now any moment he was in danger of being derricked by Deacon Vernon. Caswell the second baseman came in and talked encouragingly to him and slapped his long back. He sneaked a fast one past the next man, a dangerous hitter of the Stars, for strike one. The man went for a change-up curve and fouled it into the stands for another strike. Ed looked around at the runners on first and third, jerked at the peak of his cap, came through with two outside pitches the hitter refused to bite at. Murray called for the curve just at the knees. Ed saw the manager, Vernon, on the dugout step, wigwagging the bullpen to work faster. The pitcher tried to tell himself he didn't give a hang, that he could walk this man if he had to and still not force in another run. But he didn't want to get in any more trouble, didn't want the mental strain of having those sacks loaded again. He side-armed it in.

And the delivery was several inches above the knees, breaking too soon and coming right in there too fast. The hitter teed off. It was a sinking liner over shortstop and into left

center for a sharp single. Both base runners dashed in to put the Stars two runs in front. And Deacon Vernon came walking out onto the field.

"Give me the ball, Tolman," he said drily as he signalled with his fingers to the bullpen for the relief man he wanted to come in.

Wild Ed Tolman knew this was the end for him with the Blues, probably in the majors. He was the guy who choked up in the clutch. No other big league club would want him either; it was finis....

HE WALKED off the field as Tammis came in to take over the pitching duties. He walked on off into the clubhouse, the forgotten man now. Trying not to think, he stripped and showered and got a rub-down. He hated to admit it but he knew he was about licked. When the clutch came, he didn't blow up or lose control. But under pressure, when it seemed as if he might lose, since he'd come up to the Blues, he had that weakness of coming through with it too fat, of making the pitch too good. Just as it had happened today. And he was afraid it would happen that way all the time. It was going to happen, he was certain now, what that sports writer friend had told him. Namely that Deacon Vernon, who prided himself on his handling of pitchers, had been dickering for a veteran hurler in the International League.

"Wonder how I'll go in the International?" Ed Tolman asked himself as he sat hunched over on a dressing room bench. "Maybe I'll always be this way now when the clutch comes on?"

Then the club tramped in, not talking much. They had dropped it, 6-5, and they sort of detoured around Wild Ed. It wasn't out of resentment. But they knew what he knew, that he was slated to go, to leave the club. Ball players are that way.

Vernon tromped in and entered his office without a word to anybody. He hated to lose. And that day's lose had dropped the team out of a tie for second place, moved them back into third. Then the sports writers came

in. A couple of them came over to interview Wild Ed.

"What the hell happened out there today, kid?" one asked. "You were going along pretty slick. And suddenly you seemed to lose it."

Wild Ed put on an act, refusing to wear his broken heart on his sleeve. He gave them a big infectious grin. He was a nice kid to look at, tall and long limbed with a flat body and a big grin under short-cropped blonde hair. Without trying, he exuded an aura of good health and vitality. And he didn't believe in looking down in the mouth although he actually was. He even made himself chuckle.

"Just one of those tough ones," he said easily. "They were swinging with their eyes closed and caught hold of a couple. I wasn't tired; I had all my stuff. But they seemed to know what was coming."

The sports reporters didn't laugh. The stocky one said, "Seems to have been happening with monotonous regularity lately, doesn't it, Tolman?"

It was hard stuff to swallow, but Wild Ed forced the big grin again. "Those bums were lucky, and my luck has been running bad. Watch me next time out. I'm due for a few wins, I think."

THEN HE was standing there all alone as they walked off to interview some of the other players. He wasn't the big important figure anymore. But he pulled on a sports jacket and swaggered out as if he were still as big a guy as he'd been touted when he came up from the minors. He met Louise, the brunette, outside the park. She had a slightly frigid attitude.

"Wonder Boy sure didn't live up to his press clippings today," she said after they were in a taxi.

Wild Ed laughed it off and dropped an arm around her shoulders. "Just one of those unlucky days, baby. A guy can't win 'em all. Maybe they stole our signs, one of their base coaches. I don't know. A guy can't win 'em all." But he knew inside he hadn't won in a long time. That in his last three starts he'd been driven from the box. Still, he wasn't

going to whine, he wasn't going to go around like a whipped dog. His last sole hope was to exude confidence as if he himself at least still believed everything was all right.

They had dinner though there was little pleasure in it for him. Then they went to a little intimate place where there was dancing. It was a hot summer's night though and afterward they went up and sat at the bar. Wild Ed kept drinking cokes. He attracted women and liked their company. But he always had been strict about keeping training. There was a radio on behind the bar. And a late evening sports announcer came on the ether waves, one of those I-know-the-inside-story and straight-from-the-feedbox lads. Ed pricked up his ears when he heard the Blues mentioned.

"After today's ignominious defeat when the Blues had the ball game practically iced away only to have the touted Wild Ed Tolman blow up," the announcer informed the world, "I have some special news for you. This is inside stuff. Wild Ed Tolman, who seems to have let his great press notices go to his head, will not be wearing a Blues uniform much longer. And no other major league club in the circuit has evinced much interest in him despite the feelers put out. No, my friends. The Big Bust, meaning Tolman, who has a trick of ignoring his battery mate's signals, is slated for the minors. Deacon Vernon right now is dickering for a veteran hurler from the International League, a pitcher who won't blow in the tough spots... In racing today..."

THE BARTENDER changed the program to some music. Wild Ed was so mad he could scarcely see straight. He wouldn't have blamed anybody about the rumor he was going to go, but the false allegation that he crossed up his catcher made him furious. He swore under his breath. And when he looked over at the brunette, he got a cold eye. The shapely Louise was a model who figured to advance herself by being seen with celebrities and important peo-

ple. Now, she didn't think Ed Tolman was important at all.

"And after all your big talk," she needled him. "You, the little boy who wasn't awed by any of these big league hitters! You who were going to start another winning streak! Ha-ha!"

Ed kept his mouth buttoned up. He knew he'd boasted some, but it was just his sanguine optimistic way. Until that seventh inning this afternoon, he'd thought he might come through. He knew he had the pitching equipment to do the job and the heart. But when they threatened him, he overcontrolled. He reddened under her mockery. But he grinned back.

"They tell me Feller even loses them *sometimes*, lady," he came back. "And now I think we'd better go before your overwhelming passion for me throws you into my arms in public!" He was paying the check when she went back to the powder room. Then he saw the big smooth-looking man in his thirties step up to the girl. Earlier he had noticed him on the dance floor.

"A would-be pickup, eh?" Wild Ed said to himself and walked back down the bar of the club.

And Louise, the flirt, tried to pull a fast one. "Oh, Ed, this is Bob Brown, an old friend of mine. Bob, meet Mr. Tolman."

Ed got mad. They hadn't spoken or recognized each other. And the monogrammed handkerchief lopping over the breast pocket of the man's suit bore the initials "H.C.B." "Cut the comedy act and don't try to crash in here," he told Brown.

Brown sneered. He was burly, a much heavier man than the pitcher. "Now run along and peddle your apples, boy. You don't want to get hurt, do you? Louise, how about a dance?"

She smiled up eagerly. Brown looked as if he might have plenty of money. But the angered Wild Ed stepped between them. "I said scram, Brown, or whatever your name is!"

BBROWN glared, thick lips hardening. The proverbial one word led to another. A waiter tried to in-

tercede. Brown finally spat, "I oughta take you out on the side walk and give you a lesson, kid!"

"Nobody's holding you back, brother," Wild Ed said softly. And they started out. Ed knew he was crazy to get himself involved. In his position, he shouldn't get involved in any brawls. But that broadcaster's allegation followed by Louise's sarcasm had had him already heated up. Outside he peeled off his sports jacket. And then the bigger man was coming at him.

It was short and sweet. They both missed, then Ed caught a hook flush on the eye as Brown struck from the shadows. The pitcher was rocked back and got hit twice again. Then he caught his man with a long left. Tore into him and pumped his hands to the body. Brown, out of condition, doubled. A punched to the head knocked him to a sitting position on the sidewalk. And a police prowl car rounded the corner and spotted them and whipped over to the curb beside them. Just to make matters worse, a newspaper photographer popped up out of nowhere, recognized the Blues pitcher, and immediately had his flashlight bulb in action. Wild Ed wished he were dead.

A very haughty Louise announced she would take herself home in a cab. Brown and Wild Ed were piled into the prowl car, the former threatening to enter all kinds of charges. They headed for the local precinct house. All Ed could think of was Deacon Vernon's reaction when he saw that photo in the morning papers.

At the precinct house, Ed got a break though. Brown had cooled down, said that perhaps he didn't want any more trouble. And there was a sensible sergeant on the desk. Neither man was drunk; Ed, of course, hadn't even been drinking. Instead of sending them down to Night Court, the sergeant told them to shake hands and go home.

When the pitcher entered the elevator of his hotel, he thought he saw the boy snicker. Up in the room he saw why. A nice shiner was forming on his left eye. It was going to be a beauty. He cursed and looked down

at the opened letter on the dressing table. It was from Laura, the girl in his home town. She was making a trip with her mother and would stop off in the city three days from now. When she saw that black eye and learned he had turned out a bust as a Blues pitcher—

Why he mightn't even be with the club then, he realized, as he started to undress. A bellhop knocked at the door. It was a telegram. And then he knew the Fates were really against him and pulling no punches. It was from that pert little blonde he'd met in Chicago. She was driving through with some friends and would be in town in three days from then too...

FIRST THING the next morning, after a hurried breakfast, he had a barber up from downstairs to see what he could do about painting over the discoloration of that black eye. There wasn't very much he could do. When he was finished with his handiwork, it still had an evil tinge with a fat mouse at the bottom. And then the phone rang. It was Deacon Vernon, Blues manager, of course. He had icicles in his voice as he ordered Ed Tolman to report at his office in the clubhouse inside of an hour.

En route, Ed picked up the morning tabloids. And the *Graphic* had a beauty picture of him standing on the sidewalk, hands fisted over the downed Brown as a policeman grabbed him by the shoulder. The caption made it even worse, running, "Failure of Blues Mound Staff in Nightclub Brawl Over Showgirl." Wild Ed knew it sounded as if he'd been out on a binge. Sucking in a deep breath and squaring his shoulders, he walked into Deacon Vernon's office.

The pilot let him have it with both barrels. "You big tramp, what the hell is the idea?" he crackled.

Ed tried to tell him. He swore he hadn't had a single drink, that it still had been comparatively early in the evening. But it sounded weak, and Vernon, usually a soft-spoken leader but harsh and blunt when aroused,

tore into him. It was plain he didn't believe the pitcher's version.

"We're paying you fancy money to keep in condition and play ball for us!" he roared. "And you certainly haven't been doing the latter, not by a damn sight, Tolman!" He was really burnt up because he now felt lack of physical condition might explain Wild Ed's collapse in the later innings of games. He went on to remind Ed of the Old Man, the owner, a strict churchgoer and a teetotaler, an owner who demanded a high moral tone of his club.

He paced back and forth across the office, raking what was left of his red hair repeatedly. He told Ed more than one player, and men with real promise, had run themselves out of the majors with their nightlife escapades.

"And you've betrayed your teammates in the bargain, Tolman! They've been out there day after day trying to win. Kept themselves in shape. Whether you have or not is an open question!"

Wild Ed bridled then, face white. "I told you I didn't have a drink last night... I don't drink, Vernon. And if you think you can call me—"

"I never heard a ball player who'd gotten into trouble admit he *had* been drinking!" Vernon cut him off harshly. "I'm fining you fifty dollars to begin with. There may be other steps later."

OUTSIDE the office, those last words echoed and re-echoed through his mind. Other steps... later... and he remembered what that sports broadcaster had said last night about certain changes to be made on the club. That little episode last night, Ed realized, had been as good as signing his own death warrant. He'd go down to the minors for certain now.

Some of the club began to come into the clubhouse. It was an open date but Vernon had scheduled a forenoon practise session. Tuffy Ambers and Big Redmond the first sacker rode him a little about the black eye.

Ed laughed it off, pulled the "But

you ought to see the other guy" line. There wasn't much said though. And when Chuskowski and Skin Innis, gangling centerfield clouter, arrived they said nothing. The easy-going always friendly kid pitcher could feel a coldness, a resentment. When he went over to Lou Murray the catcher to ask him about that radio sports commentator's charges regarding signals, Murray got up and headed for the end of the dressing room.

"Be back in a minute," he threw over his shoulder.

Going onto the field, he overheard Innis walking ahead with a couple of others. Innis was saying, "Blondes and batters don't mix for a pitcher. You start chasing around like that and first thing you know, the hitters are spanking your stuff all over the lot!"

Wild Ed understood fully then. Some of the club had turned against him, resented him. It was bitter medicine to take. He had an instinctive liking for other human beings and had never known what it was to be resented by fellow members of the ball club before.

He took his cuts in batting practice, then moved into the outfield and shagged fungoes until his uniform was sweat dyed. When he was waved off, he took a few laps around the field to keep his legs in shape. Afterward, showering, he wondered why he took the trouble when it was pretty obvious he wouldn't be with the club long. He was damned discouraged.

The next day the Chiefs came in for a three-game series. He sat in the dugout and watched Mac Gimlet, the big brick-faced southpaw, pitch a fine courageous game, repeatedly turning back the strong end of the powerful Chief batting order when threatened. But they had grabbed a 3-1 lead in the fourth, thanks to some lucky breaks. And the Blues were dead on their feet. They were playing automatic ball, not the kind of baseball that says we'll go out and get those dogs and smack 'em into the dirt. Three times they had opportunities to get a big inning going. But Wild Ed saw they had lost their

edge, their confidence in their own ability to win. They dropped the game, a loss for Gimlet he never deserved.

WILD ED walked into the clubhouse feeling lower than a caterpillar's instep. He knew what had brought the club to such a dispirited state of mind. He had, he and his ability to win after such a brilliant set of advance notices and such a hot start earlier in the season. They had come to count on him, figured he was what they needed, the key man in the race for the flag. And he had flopped miserably; he had let them down. With a little fire out there that afternoon they could have wrested that game from the cocky Chiefs. It was his fault they'd lacked that fire.

He got dressed and got out, his personal problems suddenly become a minor thing. He realized now what he'd done in a ball club that had believed in him, attached high hopes to him. He almost wished now he was already back in the minors, pitching in the International League. He didn't like the taste of this guilty feeling he had even though he knew he'd given his best. It was rugged to look at guys you'd come to know, teammates who'd backed you to the best of their ability, and get that stony look in return.

That was a long night for him. He slept fitfully, actually little, with long spells of restless wakefulness between the catnaps he did catch. He rose feeling listless and headachy. "Damn glad I won't be out on the Hill today," he told himself as he showered. Then there was a call from downstairs. Laura Baines and her mother were waiting in the lobby. He dressed and thanked God the eye had subsided markedly and went down and forced up a big cocky grin as he stepped out of the elevator. He felt better the moment he took Laura's two gloved hands in his.

He'd almost forgotten how cute she was, small, coming not quite to his shoulder, black-haired, with lovely soft blue eyes in a perfect oval of face. She was very trim and very

chic. And she had a way of saying, "Ed, dear," that made him feel important. He stood and fed his eyes on her.

"I'm here, too," said Mama. Mrs. Baines was a big battleship of a woman, a widow who since her husband's death thought the whole world was out to take advantage of her. As a defense gesture, she'd adopted a belligerent attitude, reacting always as if prepared to battle any wicked male to protect her honor and demonstrate her dominance.

Ed shook hands with her and said she looked younger every year and took them into the dining room for breakfast. And then he choked on his orange juice as he remembered Heloise, the blonde from Chicago, was due in that same morning. And she'd said she'd stay at his hotel. Re-cremations gnawed at him. Seeing Laura again, he wondered how or why he'd wasted any time on Heloise. She didn't compare with this cute alive hometown kid. But his world seemed to be falling in on him anyway.

LAURA CHATTED easily, telling him about folks back home. And how proud they were of him. He tried to take the bull by the horns then, acutely aware that if he had been a success he would have proposed to this girl who'd been his high school sweetheart.

"Well, baby, I haven't looked too hot of late," he said. "Been beaten in a few starts. Seems like the breaks have just been going against me."

"They don't expect you to win them all, do they? she came back loyally. And Wild Ed could have kissed her right then and there.

Mama Baines broke in, lips stiff around her false teeth as she said frigidly, "Young man, according to the sports writers—and I've been reading them—you're far from a success out here now! In fact, they're saying—"

And Laura put in quietly but effectively, "What they don't know about, Mother, is Ed's sore arm. It will be all right soon. But the club doesn't want the information to get

out. Ed told me in a letter, didn't you, dear?"

He could only nod dumbly, amazed at her loyalty and her quick-wittedness also. Then a bellboy bore down on the table. It was another telegram. At first he'd feared it was a message to the effect Heloise was out in the lobby. He opened it with none too steady hands. It was from Heloise. She was so sorry. Heloise wanted to inform him she was practically heart-broken with grief but the party had decided to visit some friends in the mountains en route. She wouldn't reach the city till the end of the week at the earliest and she didn't know just how she was going to exist till then. He could have cheered as he stuffed it into a pocket with some gag about a friend wanting him to get tickets for a coming game. Maybe his luck had changed.

Mama Baines eyed the pocket suspiciously and asked, "Well, Ed, do you pitch today?"

Wild Ed shrugged. "I think the manager wants to rest me."

And Laura put in, "Of course, Mother. They've been working Ed awfully hard lately."

"We'll be at the ball park anyway," Mama declared ominously. "By the way, young man, what happened to your eye?"

And once again Laura stepped into the breach. "A batted ball hit him, Mother. I told you. It was on one of those radio sports broadcasts."

GOING OUT to the ball park, dressing alone and in silence in the clubhouse, again Wild Ed realized what a swell guy that girl was. And when she'd mentioned radio sports broadcast, he knew too she must have heard the stories that he was on his way out. But she was standing by.

There was the pre-game drill. Bub Hannan was on the warm-up mound before the dugout, due to go for the Blues. Deacon Vernon was gambling. Hannan was a question mark since that early Spring operation on his elbow to remove some bone chips. It was a question as to whether he had

regained his full strength. And then one of the coaches came down to Wild Ed from the skipper and said:

"Go out to the bullpen, Tolman. The Deacon says so."

Windbreaker over his shoulder, pitcher's glove stuck in a back pocket, he took the long walk up the foul line to the bullpen outside of right field. He didn't dare look to where Laura and her mother were sitting, the spot he'd discovered before up behind first. This was the last complete ignominy, he, the one-time wonder boy, the young star, being sent out to the bullpen. A Hubbell in his prime or a Bobby Feller had never been sent there. This was Deacon Vernon saying he'd just have him out there in case. And Vernon would never use him anyway. When in trouble, you called in sharp dependable veterans from the pen, guys who didn't choke up in the clutches.

Hannan breezed through the first frame easily, retiring the Chiefs in order. The Blues came up. And when Skin Innis slammed one on a line into the right field stands with two on, the Blues jumped into a 3-0 lead.

Hooks Hoffman leaned back on the bullpen bench. "Might as well make ourselves comfortable, gents."

But in the second, the pattern was reversed. Bub Hannan whiffed the first man, then came apart at the seams. He walked the next on four straight balls. He wild-pitched him to second. Then he plunked the next man in the ribs to put him on. Hoffman and little Lauder with his fork ball stuff got up and began to throw to the bullpen catcher. When there was the solid crack of a single to bring in one run, they threw faster. Vernon wigwagged from the dugout as Hannan gave up another walk. There was a double out into right center and the score was tied up. Another smashing double and the Chiefs were in front, 4-3. And when Hannan handed out another free ticket to first, Deacon Vernon flashed the bullpen for Hoffman. Hooks went in and put out the fire for that inning. But in the third, the Chiefs jumped all over him, drove over to two more counters. He was derricked

and little Lauder brought in from the bullpen. Wild Ed kept throwing with another old-timer.

Lauder was in trouble from the first as he couldn't find the plate with his flutterball stuff. He walked two men in a row. When he pitched two wide ones to the next hitter, the embattled Deacon Vernon called time and went to the hill to get the ball. He signalled the bullpen. Wild Ed was paying little heed. And then the bullpen catcher said to him:

"It's you, Tolman." He had to repeat it. "Hey, kid, it's you he wants."

WILD ED could hardly believe it. Automatically he started the walk in. There were some boos from the bleacher fans. Ed swaggered even more, determined not to let anybody know how low he felt. He figured the thing. The game was as good as lost. The Deacon had used two of his bullpen staff. He wasn't going to waste another good man. So he was throwing in him, Wild Ed, to finish out the game. Ed took the hill and threw in his five pitches.

Bud Caswell on second called, "Come on, boy! You can do it!"

Murray came out. He said, "Don't serve this guy anything on the outside, high. He'll murder it. He's a bad ball hitter."

Wild Ed nodded. But he was doing everything woodenly. He checked the bases. Runners on first and third. One man out. It wasn't a nice predicament to walk into. And he realized he had fallen into such low repute with the Deacon that he was using him to pitch out a game already lost, a game they were practically conceding. He squared up his jaw and began to pitch. On the second offering, a changeup curve, the hitter sliced one to the mound. Wild Ed knocked it down, feinted the runner back to third, then made the play to first for the out. He began to pitch to the next man. Strangely enough, he felt looser than at any time since he had come up to the Blues. He whiffed that hitter for the third out.

The Blues couldn't do anything against that stuff Long Joe Hagan

of the Chiefs was firing at them in their half. The fourth inning started. The first man got a walk. Doc Wilkins, the Chiefs' cleanup man, really got hold of his fast one. But Tuffy Ambers at short made a great play, knocking it down and getting a forceout at second. Wild Ed stood on the hill, clenching the rosin bag, feeling the easy sweat work from his body. That was a good sign. He got the next two men on infield outs and walked off the field with a slight bit of his oldtime swagger.

"Keep it up, kid," Deacon Vernon said as he came into the dugout. "These guys never killed anybody yet."

IT WAS STILL 6-3 when the fifth opened. Wild Ed got the first two men. Then, on the third one, Big Redmond dropped a throw at first to make the man safe. Ed figured here was where the trouble started. But he found he still hadn't tightened up. He got the next man to bounce an easy one up the third baseline. And Chuskowski kicked it all around the place as he failed to find the handle on it. When he did throw, it was into the dirt at first. That put runners on first and third.

"Watch him blow!" yelled the Chief third base coach. "Here he goes! The big phony can't take the pressure! Here he goes!"

But Wild Ed didn't feel the familiar strain. He followed Lou Murray's signs carefully, working the corners, and got the count to 3 and 2. And then he blazed the fireball right through there, close to the hands, not fat, for a third strike and the third out of the inning. He could hardly believe it himself. He hadn't pitched like that since he'd come up from the minors.

He sat down in the dugout and found the answer. This was a game already lost, lost not by him but by other hurlers. He had no responsibility for it. Nobody could blame him for what had happened before he entered the game. Therefore he was loosened up, pitching as he'd always known he could pitch. It didn't matter any more. No matter how good he

might look now in a lost game it wouldn't impress Deacon Vernon.

The Blues went down in order in the home half and Wild Ed went out to resume his duties in the sixth. He kept working the corners with curves. With one down, he was touched for a single. Miller the dangerous Chief shortstop, bit at a low curve and bounded to Ambers at short. It looked like a double play. And Ambers juggled it, then threw wild to Caswell at second, pulling him off the bag. Both men were safe. It was a tough blow. Ambers ran in to say how lousy he felt about it. Lou Murray came out from behind the bat, the sweat dripping from his tomato face in the sultry afternoon.

"Ed, for the luvva Pete, don't pump 'em in there too fast now! Don't feed it to them! Make 'em reach for it."

"Sure," said Ed Tolman. And he found himself working the corners, snapping his curve off without giving the next man a real piece of it. But at 2 and 2, the hitter sent a screaming drive straight at the box. Wild Ed threw up his glove in self defense. Almost tearing off his hand, it glanced off his glove and caught him a stunning blow on the side of the head. He sat down heavily on the hill, and the base runners were tearing.

Then he fought off that dazed feeling and picked up the horsehide laying beside him. From a sitting position he picked it up and armed it into the plate. It was just in time to cut down that runner from second for out number two. And then Wild Ed Tolman keeled over.

WHEN HE CAME to, time had been called. He was in the dugout where he'd been practically carried. There was the acrid scent of spirits of ammonia in his nostrils and the trainer was working over him.

"Get him into the clubhouse," the pitcher heard Deacon say.

And Wild Ed fought up to his feet. "I can go on," he said, snapped it out as he repeated it. It was baseball instinct. He had flopped enough, been the big bust. But if they wanted to get him out of there now, the

Chiefs had to knock him out with a flurry of basehits. He wasn't going to let an accidental crack off the side of the head stop him.

The Deacon took him by the arm. "Look, kid, the ball game is practically lost anyway. Don't try to—"

"Damn you, I'm going back in!" Wild Ed insisted. He got his glove and went up the dugout steps. They allowed him a few practise throws so he could determine his condition. He didn't have much smoke on his stuff. But after the second throw, he knew he did have his control. He nodded that he was ready. And Doc Wilkins, the Chief power hitter, stepped in there with a runner on third base.

Wild Ed went to work. Wilkins powdered one into the left field stands, foul by but a couple of yards. Ed's next pitch was into the dirt.

"We're all with you, boy!" Ambers yipped from short.

"Hit him in the eye and get yourself a big cigar!" Big Redmond yelled from first.

Ed fought off a brief dizzy spell and focussed on the plate. He got Wilkins to swing at a teasing curve inside that did not break over. A called ball. And then the slugger hoisted another curveball pitch to short center for an easy out. The club was suddenly talking it up, talking of putting the lumber to it, when they came into the dugout. Despite his aching head, the kid hurler realized that once again they were behind him. And they went out and touched Joe Hagan for one run after he gave out a walk. It was 6-4 ball game.

Working carefully, Ed went through the seventh with no trouble though he gave up a walk. And then the Blues really went after Hagan in the home half when, with two down, he plunked a man in the ribs with a pitch. Swinging three wagon tangles, Skin Innis began to yell:

"Get on and I'll move you, ya bum! Get on and I'll move you up!" And the whole dugout was yipping at Hagan with every pitch.

the Deacon gambled, reached for a bad pitch and sent a twisted up the third baseline. It handcuffed the rival third sacker momentarily. When he finally got it, the only possible play was at first. And the speedy Caswell beat the throw. That put two on. Skin Innis set his gangling form at the plate. The first pitch. There was a crashing sound, the contact of ash with horsehide. the crowd hit it's feet, roaring. For it was deep into the right field bleachers for a circuit clout. When Innis trotted across the home plate behind the other two runners, the Blues were ahead, 7-6.

A Chief relief man was promptly brought in and put out the fire. And Wild Ed walked onto the diamond with mixed emotions. Before he had been pitching in a game that was lost before he entered it, a conceded ball game. Nothing had been expected of him save to go through the motions and finish out the ball game. If Deacon Vernon hadn't given up on the chance of victory, he, Wild Ed, would never have been sent in. But now, things were different.

Suddenly the first hitter was on via a walk when the chief umpire gave a bad call on a curve at the knees. Murray's mask was off in a flash and he beefed. Big Redmond and Ambers came in to join him. The next Chief pulled a surprise bunt. Murray was out and trailing it up the third baseline as it twisted and angled and seemed on the verge of rolling foul any instant. But somehow it kept inside the baseline and both men were safe at first and second. It was another of those tough breaks.

"Here we go again," Wild Ed said to himself. The pressure was back on. This was his ball game to win or lose. Two men on and none out. It was the clutch spot. And he knew what he did, always, with the clutch on. He picked up the rosin bag again, walked around the mound, thinking, thinking, not daring to look over where Laura sat with her mother. Then it came to him. When the Blues had been behind, he'd had no trouble paring those corners, never showing the hitters a big piece of it.

CASWELL, the second sacker, with the hit-and-run sign on as

Why the hell couldn't he do now what he'd been doing ever since he took over?

He got back on the rubber and tried to forget his aching head and grinned confidently down at tough Doc Wilkins. Lou Murray wanted it on the outside corner, low, but in the strike zone. Wild Ed came through it but it just missed, a called ball. Murray's mouth tightened. He thought the kid was going to pieces again. He signed the dugout and in another few seconds, they were throwing out in the bullpen. Wild Ed hitched at his pants. He kept shaking off Murray till the latter gave the sign for the same pitch again. Then Ed nodded and steamed the thing in there. Wilkins took and it was a strike. Wilkins fouled one off into the screen. Another called ball. Some of the fans were already giving the catcalls to Wild Ed, the kid who'd failed so many times in the clutch.

THEN HIS FAST one whizzed through for a third strike, smoking hot, as Wilkins swung half an hour too late. Wild Ed knew he could do it then. His head was splitting. His arm was tired. But he was throwing easily, loosely. And he set down the next two men on infield rollers as he kept nicking those corners, tricking them into hitting at stuff they didn't like.

The Blues were stopped cold in their half of the eighth by that Chief relief man. But when Wild Ed strode back out to the mound for the top of the ninth, he had that old swagger, the cocky tilt to his blonde head. A pinch hitter slashed a double into right.

"There he goes! The big bust is finished," chanted the Chief coaches. "Everybody hits now! He's only got a one-run lead and the busher knows it!"

Wild Ed looked over toward the raucous third base coach and spat

cotton derisively. He looked at the runner on third and sneered.

"Go get 'em, kid! We're right with you!" Ambers yelled.

"Don't worry about these bums," Wild Ed called back casually. And he began to pitch. It was a beautiful exhibition. His head was hurting like hell now, but he didn't care. He knew he had conquered himself, that never again would he tighten up and over-control in the clutch. He simply pumped them in there, got the next man on a soft roller to the mound. And then he had the fans screaming with delight as he whiffed the next two men on eight pitched backs.

The Deacon ran out and grabbed him by the shoulders as Wild Ed trotted off. "Kid, now you showed me, now you showed me," the manager chortled. "You showed me what I always knew you had!"

Ed grinned as teammates gathered around him and slapped his back, delighted at pulling out a game that had seemed lost. Ed said, "I wish those big-headed monkies were staying around long enough so I could get another crack at them! I'd like to hit them on a day when I feel really good."

Then he backed away from the dugout a moment and looked up to where Laura and Mama were sitting. Little Laura was standing up, jumping up and down as the ovation of the fans continued, clasping her hands over her head as she beamed down on him. Wild Ed felt good deep down inside then. Now he could ask her to marry him. And he realized too how much her loyalty that morning at the hotel had bucked him up.

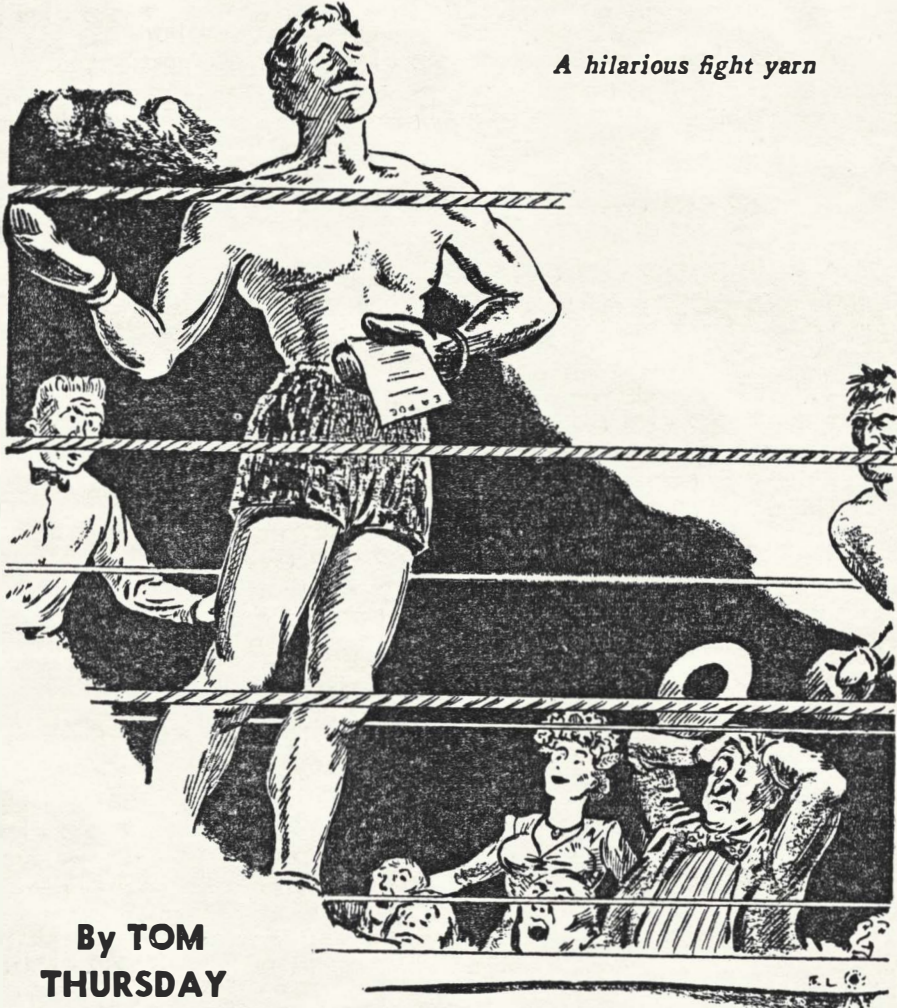
He switched his eyes to Mama Baines. Mama's hat was askew. And she was beating the male fan beside her, a total stranger, over the head with a bag of peanuts...

THE END



Things Could Be Verse

A hilarious fight yarn



By **TOM THURSDAY**

WELL, SPORTS, if you hold my wave length for a few minutes I will haul off and broadcast the howling history of one Henry Wadsworth McGann. In my day—pardon me, Eleanor—I have managed and mismanaged some strange, sinister and sappy canvas cuckoos but Brother McGann was a horse from a different Derby. So, tune in and flap your ears forward, this goo ought to be good!

I have come to the land of Miami via 'he Hitch-Hike Highway and the traveling is very rough, indeed. Between Times Squarehead, N.Y. and Jacksonville, Fla., several uncouth cops have tossed me bodily into various canolas and clinkeroos for doing nothing whatsoever and even book me for criminal investigation. In one cop-trap they take my fingerprints, mug me, and then send the finished product to J. Edgar Hoover to see if

I am wanted for murder, mayhem or just plain kidnapping.

All the cops demand to know why in Hialeah I am hitch-hiking when I could just as well travel via plane, bus, railroad and even kiddie-kar and when I tell the dopes I have just forty pieces of moola in my pokey-wokey which I desire to risk at Tropical Park track they give me a large kick in the sit-spot and tell me never to darken their cities again.

It is what is known as the Season in Miami and a buck bill is worth as high as two-bits any place, the landlords getting the notion that the OPA is quaint and also quacky, and think any one who comes to town is the sole owner of a U.S. Mint. I finally find a bed in a terrible trap named the Hotel Flopwell at a rate that is positive grand larceny seeing that there is only one shower for every fifty customers and even then the water is full of rust. The only thing they do not charge for is the flying termites and galloping cockroaches which come in all sizes, from flyweight to heavy. The joint is one large room and a flock of army cots are placed side by side so it will be more convenient for the guy next door to pick your pockets.

I'm scared to sleep account of the mug at my left who looks like it would be a keen pleasure for him to rob even the inmates of a blind asylum or his grandmamma just to get hold of her upper plates. In face, good friends, this booze-bumping bum makes a pass at my poke when he thinks I'm asleep but I discourage him with a quick right to the snout and a fast left to the belly. He runs to the burglar who owns the joint and claims that I have assaulted him along with some considerable battery.

Well, I manage to get out alive the next morning and stroll down Flagler street and enjoy the climate and the sunshine which same is okay only you can't eat it. I select what I hope is a cheap grease-can and order bacon, eggs and a cup of la slops. The doll who takes my order is very clean and smart looking and I get the idea that she is working her way through college and also the cus-

tomers. She is a silky-hair brunette, with wide brown eyes and a figure that would make Lana Turner look like a corkscrew.

WHEN I FINISH the meal I get a bill for no less than seventy-five megs and I promptly consider this a very great outrage and a high form of very black marketing. I figure the bill should be about thirty megs and even then the joint would make a profit of twenty-eight cents including overhead and under-head expenses.

So I say, "I think you have made a slight error because I did not eat any sirloin steak with caviar and champagne."

"I'm sorry," she smiles, "but I never make slight or even big errors in mathematics. In fact," she says, "I'm now attending the University of Miami and am considered excellent at figures."

"Well," I say, "I did not know that Captain Kidd was running a food-mill in Miami."

"This place is owned and operated by my sister, Laura Larrimore, and I assure you that we are no relation to the late Captain Kidd. And I do hope you will come in for lunch. We are having some very fine roast beef and three fresh vegetables. Seventy-five cents, please."

"I will be happy to come back for lunch," I say, "if I should run into a goldmine before 12 o'clock so I can pay for the chuckaloo; otherwise I will sit in the park and watch the pigeons."

"Why, you poor man," she says, "you must be short of money and you have such an honest face and look so kind."

Then she knocks me over with this, "If you are short of funds I will be glad to trust you until your luck gets better. Moreover," she says, "if you care to work I can give you employment right here as a dishwasher. Of course the job pays only thirty-five dollars a week but you also get all your meals free."

"Thirty-five buckeroos per weekly?" I ask. "Well, that is thirty more than I used to get when I was a

young man and I had to knock out ten other guys to get the job. Miss," I say, "I will be happy to curry your dishes for that large sum of moola."

(By this time you are no doubt wondering when I am going to get around to Henry Wadsworth McGann, huh? Well, have patience and pretty soon I will give you a full report on this remarkable character but I always like to get in a few words about myself just in case you don't care to get too familiar with strangers).

After washing 1,234,002 dishes that day I look around for another place to flop besides the ant-and-roach sanctuary I roosted in the night before, but I soon find that others are even worse and the prices are just six feet this side of the moon. So I go back to the Hotel Flopwell and the old yanneck who runs the drum greets me like a long lost case of smallpox. He says, "Money first, snore after."

I toss him a buck and this time I find a cot back at the left side as I desire to get very far away from the two bandits I sleep between the night before. The change is very lucky for me because I meet the next middle-weight champ of the world, the one and only Henry Wadsworth McGann, a very fine and lovable character and you can yelp that again.

I FIRST observe the guy in the cot at the right and he has more whiskers than a tree with Spanish moss and he's looking off into space like he has just seen a million loose bucks in nickels and dimes. Suddenly he takes out a needle and gives his arm a jab and pretty soon he again looks off into space and no doubt sees a yacht and a mansion to go along with the million bucks. However, do not be alarmed because this beezo is certainly *not* Henry Wadsworth McGann.

Then I take a gander at the guy lying in the cot to my left and see something that is very tasty in the form of a male torso complete with blond hair and fine features. He is flat on his back and dressed in a G-string which same is not much of a

full dress attire no matter how you wear it and there is only one place to wear it.

His whole body is brown-bronzed from the Florida sun which is free account no chiseler has found a way to bottle it and sell it to the tourists. He is entirely surrounded with books and is holding one in front of his puss and is reading it like it is the will of King Croesus, leaving all the dough to him. The contrast between this choice morsel of young manhood and the other inmates is so startling that I rub my eyes to see if it is a optical illusion.

I keep pop-eying him so hard that he finally turns and gives me a pleasant grin. Without a word he picks up one of his books and throws it onto my chest. It is called *Leave of Grass* by some old farmer named Walt Whitman and I imagine it is all about how to feed cows, otherwise what is the grass for? I have personally been through everything but school and my education would not win me a seat at the United Nations Conference although I could settle the war and peace situation in Ten minutes, Eastern Commonsense Time.

I examine the book carefully but am disappointed because I can find no pictures of bathing cuties and the only pic in it is of an old guy with enough whiskers to solve the housing shortage for a whole family of sparrows. The blond lad drops his book and says, "Great old fellow, Whitman; don't you think?"

Well, expecting a fight manager to think is asking too damned much and so I tell him that this guy, Whitman, is not in any of the record books unless he fought John L. Sullivan or Jake Kilrain under another name.

"He wasn't a boxer," smiles the blond guy. "He was a very great poet; a poet of democracy. Of course I am very fond of poetry. It is my passion, you might say. I love to read Tennyson, Longfellow, Kipling, Dante, Whittier, Lowell—"

"Look, chum," I say, "if them birds are boxers I may have heard of same but," I say, "that is about all I know except that Harry Truman is now prez of the U.S.A."

"That is too bad," he remarks, shaking his head sadly. Then he smiles and he has the nicest smile I have ever seen on a lad. I mean it is real, honest and not like that sophisticated crap I am used to in the boxing biz. "Poetry feeds the soul," he goes on. "I sincerely believe that if poets were in charge of the world there would be no more wars."

Just then I spot a little bud of a cauliflower on his right ear and I ask him if he has ever done any boxing or rassling or did he get that ear-nick in a revolving door?

"Why, yes," he says. "I used to do quite a bit of boxing in school. As a matter of record," he says, "I won a number of blue ribbons and also a nice gold watch."

THE MERE mention of ribbons—blue, pink or even technicolor—gives me the jumping jeebies with a large touch of heebies because I can locate no eating dough in such liverwurst. I then state to him that I am an old fight manager at the present time fresh out of fighting fodder account of my two battling babes are now doing duty in Tokyo and probably in the guardhouse for tossing a heavy Chinese gazinka into Hirohito's bedroom.

"I love boxing as well as poetry," he says. "There is even a form of poetry in the art of boxing."

"Leave us not argue the matter," I say. "I have not noted any poetry in boxing but maybe I wouldn't know poetry if it smacked me in the rear-end."

Then I get what they call a inspiration and say, "Why don't you turn professional and win yourself some heavy moola? I can take a likely lad like you and make him middleweight champ in a few easy lessons."

I tell that electrical transcription to all the boys and all of them believe me, and I am hoping this clean lad does. Echo: he does.

Well, to reduce a main bout to a prelim, I have a heart to head talk with Henry Wadsworth McGann, which is the handle he gives me, and then curl up and get some snoozy. I figure I will hold the dish-dousing

portfolio in the *Coy Calories Cafe* for about a week, collect my sugar, then pay strict attention to Young Mr. McGann. Before shoving off the next morning I give Henry Wadsworth, etc., a note to Major Peeples, who runs the gym and likewise fight arena, telling the major that the bearer is the next middleweight champ of the atomic world and to please handle with care.

At lunch time I take a glim through the peep-hole between the kitchen and the front of the grease-can and see Henry Wadsworth McGann having a debate with a hard-puss customer. I had told Henry about the good food in the *Coy Calories Cafe* and he said he would drop in after working out at the gym. Laura Larrimore, Joan's sister, and the owner of the joint, stands beside me and says, "My gracious, what on earth is the matter out there? I do wish that man would not come in any more. He has been trying to make a date with Joan for weeks and she finds him very repulsive. I hope he won't hurt any one. He looks so rugged and strong."

I am doing a little hoping myself because I have a interest in Henry Wadsworth McGann and it would not look very good if some hambo socked him in the snizzle. About this time I hear Henry say to the yoke, "My dear fellow, I'm sure you are a gentleman, although you do remind me of the poems of Robert W. Service, especially *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*."

"Ah, nuts!" snarls the big bum. "This is between me and this dame, see, and if you're lookin' for a trip to the hoss-pital, just keep jawin'."

"I can see that you haven't the soul of a poet," says my Henry. "Suppose you let me read you a few verses from *In Flanders Fields*. A very fine poem, written by a real war hero. It goes like this—"

Bam. The big ape lets go a stiff right to the jaw of Brother McGann and I close my eyes and wait to hear the body hit the floor. Whilst my peepers are still closed I hear another smack like fist hitting mug and I hope the ambulance service ain't

THINGS COULD BE VERSE!

too slow. Then I hear a thud and I just know that my little lollypop has gone down to investigate the sleeping qualities of the tile floor.

WITH A carving knife in one hand and heavy plate in the other I rush out to annihilate the tramp who assaults the forthcoming champ, but the first thing I see is Joan Larrimore looking admiringly at Henry and then I see the fresh floop on the floor very flat on his fanny.

"Which plate," I say, "did you hit him with and you will please not do any more fisticuffing without you can observe gate receipts clinking around the ticket box."

"I do not care for public brawls," says Henry, "but this young lady has a right to work in peace. *Every* one has a right to live *and* work in peace. Good afternoon."

He walks and Joan looks at me, like she is thinking, "Who is that handsome hero?"

"What an odd and distinguished young man," says Laura Larrimore. "I wonder who he is?"

"That," I say, "is Henry Wadsworth McGann, the next middle-weight champ of the entire earth."

"My gracious," says Joan, "a nice young man like that a prize fighter!"

"And likewise poet," I say. That is too much for Joan and she gives me a amazed look and begins to wait on the panting customers.

THAT NIGHT me and Henry reach the Hotel Flopwell at the same time and I ask him how he made out with Major Peeples in the gym. He says he does a little bag punching, some bending exercises and a little shadow boxing.

"Then I sat in the major's private office and studied Lord Byron," he says. I enquire if the Lord was a fancy-prancy boxer or a puncher and Henry gives me a friendly smile.

"I am going away for about two weeks," he says. "And I must request that you do not ask me where I am going or what am I going to do. I like you because you know how to mind your own business. Minding one's own business is an art in itself.

However," he says, "I want you to trust me, have faith and believe in me because I shall return and take up professional boxing in a very serious manner."

Next morning we walk to the cafe together and all Henry has with him for his mysterious trip is a satchel full of books and one pair of under-pants. After breakfast he opens the satchel, takes out a book and hands it to Joan Larrimore. "Miss Joan," he says, "please accept these poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson with my best wishes and compliments. And now, goodbye to both of you."

He picks up his satchel and shoots out the door and me and Joan look at each other and then Joan says. "What a strange young man! I wonder how he knew I loved poetry?" I can't answer that one so I go back to the kitchen and douse dishes for the rest of the day.

That noon I phone Major Peeples at the gym and ask him what he thinks of Henry Wadsworth McGann. "I think," says the major, "that he should make up his mind whether he wants to be a champion boxer or a champion poet. If he tries to be both he will go nuts."

"Aside from all that," I say, "how does he shape up in the manly art of assault and battery?"

"I would say that he has health, speed and youth, but he spends more time reading than he does training."

"Okay," I say. "Well, I will see you at the end of the week when I get paid and slip you some dough for Henry's training expenses."

"That," says the major, "will be quite unnecessary. You don't owe me a dime."

"Look," I say, "have you suddenly turned honest and generous or did your personal quack say you got heart failure and are about to shove off to the next world?"

"Henry gave me a fifty-buck bill on account," says the major and you could have knocked me over with a goldbrick. "He had two of them and remarked that money was a darned nuisance and says when poets rule the world money won't be so im-

portant. If the guy isn't cracked, he's something else."

"Well," I say, "I personally wouldn't know what else but I love the kid like he was my own son."

"Sure," says the major, "he is a very nice kid but even kids can be cracked."

TWO DAYS after Henry leaves on his mystery trip I am sitting in the cafe having breakfast when I get one terrific shock. A little guy comes in and sits next to me while waiting for his ham-and-cackles unfurls a copy of *Revealing Detective Cases* and right in the middle of the page is a picture of Henry Wadsworth McGann. If it ain't Henry then it must be his twin brother or some one who is a positive double. I sneak a peek at the story and it says that a guy named Oscar J. Trotter is wanted for leaving jail several years ahead of time and without the warden's permission or even the parole board's. It also says that Brother Trotter is a famous check-raiser, hotel bill beater, and all around no good gook, with a fine record of assault and battery to prove it. I almost choke on my coffee and beat it back to the kitchen and do some heavy thinking because I am one who does not care to hob-knob with the underworld although I have met some fine underworlders in the boxing racket.

I decide to say nothing about this terrible state of affairs and the next day I get a hunch and toss five berries on a horse at Tropical Park named *Escape*. This nag is a sleeper and wins by seven lengths at ten-to-one and with the seventy pieces of moola I bid goodbye to the *Coy Calories Cafe* seeing that being chambermaid to dishes is getting a wee morsel rough on my hands.

"We are very sorry to see you go," says Laura and Joan Larrimore. "You have been the best dishwasher we ever had. Er, what have you heard from Henry?"

"Well," I say, "Henry is still on his little business trip but he will be back soon with some more nice poems."

Next day I go out to Tropical in

person and have a very large hunch on a bangtail entitled *Dishpan*. I am a great hunch-player and that system is as good as any other account of all systems being lousy in the first place. Well, *Dishpan* will arrive over the line some time next month according to late reports and I drop a even twenty-five buckolas and get the idea that the name of the jockey was Rip Van Winkle. So I decide to quit playing the races forever and don't place another bet until two days later showing I have great will power.

I PLAY and pay around Miami and the Beach for the next two weeks, dividing my time between chasing cockroaches in the Hotel Flopwell and wondering how it could be possible for Henry Wadsworth McGann, a fine gent, and Oscar J. Trotter, a crook, could be one and the same fellow. Then one morning whilst I am sleeping with the usual one eye open account of the other guests at the hotel getting snitchy fingers I feel a light tap on the chest.

"Good morning!" says a familiar voice. I look up and note a lad with baby mustache and black hair with eyebrows to match.

"I do not think I have the pleasure of knowing you," I say. "Besides," I say, "I am in no financial condition for a touch because business with me is very unhealthy."

He laughs and says, "Why, I see that you do not recognize me. I am Henry Wadsworth McGann, but I am very glad to see that my new mustache and bleached hair fooled you. Now I feel assured that no one will recognize me in the ring."

I am shocked to hear him say that because I now feel that he and Oscar J. Trotter are one and the same gee and I am practically heartbroken because I am growing very fond of the kid.

"I don't know what you are thinking," he says, "but you will have to trust and have faith in me. Everything is going to be all right. Incidentally, I have memorized a new poem by Robert Louis Stevenson. Listen to these beautiful lines—*Home is the hunter, home from the*

hill, and the sailor home from the sea. Isn't it magnificent?"

I inform him that the only sailors I know are in the U.S. Navy but the only hunters I know are landlords who always hunt for my rent when I ain't got it. Then I try to make up my mind whether or not I should notify the cops that I have Oscar J. Trotter in my immediate vicinity because if they find that I have been consorting with him they will positively believe that I am what they call an accessory after the fact and when it comes to nestling in a clink I do not desire to be an accessory after anything, fact or otherwise.

I do some more thinking and decide that I am innocent of any wrong doing although I have been a fight manager for a number of years which is a very bad character reference in any cop station. I also make myself believe that Henry Wadsworth McGann and Oscar J. Trotter are not in any way related, not even fourth nieces. The fact that they look very much alike may not mean a thing because I have often been taken for a horse and I am no horse what so ever.

WELL, I WILL now get down to business and start Henry Wadsworth McGann on his boxing career before we both fall asleep which after all is better than falling out of a window.

After observing Henry in the gym several times and noting that he is a very snappy boxer complete with the prancy-dancy stuff I promptly tell him that the cash cuckoos at the ring-side and gallery do not come to see waltzing and two-stepping or even the Virginia Reel but pay their dough to see some one murdered so long as it is not themselves. Henry tells me that he does not care to hurt any one because it is not nice and humane and he also says that the customers should look upon boxing from the artistic and scientific angle.

Our first fight is with a lummoX labelled Socker Swunker and is booked for four rounds at the Armory and Major Peeples suggests that Henry should have his name

changed to Mayhem McGann which will make the customers think that he is very nifty with the kayos. Although Henry squarks that such a name is very uncouth and unartistic I manage to convince him that it is good business and he says, "What has business got to do with art and poetry?" and I have no answer to that one.

Socket Swunker is a nice young gent who gained most of his knowledge of fighting from driving a large milk wagon and getting off now and then to bust some taxi driver in the puss for blocking traffic. He becomes so good at this that even the city judge suggests that Brother Swunker take up boxing as a profession and stop fighting free and also cluttering up the courtroom twice a week.

The Socker has had three pro fights and won each via the kayo trail and has gathered the notion that he will be the next middleweight champ just as soon as he can connect with the chin and belly of the present champ, Sappy Mook.

"You will please keep your nose, chin and stomnick a mile away from the Socker's paws," I advise Henry. "And," I say, "I will admit that this is one fight where clever defense boxing will be a good thing for you even though the patrons will yell murder in technicolor."

"I am unafraid," says Mayhem McGann. "In fact," he says, "I am more interested in a new poem I am memorizing. It starts like this—*Out where the handclasp's a little stronger, out where the smile dwells a little longer, that's where the West begins.* Er, does Mr. Socker Swunk like poetry?"

"If he does," I say, "mules love to eat tin hay."

WE ARE BOOKED in the four-round opener and when the clients in the cheap seats get a glim at Henry's baby mustache they give him the barber's razzberry which same cannot be printed even on asbestos paper. The referee, a giant intellect named Clambake Clancy, calls the lads to the center of the ring and gives them the usual side-mouth in-

structions which Henry interrupts in the middle claiming that the ref's grammar is slightly cockeyed.

After the ref gets through his monolog, Henry says, "Pardon me, sir, but I have something I would like the audience to hear. I am sure they will enjoy it immensely."

He leaves Socker Swunk and dives into his pure white trunks and hauls out a sheet of paper. This unusual action makes the patrons wonder if another war has been declared and Henry is going to make the exclusive announcement.

Henry holds up his right hand for silence, and remarks, "Ladies and gentlemen. I would like you to hear a few verses of a very famous poem by a great genius named Edgar Allan Poe. Listen, please—*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary—*"

"Boo!" yelp the patrons and several pop-bottles and seat cushions come through the air. "We wanna see a fight. Start punchin', you bums!"

Sadly Henry turns to me and says, "I am afraid that these good folk lack an appreciation of the fine art of poetry."

"C'mon, crackpot!" whinnies Clambake Clancy. "Git tuh yuh cornah!"

The chimes.

Socker Swunker roars out of his corner like Henry had kidnapped his baby sister or at least picked his pockets whilst he was snoring. He throws a sizzling right sock to Henry's chin but my boy promptly removes his chin to the next city which annoys the Socket very much. Then Henry begins to waltz, two-step and even do a little jitterbuggy. The patrons let forth with more assorted boos and one enraged ginzo in the gallery bellers, "Who taught you fightin', yuh mamma?"

Just then a funny thing happens and two little mice climb up a ring post and scamper across the canvas. This causes a very large giggle from one and all and a halfwit woofs, "That proves the fight is cheesy!"

The Socker begins to chase Henry and catches him in our own corner and proceeds to toss lefts and rights all of which land in either Chicago

or maybe St. Louis but come no where near my dodging darling. Just then a high feminine voice splits the air with, "Careful, Henry—don't let that awful creature harm you!"

I look across the ring and sitting in the third row is Joan Larrimore. She is biting her hanky and jumping up and down like she is a yo-yo on a string. Although I am happy that this restaurant doll is rooting for my Henry I do not want him to become interested in her or any other judy knowing from past experience that all babes are arsenic to fighters. In fact, every time I get what I think is a forthcoming champ some cutie comes along and tells him that fisticuffing is vile and bad on the complexion and makes him retire.

I turn my attention back to the ring and note with extreme pleasure that Mayhem McGann is slapping the Socker with a large quantity of lefts and rights. He is hitting him at will and the Socker begins to call Henry some names that are very uncomplimentary indeed which indicates that he does not care for the work of my dashing duke. The mob is all for the Socker and seem to like Henry and sore bunions with the same admiration.

Well, Henry wins the first round on points which are very sharp and you can ask the Socker about that because his face is very flushed from Henry's speedy gloves. In the second frame Brother Swunk clips Henry on the point of the chin and the sock has the wallop of a bazooka. I close my eyes as I do not care to see Henry hit the floor but when I fail to hear any thud on the canvas I look up and see Henry grinning all over. This delights me very much because I now know that if he can take a bustaroo like that he has a chin that is not made in Pittsburgh where they make great quantities of glass.

Henry gets the decision and you could hear the catcalls and boos in Tokyo and Berlin. Joan Larrimore troops down into the cressing-room and coos to Henry, "You were wonderful, Henry; perfectly wonderful. Goodbye, now!"

NEXT MORNING I reach the *Coy Calories Cafe* in time to note Henry Wadsworth McGann, the current Mayhem McGann, sitting on a stool and having some ham and cackles and likewise some chitchat with Joan Larrimore. I give them both a merry good morning, order some buckwheat cakes and pig-fodder—bacon to youse—and begin to worry how I can bust up this beautiful romance. I have personally nothing against young and pure love and marriage but I am beginning to take a very fatherly interest in Henry and do not want him to get messed up with any petticoat even though she is a nice dame like Joan Larrimore.

So right away I get Henry a match over in Tampa with an authentic floor-flopper entitled Zulu Zimmerman who is famous for jumping out of the ring when any one smacks him on the snoot or even left ear. This act is also for four rounds and Zulu and Henry get along like crackers and milk, if you know what I mean and you certainly do. It seems that they get together in the dressing-room before the bout and Henry asks Zulu if he likes poetry and Zulu pricks up a set of extra-large ears and beams all over. Not only beams but he begins to recite a thing called *Gunga Din*, and when he is through Henry recites a dish called *Sheridan's Ride* and when he gets through I have the idea that General Sheridan could have done much better if he had of used autos instead of horses.

Well, when they get into the ring they are very polite to each other and the cash clients wonder if they have paid to see a fawn dance on the lawn with the *Three Graces* coming on next or what? This keeps up for three rounds and finally the referee on the advice of practically all the customers throws them out and tells them never to darken his ring again. But if you ask me I will remark that they give one beautiful exhibition of scientific boxing and when the average ringsider begins to admire scientific boxing you can watch closely for the end of the world because same will be due any minute.

We go back to Miami and Henry says, "Aren't you getting bored and tired living at the Hotel Flopwell? I must confess I am because I have no place to keep my poetry books. In fact," he says, "several of them have been stolen and although I do not mind if the thief steals them because he wants to read them, I think they just sell them to buy liquor."

"I am very tired and bored indeed living in this roach-and-rat rendezvous," I say, "but although there is no large holes in my pockets my money is not there because I have none of same."

"Well," he says, "I am happy to hear that you are bored with the Hotel Flopwell because I have a very wonderful proposition for you to live with me in a nice, private home. Isn't that splendid?"

"Leave us depart at once," I say, "before these alky-sniffers steal our pants and socks."

HENRY PACKS his books and his few items of clothing and we hop a bus and land out in the Northwest section of the city, and then we walk three blocks and come to a stop in front of a nice, cozy-looking white cottage. As we reach the front porch the door opens and a voice says, "Welcome to Happy Hollow!" The voice is no less than Joan Larrimore and I see that Henry's boxing days are over and also under and I can see that I have been framed and I wonder what I can do about it.

"We are very thankful to you, Miss Larrimore," I say, "but I think we will be crowding you out and so I think me and Henry should return to the Hotel Flopwell until the housing situation eases up or the landlords take the OPA seriously and stop thinking they are Jesse the James or John the Dillinger."

Joan takes me by the arm and leads me to a swell room with a fine set of twin beds and then she says, "You boys can choose which bed you want. You will find a shower and tub bath across the hall. Goodbye, now!"

The next morning after a night of dreaming that I am living in Buck-

ingham's pet palace I decide to do something to get Henry out of the clutches of Joan. I go to the Western U. and send collect wires to all the promoters I ever hear of and that night I get favorable replies from six in all parts of the country. I think Joan will raise Hades when she hears about it but she just smiles and says, "I think that is just wonderful. You and Henry should have a good time and I want you to always remember that you will always be welcome at Happy Hollow."

I admit that Joan's actions buffalo me because she is the first skirt I have ever met that did not try to rule or ruin one of my boxers and I wonder what she has up her sleeves besides her arms. Two days later we shove off for Columbus, Georgia, and are booked to box a bird named Cracker McCarthy. We win the decision from the Cracker and the customers don't want to see no more of Mayhem McGann either in the flesh or in the spirit."

Well, I will now tear off about five months from the calendar before this begins to look like a sequel to the complete works of Charley Dickens, and bring it up to the time Henry Wadsworth McGann, the present Mayhem McGann, gets a crack at the contender for the middleweight crown, one Murderous Margulies. During all this time I am very worried over two things, viz., whether Joan Larrimore will appear suddenly and marry Henry or whether the cops will swoop down and grab him for being Oscar J. Trotter, the escaped convict. This Trotter business worries me night and day and although I can't imagine a nice chap like my Henry being anything remotely connected with Oscar J. Trotter I keep wondering why he has raised a mustache and dyed his hair. He never even mentions any of his family or even where he comes from and always gets his mail care of General Delivery.

THE FIGHT between Margulies and McGann takes place in Chicago and the gate receipts are tasty and toothsome. It's for ten rounds

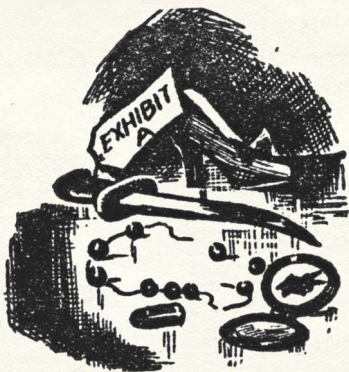
and as you may recall Henry gives Margulies such a lesson in boxing that he wins all ten rounds on points. Naturally Henry is as popular with the fans as ice cream in South Hell but my boy just keeps grinning and reading and writing poetry. By this time he has written a trunk full of the stuff and I listen to every word of it and although I know as much about poetry as I do about having six ears I think it is swell he-man stuff.

Comes now the bout for the middleweight title with Sappy Mook, managed by one of the world's greatest burglars, Felony Jones, and if he ever graduated out of any place except Sing Sing I would like to know it. That snizzlehead has been getting in my hair and way for years and how he made Mook the champ without bribery is a mystery that the boxing commish should look into.

Well, fight fans, hold your hats because this tale is about to speed around the curve into a whirlwind conclusion and before it is over I am very dizzy to say the least.

The brawl takes place in Madison Square Garden and Mook states in the press that he will knock all the poetry out of Henry with the first two punches and remarks that he hopes a doctor and an ambulance will be waiting for my boy's remains. Just before we go on Henry says to me in the dressing-room. "This is very odd," and shows me a letter he has just received care of the Garden. It is from Oscar J. Trotter, the escaped convict, and Oscar is very mad about Henry because whilst Oscar is out enjoying his freedom a lot of people mistake him for Henry and wish him luck when he meets the champ. Oscar also states that if it wasn't for this resemblance he would still be free account a dumb dick happens to stop when a fellow asks Oscar if he ain't Mayhem McGann and this cop takes a look and sees it is Oscar and takes him back to the clink. Oscar concludes his letter with, "I hope the champ busts your head open, you punk!"

Well, I am greatly relieved to find that Oscar and Henry are not one and the same person and I ask Hen-



3 NOVELETS

OF MIDNIGHT MYSTERY

* * *

THE LOST ROOM

By T. W. FORD

* * *

**THE EDUCATION OF
HOMER ANGEL!**

By GRETA BARDET

* * *

SMOKE A KILLER

By ALAN RITNER ANDERSON

*Plus Short Stories
By Topnotch Authors*

C R A C K

DETECTIVE

STORIES

WATCH FOR THE JUNE ISSUE

ry, "Didn't any one ever take you for Oscar J. Trotter?"

"Goodness, no," he says. "In fact," he says, "I never heard of Oscar J. Trotter." I am about to ask him why the disguise with the mustache and dyed hair when we get the call to go to the ring, and anyway it is none of my business."

Mook is greeted with great cheers while my babe is saluted with everything but the ringposts and if all the boos was placed end to end they would still show that Henry was very unpopular because he is a gentleman and a poet. As he sits on the stool in his corner I note that he is very serious which is something new because in all his other fights he is grinning all over or reading a book of poetry between rounds.

"Feel okay, chum?" I ask.

"Physically, yes; mentally, no," he says. "I'm afraid there are times when calmness and politeness simply will not work. Force is the only thing some people can possibly comprehend and—"

The bell!

THE CHAMP rushes out of his corner like a three-alarm fire and gives the impression that he has a date in five minutes and will kayo Henry in less than one. He throws a terrific scorcher at my boy's chin but the chin departs hence with the usual speed and dexterity and the champ almost dislocates his right hand when he misses. Henry begins to dance and jab and cut Mook and the champ passes some unprintable remarks but Henry was mad before he leaves his corner and didn't seem to get any madder.

Suddenly the champ stops in ring center and snarls, "Come on, you pansy, and fight!" The expression on Henry's face remains the same, cold and serious, and I am beginning to wonder if there is really something the matter with him. And then—obaby!—I see a brand new Henry in action. Changing his usual stance my beauty chops down the champ's guard and shoots in a right that flushed the champ's chin and you could hear the thud up in Albany, 150

miles north.

First Mook's legs buckle, then his eyes glaze, then he drops to the canvas and curls up for a fifteen minutes of happy dreams. That leather louse is out as far as the North Pole and three miles beyond. The crowd is so stunned they can't move for a few moments, then they howl 'Fake!' and the guys who are yelling fake are the gamblers who lost their shirts, underpants and even gold teeth.

We get back in the dressing-room a few moments before the photogs and newspaper boys and I say to Henry, "I never knew you had such a sock and I would like to know how come?"

"Frankly," he says. "I never knew I had one, either, but Mr. Mook is not a gentleman. You may remember that I went over to him just before the bout and tried to be pleasant. I asked him if he liked poetry and he said, 'Poetry stinks and so do you!' That was totally uncalled for and something inside me snapped and I decided to either knock him out or get knocked out myself."

Just then the door opens and a husky-looking guy rubber-soles in and although his feet are not the regular size I can tell he is a cop. He flashes a badge and says to Henry, "How do you do, Mr. Longfellow? My name is Joe Tate, and I am a private detective."

"Look, stupid," I say, "this boy is Henry Wadsworth McGann and if you think he is Oscar J. Trotter I can show you a letter from Oscar proving that Mr. Trotter is now in the cooler."

The door busts open again and a wild mob comes in, led by a old boy with high hat, spats, cane and waved mustache.

"Oh, hello, pater!" says Henry. "I'm really glad to see you and I trust you are not angry."

"Angry?" says the old codger. "Why, my boy, I am proud of you! I never thought a Montgomery would ever become a boxing champion. I thought you were going to turn out to be a poet and there is no fortune in poetry." Then he turns to the assembled photogs and newspapermen, and goes on, "Gentlemen, I want you

to meet Van Wyck Montgomery, my son and middleweight champion. Er, you see, we had a little misunderstanding and Van Wyck left home. I wanted him to enter my banking business and he was interested in poetry and so he left home and wrote me that he was a traveling salesman in the glove business."

"I'll say he's in the glove business!" cracks a sports writer.

"Just a moment, pater," says Van Wyck, the junior. "about this poetry thing, I want to show you this." He opens an envelope and takes out a check for \$1000 and waves it under the old boy's beak. "This," says the former Henry Wadsworth McGann, "is advance royalty on my soon-to-be-published book of poems entitled *Rhymes of the Ring*. With my pugilistic fame my publisher thinks it will be a best seller."

"Splendid!" says the pater. "I am doubly proud of you. I—er—trust you gave the book the proper dedication?"

"Yes, indeed," says junior.

Comes a voice from in back of the crowd, "Henry! come get me through here!"

Soon Joan Larrimore is squeezing through the crowd. Junior turns to all and says, "Gentlemen—and pater—I want you to meet my wife."

"Just a moment," I say, "I know I am famous for being asleep but when does this wedding take place?"

"Two days ago—by proxy. She was in Miami and I was here in New York. The telephone is a splendid invention, don't you think?"....

Later that night I am alone with Mr. and Mrs. Van Wyck Montgomery and say, "Well, I will bid you all goodbye and I wish you luck. You will not be needing a manager any more."

"What on earth is this poor man raving about?" demands Joan.

"Well," I say, "he will quit the ring, won't he?"

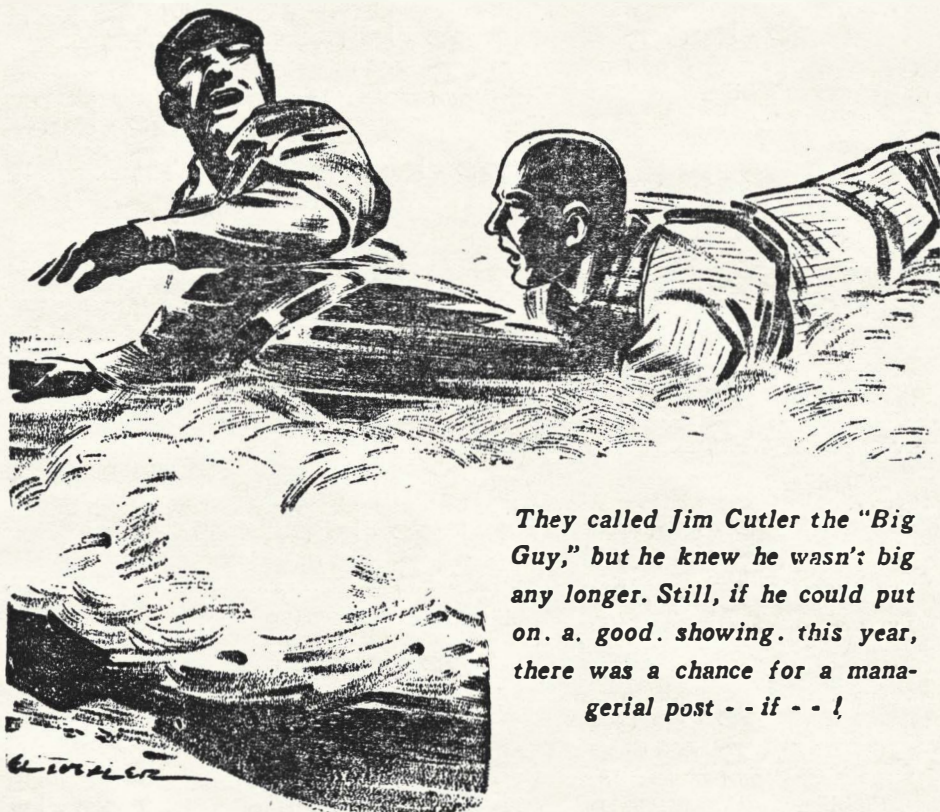
"I just dare him to quit the ring!" she flares. "He is going to be champ for the next ten years!"

Goodbye, now!

THE END

Showdown At Shortstop

By T. W. FORD



They called Jim Cutler the "Big Guy," but he knew he wasn't big any longer. Still, if he could put on a good showing this year, there was a chance for a managerial post - - if - - !

THERE WAS a bulleting grass-cutter right through the box. The Big Guy raced from the shortstop spot to his left, leaping out of his tracks. The hit was really in the zone of Sloane, the second sacker. But Jim Cutler, the Big Guy, knew Sloane was a little weak on going to his right. Cutler charged over there, digging recklessly, flung, stabbed out with his gloved hand. He just got his finger tips on the hot-bounding ball, managed to break its flight. It skidded away a few feet back onto the grass. He came off one knee and dashed out and scooped it up, too late for a play at first. But the crowd was applauding; it looked like a great stop on a sure-fire hit.

Hopper Sloane called, "A nice try, Jimmy boy, a nice try. You *looked* good on that one all right." But there was a hint of sarcasm beneath his drawl, especially in the way he stressed "looked" as if the Big Guy was a grandstander.

Chirping something to Sanders on the mound for the Sachems, Jim Cutler moved back to position. He spat cotton and checked the infield on the next hitter, a left hander, the old leathery grin that was less mirthful than a fighting grimace on the Big Guy's face. But a big doubt was pushing up inside him. His left knee still felt wobbly after that skid he'd taken on it. And last season, or the years before when he had been the fireball

at the short fielding position of the league, his legs would have gotten him to that ball. He would have gloved it cleanly, made the putout. The underpinning was beginning to go; and something else too, Jim suspected.

That runner on first, leadoff batter of the inning, proved to be important. Sanders gave a free ticket to the left-handed swinger at the platter. There was a high fly to short right for an easy out. Then the Big Guy, Jim Cutler, made a leaping dive to his right to snag a line drive and hold the runners. But the Blue Sox catcher stepped to the plate and slashed a clean single up through third and out into left. The man on second, whom Jim himself knew he should have gotten at first, went around easily to score and tie up the game at 4-4. Sanders whiffed the next batter.

Jim trotted into the dugout as the Sachems prepared to go to bat in the eighth. He felt little Ed Jenson's steely gray eyes on him a moment. But when he looked the manager's way, Jenson was moving out to take up his coaching duties at first. Jim noticed that Ed moved a little wearily; Jenson hadn't been well during the winter. Down at the Spring training camp in Florida, when they'd flown to Cuba for that exhibition series, Jenson had been away from the field for five days, ill. Afterward he passed it off as a bad case of air sickness. But Jim Cutler knew better. Ed Jenson wasn't well, and he was under extra-heavy pressure with a club composed mostly of youngsters. On top of that was the ownership situation too.

"Everybody gets a hit!" barked somebody in the dugout. "Let's put the wood to that big busher on the hill, gang!"

A NEAT PLAY by the Blue Sox kid at short robbed the first Sachem hitter, and Jim Cutler slung away the two extra bats and stepped in there, muscle-corded jaw working on his gum. He batted sixth in the lineup. The crowd yelled for him to get a piece of one. Though never a

fence-crasher even in his prime, he had been one of the great clutch hitters of the Stadium, the kind of a player who was most dangerous when the chips were down.

He caught Jenson's sign from first, spat cotton, then faked a bunt attempt on a pitch that hooked outside for a ball. He took for a strike, a sinker, then fouled one into the left field stands. There was another ball. And with the count even up, he saw what he wanted, a bad ball, a curve breaking outside and high. But that was one reason the Big Guy, Cutler, had always been so dangerous. He would hit bad stuff safely; he did on that one. It was a wicked shot spiked into left center. And as he tore up to first, he saw the skipper giving him the green light.

Cutting out, Jim made the turn and churned the base path for second, for that extra base that was part of the Ed Jenson brand of ball. The gamble with a deadlocked game at this stage would be unexpected, and they knew Peters in center for the rival club had a weak arm. Jim knew it was a good risk. He threw himself in a slide. And then the Blue Sox short-stop was slapping the ball on his leg a split second before he hooked the bag. He was out.

"Truck horses always got lead legs," said one of the Sox.

Some of the fans hooted Jenson for sending him down as the Big Guy walked into the dugout, but Jim knew the skipper had been right. Knew that it was that missing ounce of speed in his fading legs that had let the Sox nab him. He watched Gus Rudnark the Sachem receiver hang a clothesline single over second that would have scored him from the key-stone sack. Then the next Sachem was retired and they took the field for the top of the ninth.

With two down, there was a high bounder over the box. Without exactly planning it, Jim always a ball gobbler, let Sloane the second sacker take it. A little vague idea was beginning to creep into the Big Guy's mind. Now if he saved those legs a little, maybe...

THE SACHEMS went down in order before the slants of the Sox hurler in the home half, dropping the ball game. Silent, moody, they went through the tunnel into the clubhouse. Jim knew what was going through the minds of the kids. They were wondering just how much of a ball club they really were. And Jim had a hunch there was nothing the matter with them a fair-sized winning streak, the copping of a series from one of the top clubs, wouldn't cure. They'd begin to jell, to cohere, if they could pull that trick.

"All right. That one's gone. Tomorrow's another day," Jenson snapped at them in the clubhouse. "Go to a show. Have a few glasses of beer tonight, if you want. Don't think about baseball till we take the field tomorrow." He gave them a tight grin, but Jim knew he was worried.

After his shower, the Big Guy sat meditating on the bench before his locker for a while. Fatigue was a heavy dull thing camped on his loose shoulders; and discouragement clung to fatigue's back, weighting him down the more. The glory of the bygone days started a funeral parade through his mind. The days when he had been the flash at the short position. When he'd been dubbed "The Big Guy" by some sports writer—actually he was short of six feet and stringy—because of how he could dominate an infield, take charge of a ball game, break the hearts of the opposition with his speed. And now those days were ghosts, relics of a dead past. His pins were going.

The stories of the game wouldn't blame him for the loss. The experts might even fry Ed Jenson's hide a little for sending him onto second that last time. But Jim Cutler knew he should have collared that hit in the top of the eighth, that he should have made it safely into second. And Ed Jenson would know too, Jenson knew baseball, knew the players who worked under him.

Hobson, a southpaw of the mound staff, came by. "Dammit, how many of those close ones are we going to lose?" he asked, towelling his

freckled shoulders. "I think Ed's betting too much on these rookies!"

"Yeah," Jim lifted a cold eye his way. "Never heard of a ball club yet that didn't have half a dozen guys who thought they'd make a better manager than the boss." The minute he got it out, even as Hobson, an old friend, stalked off, Jim was sorry. It was that flash temper of his, Jim knew. It would hit him and he'd turn sullen and moody. In the old days, he used to take it out on the opposition in a game. Like in '41 when he'd sparked the club to a pennant with the fierceness of his play. Even last season—Then he tried to derail that train of thought as the ugly question popped up. Would there be any more seasons?

THAT NIGHT he dropped around to a tavern across from the city's big indoor sports arena where the newspapermen and sports experts hung out. Had a few ales and forced himself to mix in with the gang, exuding a false gaiety. Sure, the Sachems would catch on fire any day now, he assured them. But he heard the hints around him, the insinuations there was going to be a shake-up on the club, at least in the front offices.

He thought about it before he dropped off to sleep that night. The Old Man had died during the winter, leaving the club in his will to a spinster sister and a nephew. A lawyer had entered the picture to represent the sister. He and the late John Grauer's nephew were in charge of things now. The club secretary had already been replaced; and the two new bosses had hinted rather strongly in press conferences that they want a bunch of slambang sluggers, a clouting club that could thrill the fans as well as go out and grab a flag. The two previous Sachem seasons had been lean ones with Grauer and Ed Jenson ripping down and going through the process of rebuilding. Jim himself was one of the few veterans remaining in the regular lineup. He'd heard from several sources that Jenson had been told to produce, to come up with a club that

was going places, or the ten-day release clause in his contract would be called into effect.

To the Big Guy, Ed looked a little big more haggard when they took the field the next day for the final game of the series with the Sox. It was one of those prematurely warm early May days, easy to get a comfortable sweat up in. It seemed to effect both hurlers who went along beautifully for five innings without permitting a score. In the top of the sixth, Hobson for the Sachems weakened a little, allowed a runner to reach third with two down. There was a tricky slow hopper to short, to Jim's left. He heard Hopper Sloane yell but kept charging the ball. His throw to first was too late by a whisker, the first run scoring.

"Sweet dreams, Big Guy," said Sloane with his thin smile. "But I thought you'd wake up on time on that one."

Jim Cutler kept his teeth locked, but he avoided looking at Ed when they went into the bench. Jim knew he'd been slow coming out of his tracks and cutting off that lazy hit. It wouldn't be an error, but the old Big Guy of the bygone days would have made the play. When he stepped to the plate in the home half, his light blue eyes were more slivered than usual. He wanted a hit bad this time to wipe out that bad taste in his mouth. He didn't get one, the Sox pitcher walking him as he tried to curve the outside corner of the plate. And then Ed Jenson put on the hit-and run with Rudnark swinging for the first offering.

Rudnark got hold of it. But the kid shortstop of the Sox knocked it down on a pretty play, flipped to second to start a D.P. The Big Guy went in there hard to dump the keystone man on the pivot and break up the twin killing. A hot lance of pain stabbed up his leg. When he came out of the dust he saw the rip in his stocking, the thin line of crimson beneath it where the Sox player had accidentally knicked him with his spikes. In the dugout, the trainer looked it over. It was little more than a surface scratch that a strip of court

plaster would take care of. Then Jenson's clipped voice came:

"Okay, Jim. Call it a day. Go on into the clubhouse. Sloane, you move to short. Hatlo, you take over at second."

Jim scowled at the manager. "Listen, I'm all right. I—hell, I've played with worst than this, Ed!" He could hardly believe it, being yanked from the lineup. "Why, Ed, in that '41 World Series—"

"This is '47, Jim... We don't want to risk making the injury worse... Now look, Hatlo, just don't try to rush your throws. And..."

IT WAS A LONG hegira through that tunnel to the clubhouse for the Big Guy. His temper smouldered. He saw what was behind Ed Jenson's move. The nick in his calf simply provided a good excuse to yank him after the way he'd failed to come up with that slow poke in time. Jenson was going for speed. Sloane had been converted to a second sacker when he joined the club, having played the short position with Indianapolis in the minors two seasons ago. And this Peewee Hatlo was the rookie who'd been such a sensation in the camp down at Clearwater. He had springs in his legs, bubbled with competitive spirit, and could streak when he got on the basepaths. Yeah, Jenson was going for speed. And the Big Guy wondered now how long he'd be with the club. If his career as a major leaguer was snapped off now—

He thought of Kathy, and Jim, Junior. His one hope of getting them back was in keeping up there this year, in clicking.

From the clubhouse window, he saw the new keystone combination mess up a double play in the eighth. They lacked that sureness, the experienced touch. But in the home half, Halto got on, then went all the way with the tying run to score from first on a long single. And in the ninth it was Sloane who touched off the rally that got the Sachems the ball game and at least the meagre satisfaction of a split with the Sox. The club came in.

Ed came up to Jim. "Say, Jim, I'm

going to be tied up around here for a while." He lifted his eyes significantly toward the business offices above. "But how about dinner? Meet me at Griffin's about seven, eh."

WHEN JIM entered Griffin's Chophouse in midtown, he wondered what was coming up. Maybe Ed wanted to break the bad news gently. Then Si Hepburn, ace sports commentator on a national radio network, called to him from the bar. Hepburn was a wasp-tongued lean man with wise crescent-shaped eyes. Jim greeted him but started to turn down the invitation to a drink.

Hepburn hooked his arm. "I got an inside tip for you."

Jim looked down the noisy room, failed to see Ed Jenson at any of the checkered-table-clothed tables, and stopped. Hepburn edged away from a couple of other imbibers and dropped his voice.

"Jim, you and I broke into the big leagues the same year together. The season you took over from Banson at short, I was making my first broadcasts from the Stadium. We've been good friends."

Jim gave him a crooked grin. "How much do you need, Si?" That was a joke. Hepburn was one of the high-paid men in radio.

"I'll just want a break on the advance inside dope when you're boss in that Sachem clubhouse, Jim," Hepburn said slowly.

Jim almost tipped over his glass of ale. "What ever you're smoking, cut it out, Si. That dope gets you after a while."

Hepburn shook his head. "I'm not being funny, McGee. I got it straight from the horse's mouth. The new bosses at the Stadium are out for action. And the skids are greased for Jenson. The dope is you'll get the call as a player manager."

Jim laughed shortly, broke off. "Si, you're no rookie in this game. Those crazy rumors—"

"I'm no rook. And I know my sources of information. Jim, just look at it objectively. They want color up there at the Stadium. They

were trying to get Durocher last winter but Rickey held onto him. That Rickey could charm a snake. So—"

"I'd hate to see Ed go," Jim said quickly. "He's one swell guy, and he wants one more big season. He figures it's coming, too."

"Sure. All managers want one more good season. But Ed Jenson is a sick man. You know that. . . . All right. And you, you're a big name up there at the Stadium. You've been a star. You're a fight guy, a driver. And you'll be good box office as the manager. It adds up, doesn't it?"

Jim Cutler nodded slowly, brow knitted. He felt disloyal in a way. At first, he had put little weight in Hepburn's prediction. But now, as he thought about it, there were some convincing points. Putting him in to replace Jenson, a capable well-liked man, would cure any resentment amongst the older dyed-in-the-wool fans. And he had dreamed at times of how he'd run a club. He was confident he could run one damned well. But he tried to defend Ed once more.

"Hell, Si, the season is still young. We're just away from the wire a few weeks. They ought to give Ed a show, a chance—"

"Look, Jim," Hepburn cut him off. "I'm not doing it. The new owners just don't like the kind of ball Jenson puts on. And the club is in fifth place. So-o. . . . Hell, don't you feel capable of running a club, Jim?"

Jim Cutler's eyes chilled up a moment. "That isn't the question. . . . Ed's still manager, and I'm solidly behind him. I know nothing else."

"Okay, Jim. But I'm going to announce it on my broadcast tonight. And predict you'll do a grand job. Big Guy."

A couple of acquaintances detained Jim over by the cigar counter as he started back for the dining room. When next he looked at the clock, it was seven-twenty. He scoured the tables. Ed, usually a prompt guy, was nowhere to be seen. And then a waiter who knew them both told Jim the Sachem manager had been in, but left a few minutes ago. Jim colored as he remembered how Jenson had

no use for Hepburn, the radio expert. A few seasons ago, he had even barred him from the clubhouse, claiming that Hepburn had violated a confidence. Ed had come in, seen them together, and left in irritation.

Jim tried to shrug it off, caught a cup of coffee and a sandwich, then got his cheap coupe out of the garage and headed out for Graymoor, a suburb of the city. Kathy lived out there with her folks. As he cut onto the parkway, his mouth clamped in a hard sharp line. It came to him then what the managerial berth could mean to Kathy and him. It would bring Kathy back to him!

NOT THAT she was a gold digger. Heavens, no. Almost from the day of their wild elopement back in the lush years when he had been at his height as a star. Kathy had tried to make him save his money.

The bitter worms of remorse gnawed in his heart as he drove through the soft Spring evening. Not actually, despite the glib newspaper reports, that there had been any fantastic salaries when you played with the Sachems. But it had been good money, enough so a man could give himself a headstart on security for life. But the excitement had been like wine in his veins. They were the salad days, the days when there was always another big year coming up. So you danced the abandoned dance and money was something to have fun with. Hell, they always printed more, didn't they!

Kathy had stood a lot. But, after Jim Junior had been born and she discovered he was gambling again, she had walked out. He hadn't blamed her though he'd been hurt deep inside. And he'd gone a little faster for a while. Then he had put on the brakes and pulled up his socks.

"Hey, you jerk, watch where you're going!" another driver bawled at him.

Jim blinked and realized he was on the main business street of the wel-to-do suburb. He slowed as he passed the bank corner. Right beside the graystone edifice was that Country Club Inn, the colonial-style res-

taurant with its dining rooms, its smart cocktail lounge and the panelled bar that drew some of the best people in the county, the whole thing small but snug. And the place Kathy wanted.

Cursing softly, Jim made the turn up the avenue to where her folks lived. The Inn owner wanted to retire. Not too much cash down would grab the place. Kathy had taken a hotel training course at Cornell, had even managed a restaurant before marrying him. And as for him, well, his presence around the bar in the off season, as a sports celebrity, would guarantee a brisk business. He thought of the lucre he'd splashed away in parties in his prime, thought now of how two-thirds of his earnings went out to pay off back bills, I.O.U.'s, and gambling debts as he tried to clean up the debris of a flung-away past. He couldn't get a cent of credit now.

DRAWING up before the large house of Kathy's parents, he gave the signal on the horn. She came to the door, a statuesque girl with fine strong features—a thoroughbred, as he'd always thought of her—and signalled him to come in. His face grimaced bitterly. That meant the family was out, he could come in. When her irascible father was there, he didn't. It only brought on too many unpleasant arguments.

"Hello, Jim," Kathy said warmly. She kissed him, but she pulled away when he tried to sweep her into his arms. Then he was inside the big richly-furnished living room and scooping up five-year-old Jim Junior already in his pyjama suit.

"How's the young slugger, kid? You—you still—" Then the short-stop's voice clogged in his throat as he felt the warm little arms of his son around his neck.

They talked a little. The boy told him how he'd stolen a base on his private day school's team that day. Jim felt the cold paleness creep over him. This was the kind of stuff he wanted in his life every day, not just furtive snatches of it. He tried to rally.

"Well, mister, what're you going to be when you grow up, hey?" Jim said. The answer always was, "A pitcher." This time, it was different.

Jim Junior smiled out of the dark eyes so like his mother's. "A ball player, daddy. But grandpa says I have to go to college first so that when my legs slow up, I'll be trained to do something else."

Kathy saw the tired hurt-laced look that fell over Jim's face. She said it was time for the boy to be in bed. A maid came in and took him away. Jim and his estranged wife drove down to the local movie. He couldn't stand sitting there for long. Too many things were tugging at his brain—and heart. They drove down King's road to the lake, parked.

"How're things going, Big Guy?" she asked.

"They'll never be right till you come back," he snapped hoarsely and tried to take her in his arms.

After a brief embrace, she fended him off. "Look, Jim, I'm not cold-blooded. You—you know how I still think about you." She paused to light a cigaret. "But it's too late now to let emotions rule things. I've got to think about Little Jim. You understand, honey."

He did and knew she was right. She gave him her cigaret, an old trick and talked on calmly. She'd seen Mr. Finlay, the Inn owner, that day. And he was still holding things open for them. The Big Guy shook his head. There was no chance. In hock to his ears, paying off back bills, he had no credit. Especially in view of the fact, as he'd learned indirectly, as it was a question how long he'd be playing top-flight and top-pay ball.

"Hang on, Jim. We'll wait a while longer. But—well, I have got to think of Little Jim. This time, I want some security. The Inn would mean that. I'm not afraid for myself, Jim. It's—well, you know what father has sworn he'd do."

The Big Guy knew all right. Kathy's father had vowed that if she went back to him, he would cut her off completely, refuse to ever again give her a cent. And she was thinking of that in terms of Little Jim, of

what would happen to him if they went back together and the bottom should fall out of things. They had discussed it several times. She had to protect her son. She repeated it then.

"He's my son, too, don't forget," Jim bit off harshly, starting the car. He thought again of what the managerial berth could mean. Appointed manager of the Sachems, he would have credit, could raise a loan to take over the Inn. And then he would have Kathy again.

He drove back to her home at a furious pace. She put her hands on his powerful whiplike arms before she got out. "You didn't play today, did you, Jim?"

He jerked his head negatively, said something about a leg scratch. How Ed wanted to have him hot and rested when the big games came along and the pace of the season got stiffer. He kept thinking of the manager's job. But he said nothing to her; it would have been cruel. And he had disappointed Kathy so many times. Her hands tightened on his arms.

"Hang on, Big Guy. I'm betting on you."

Driving back to the city, he alternated between moods of depression and then high hopes, hearing again her final words, feeling once more the warm touch of her. And he came to a grim decision. Ed Jenson had always been his friend, and he had starred for Ed, given a little extra sometimes because it was the lean-faced Ed on the dugout bench. But now, he was going to grab the managership if he could. And friendship wouldn't get in the way.

IT WAS IN all the next morning's papers, Si Hepburn's broadcasted statement that, according to the inside dope, before long Jim Cutler, the Big Guy, would be running the destiny of the Sachems. Jim thought of Ed seeing that, facing a prediction of his own end. Then the short-stop's mouth jerked, seamed into a ruthless line. When he entered the clubhouse later, Ed was just coming down from the offices above.

"Good morning, Jim." Then Jenson was turning into his own office,

the curtness of his voice hanging on the air like a frost behind him. None of the usual banter or a little talk about the day's game.

The ebullient Hopper Sloane breezed in, then pulled up short, swung off his Panama, and gave the Big Guy a mocking bow. "'We who are about to die,'" he paraphrased. Then: "Pal, they always said you were smart on that ball field. Now we know it doesn't stop there."

Jim Cutler's eyes blazed. He got the implication, that he'd been boring from inside, worked to get another man's job behind his back. That he was a tunneller. "Listen, I don't know a damned thing about that manager stuff," he half shouted. "I can't help what some wise expert says on the air. I had no hand in it. I've spoken to nobody, and I know nothing."

Sloane shrugged and looked around. "Gee, he's going to be a tough skipper, boys! See?"

Jim felt like giving him a set of fives, a fist to the jaw. But he held himself in. And then he saw Ed Jenson standing in the doorway of his office. Jim started to grin. Jenson stared coldly and then shut the door his gesture as good as saying he didn't believe the Big Guy.

WHEN THE batting order was sent up to the plate umpire just before the game, it listed Hopper Sloane at shortstop and Pee-wee Hatlo in Sloane's shoes at second. Jim Cutler was riding the bench and sullen resentment began to bubble and boil inside him. This was Ed Jenson's way of getting back at him. More, it could be Jenson's way of keeping the managerial berth from him. The club owners, according to Hepburn, had envisioned him, Jim, as a player-manager. If Jenson could cast doubt on his ability to play any more, it could sway the decision on a new pilot, Jim realized gloomily.

Right in the first inning, Sloane messed up one when he had to go far to his right. Sloane was feather-footed but none too sure of his ball handling to that side. And in the fourth, with a steal on, Sloane and the green

Hatlo got their signals mixed up, neither covering the keystone for the throw. The ball went on into center, the runner continuing to third. He came in to score on a long fly with the run that eventually spelled the difference between defeat and victory as the Sachems went down, 6-5. But the next afternoon, Jenson fielded the same infield with Jim again warming the pine.

He was fuming constantly now at the injustice of it. Twice the infield failed to come up with the play that would have lifted the pressure from the hurler. But in the sixth, the fleet Hatlo went halfway out into right field to pull in a blooper that broke the heart of an enemy rally. Even the Big Guy knew it was a sensational, impossible catch. And Jenson kept utilizing the club's speed on the offense. The Sachems were always ready to run. Sloane took an extra base in the seventh when an outfielder momentarily bobbled his single on the hop. It was turned into a run. And then in the tenth, as it went into extra innings, with a runner on second, Hatlo laid down a bunt. The hurler scooped it up, but, knowing Hatlo's speed, threw it into the dirt past first and out into right. The tie-breaking runner came around from second easily.

They took that series, two games to one, left town on a short road swing. And the Big Guy still decorated the bench. When they won the first two away, they moved into the first division. A day later, Jim was called upon to pinch hit in the seventh for the pitcher and banged out a sharp double. The minute he got on base though, Jenson sent in a pinch runner for him.

"Trying to advertize to the whole damn world I'm dead on my feet!" the Big Guy told himself angrily afterward. Actually, his legs felt better than they had in a long time.

He and Jenson had little more than a cool nod for each other now. No words. Jim kept watching him. Ed looked slightly haggard, and Jim noted that he was making a lot of long distance calls. In Boston he left the park in the closing innings of a

game and later Jim saw him having dinner in the hotel with several elderly impressive-looking men. A new rumor, that Jenson would be relieved of his post on the first of the coming month after their return home, began to make the rounds.

IN THE FIELD, the manager was always throwing the Sachems speed at the opposition. Sometimes it fizzled. But Jim had to admit that more often than not it paid off. Rival infielders were jittery, hurrying their throws. There were bad pegs, boots, errors, all brought on by the pressure engendered by the threat of those fast base-path-tearing Sachems. They won five out of seven on the road and rolled home in third place. Next came the tough league-leading Titans, the powerhouse club of the circuit. Riding in the club car that night, Jim Cutler found himself almost hoping the Titans would knock their ears off and send the club into a spin. Before he turned in, he saw Ed Jenson receive five telegrams in the club car, three at one station, two more at the next stop.

Jim figured he understood. Ed was no dope. With the props as good as jerked from under him, he was taking steps, putting out feelers for a new berth. It was smart.

Back in the city, Jim phoned Kathy. But when the maid answered, he hung up without a word. He couldn't talk to her, not now when he was going out of the picture so ignominiously, a benched forgotten guy with the fickle fans already taking the new sensation, flashy Pee-wee Hatlo, to their hearts. And like practically all other stars, he had always pictured himself as going out of the picture with the drums beating and colors flying, turning on one last magnificent effort that would leave him stamped in their memories. Now...

There was an open date. Then the swaggering arrogant Titans with their explosive batting power. Even though so early in the season, it was a crucial series for the club. And for Ed Jenson, Jim knew too. The Titans

could wreck their morale, send them reeling back into the second division. Or the Sachems, by winning the four-game series, could prove their iron, convince themselves they had it, and be crowding second place. From the bench, the Big Guy watched the surprising kids of Jenson annex the first one. The infield was unsteady, lacked a boss man. In the fifth, they almost came apart at the seams as they made a couple of boots. But Spot Young on the hill for the Sachems was having one of his great days, striking out the side when his support failed him in that fifth. And Sachem speed paid off with three runs in the next frame to sew up the ball game.

THE FOLLOWING day though, it was a different story. Jenson's starter was tagged for four tallies in the second and had to be derricked. Bobo Hobson taking over. Hobson pitched good ball but the club of rookies was shaky behind him. Sloane at short flung into the dirt at first to lose a double killing after hauling down a liner and trying to get the runner off. In the sixth, jittery, young Hatlo tripped over the keystone sack as he whirled on an attempted double play and dropped the ball, making both men safe. But in the home half, the Titan hurler lost his control, filled the bases on two walks and an error. And Overton, the big first sacker, boomed a triple to drive in three tallies and put the Sachems back in a 4-3 ball game.

They started onto the field for the seventh. Jim was sitting there, head in hands, studying the flooring. Jenson's hand dropped on his shoulder.

"Take over at short, Big Guy! I don't want to give away any runs now that we're back in the game. Take care of things, Jim!"

The Big Guy bounded onto the field, digging the glove from his pocket. For a few moments, so elated at being back in action, he didn't even think. But as Hobson worked on the first hitter, eventually getting him to foul out to Rudnark, it came to Jim Cutlet. Yeah, Ed could throw him in there now when the defense needed

steadying. Sure. To plug the hole in the dike. But tomorrow would be another story. And—

There was the pistol-like crack of ash on horsehide as the Titan hitter timed Hobson's change-of-pace ball. The Big Guy flung himself and landed in the dirt as he dived for the bulleting apple that whizzed just over the second-base bag. Dived in vain. Hatlo, still at the keystone—Sloane had simply been removed from the game—got nowhere near it. Picking himself up, Jim remembered about saving himself, favoring those legs, a thing he had decided to do just before being benched.

And then another thought hit him. Sure, he might come through, might steady the infield while the Sachems got that run back, maybe another. And it would only be a feather in Ed Jenson's cap, would, perhaps, save him his job. The Big Guy spat cotton angrily. Jenson sure was *using* him.

There was a groan from the packed park. Hobson, with his tricky motion, had made a peg to first and trapped the runner off. But Overton, with less than a year in the majors behind him, dropped the ball. The Big Guy's experienced eyes cut around. Hatlo off of second was pale and had lines tugging at the corners of his mouth. Over on the hot corner, chunky Ray Shirley was down on his heels, chest working as he breathed hard under the strain. And they were all silent, locking up under the pressure, wondering just how good they were. And then the Big Guy heard his own voice barking out:

"All right now, everybody! Get in it! Go after these inflated bums! We're with you, Hobby! Hit him in the eye an' get a big cigar, boy! Everybody now! Come on!"

HE WAS TAKING control, asserting himself as the infield boss. The hell with Jenson and everybody else. He was ball player to the core. He had to play it. He kept jabbering, signing Hatlo to move to his left another stride as he saw the Number Four Titan batter shift his feet. The man was a right-hand hitter

but had a trick of pushing a ball to the right field at times.

It was a blazing drive to Hatlo's left. He knocked it down. The Big Guy covered second, yapping at him for the D.P. "We get two!" And then he gloved the low throw out of the dust as the base runner crashed into him. Jim fell away neatly to one side as he trigger-armed it to first. It was a two-ply killing to end the inning. It was the key play the Sachems needed to jerk them together.

"All right, boy, all right," Jenson said as he came off the field. Jim recalled now, looking at him smile, that Jenson had had an air of relief ever since he'd walked into the clubhouse. "That's the kind of stuff I count on you for, Big Guy!"

Jim gave him a frozen look. The Sachems were stopped in order. They went back onto the field for the eighth. And again Jim Cutler was the boss. Shirley at third picked up a tricky roller but hurried his throw so Overton was pulled off the bag at first. Jim's sharp voice flailed over them, at the same time hot with confidence, telling Hobson, telling them, they could do it. A passed ball let the runner ride into second. Then Hatlo pounced on a hit that caromed off Hobson's shinguard. The Big Guy was right on top of him.

"Take your time, Peewee. Easy, now, easy! You got him," he said to the rook in a calm voice.

And Hatlo, trying to find the handle on the ball, gripped it and arrowed a clean bullseye to first to beat the runner for one out. There was a foul into the screen. Shirley, rubbing it up, brought in the new ball from third. Jim had a word with him on his way back. Shirley stared.

"Do as I say—if it happens," Jim ordered.

It did, the Titan batter powering one to deep short. The Big Guy thought he felt something jerk in a leg as he cut and snagged it off the grass with his bare hand. There would be the routine fake throw to drive the runner back to third, the peg to first for the out. But the Big Guy threw to third to Shirley, who,

as per his instructions, was diving to cover the bag. They trapped the runner off. And in the rundown, stocky Rudnark the receiver, finally caught him, plunking the ball into his back for the second out. That made it two down, with a runner away back at first, the threat of a run practically snuffed out.

IT LIGHTED the fire under that rookie infield. Their pepper-talk bubbled up with staccato confidence. Hobson got the third man. And they ran into the dugout, eager to get their hands on some war clubs, feeling like a ball club headed for somewhere for sure.

Hatlo beat out a Baltimore chop to the mound and the Big Guy stepped in. And then the blood pounded into his head. For the fans were bellowing his name, telling him to do it, to bring around that tying run. They hadn't forgotten. All the enervating dragging toll of age fell away from him. His light eyes became slits. He took a strike, fouled one. And then that hook came to the inside, not quite sharp enough on that waste pitch. The Big Guy stepped back and put the wood to it. A double into left. He pounded into second standing up as the third baseman cut off the throw between the mound and the plate. And the Big Guy decided to cash in on the speed threat of the club. He broke some yards off second.

There was a hurried peg as he threw himself back. The low throw bounced over the second sacker's glove, into the outfield. The Big Guy trotted into third easily. Rudnark's long fly brought him in with the tie-breaking run. In the first half of the ninth, the last of the game, he only handled a soft fly at shortstop. But his presence was felt in that infield, dominating it. And Hatlo made a great stop on a pinch-hitter's smash, then threw accurately from a sitting position to first for the third out and the ball game. And Hatlo acted as if the Big Guy had made the play, running over and slapping Jim's shoulder. When he walked into the dugout, Ed Jenson grabbed those shoul-

ders and hugged him.

"I knew it, I knew it! My spot guy, Jim!" he crowed. "And say, you might be modest enough to wave to your wife up in the box there."

Stepping back from the dugout step, Jim looked to the box where the manager's own wife always sat. It was like a mirage. For there was Kathy with Jim Junior beside her bouncing around and yelling wildly.

WHEN THEY got into the clubhouse, Jim was still in a daze. All he knew was that he'd been all wrong somewhere along the route. The club was jubilant, talking about taking both of the final two from the Sachems. Then the assistant trainer told Jim he was wanted in the manager's office. Jim walked in stiff-faced. This could be it, his release. Ed had used him and—

Ed sat on the corner of his desk, swinging his legs like a small boy. "Jim, be at the downtown office in the morning, will you? I'm making out some new contracts. Yours will be a two-year one, for next year as a player-coach. That'll be my final season—my pennant year. After that—well, we'll see."

"You—you're making out new contracts?" Jim said a little stupidly, thinking of how Ed was due to get the gate.

"Uh-huh, Jim. Keep it under your hat. It won't come out till the morning papers. But I and two backers have bought the controlling interest of the club from the Old Man's spinster sister. And I want you on a two-year contract, using you in the hot spots the rest of this season." He poked the Big Guy in the chest. "Wake up! I expect a free meal the first time I come out to that Inn of yours in Graymoor, too."

"Wh-what?" Dimly he began to see that with a two-year contract he would be good for a loan. That he could buy the Inn out there.

"Sure. Kathy came to see me a couple of weeks ago.... And she's upstairs now, Jim, waiting...."

THE END

Loser Take All

By MAT RAND

When his dream came true, when Callano finally found himself fighting a great champ in what Joe Britt had sworn would be his last bout, he suddenly found himself a ring villain; nobody wanted him to win!

CALLANO WAS sullen and nervous in the dressing room, walking the boards the way he always did, unable to keep still. Sammy was getting his stuff ready, packing it carefully in his pockets where he could reach whatever he needed quick. Callano wondered how Sammy remembered where all that junk was when the heat was on out there, the vaseline, cotton swabs, ammonia, smelling salts, the adrenalin chloride and the Monsell's. Sammy knew his business. Callano didn't cut easy and he wasn't a bleeder but you had to play it safe; this Murtagh was a rough boy.

Somebody else knocked at the door and Angelo went to chase them away. Instead Angelo's manner changed and he opened the door carefully and a broad figure filled it. Callano snarled: "I told you I don't want to see nobody." And then he saw with surprise who it was.

"I know how you feel, kid," the Champ said in his soft hoarse voice, moving forward and holding out a square hand. "I just want to wish you luck. If I got to lose I'd rather lose to you than Murtagh."

"You got a lot of fights left yet, Joe," Callano said, feeling young and shy. "Don't kid us, Champ."

Joe Britt shook his head and studied the blond Italian boy before him. Callano was rangy for a middleweight; still his shoulders were com-



pactly muscled and his legs were strong. He had a plain brown face, marked only a little and boyish except for the dark eyes. Joe Britt nodded gravely; he was looking old and tired with sagging lines in his rough scarred face.

Callano liked Joe Britt; everyone liked him, he was a great champion and a fine man. But Joe Britt's time was about it, and Callano thought coldly: *He'll be easy for me. I get by Murtagh tonight and I'm in. Old Joe is done.*

"I hear you're going to get married, Cal," Joe Britt said. "It's a good thing, boy. It helped me get up there and stay up there. Well, I'll be going. Good luck in there, kid." The Champ went out quietly, and Callano saw the lights pick out gray threads in his black hair.

"What's he trying, to soften you up so you won't murder him when you get him into a ring?" muttered Sammy, who hated all fighters except the one in his corner.

"Don't be foolish," said Callano.

"Well, Cal, this is the big one," Angelo said. "We take this Murtagh



and we got the title sewed. The Champ is a great guy but he's through; he ought to retire."

"He wants to retire undefeated," Sammy said. "The sucker."

Callano scowled and scraped his shoes on the floor. "He better quit right now then."

WHEN THEY went out, Murtagh was in the ring mitting the crowd. The roar beat about their heads as they went down the aisle, and Callano felt the old wild excitement vibrate through him. The lights struck his face as he climbed through the ropes, glad that the waiting was over, and turned briefly to the sea of humanity stretching up and out into darkness. The sound of their welcome dinned in his ears, and Callano felt strong and reckless and unbeatable. This was what he lived for, what he had always wanted. He need-

ed it as other men needed drink or drugs or women.

Sammy was placing the ice bag, towels and water bucket on the apron. Angelo was talking to Callano in a soothing singsong voice. Callano thought oddly of Elena, the girl he was to marry, and of what Joe Britt had said. Then he stared narrowly across at the dark broken face of Murtagh. Murtagh could take it and his face showed that he had; men had broken their hands up on him. And Murtagh could dish it out too, especially the rough stuff, he had a left hook that could tear your head off and a right that landed like a club. They said Murtagh was the most powerful middleweight in the game.

"He'll try to tie you up and work on you in close," Angelo said. "He'll do anything but kick and bite, and maybe that too. Feed him the left

until he opens up, then shoot away. You'll outpoint him a million points."

"By a knockout," said Callano, "is what I want."

"Don't take chances," Angelo said. "We been a long time coming this far, Cally."

"I'm going to be a fighting champ," Callano said. "Like Joe Britt."

"Don't be fish anyway," muttered Angelo. "This guy's tough."

Callano took it slow and easy in the first; Murtagh kept rushing and hooking. Callano rolled under the hooked left and faded back from the heavy right, kept his left hand in Murtagh's black face. Murtagh didn't like it. He crowded in and roughed Callano on the ropes, bearing down with his great strength and solid weight, coming in low with a couple, then clubbing at the back of the neck in the clinch. When they broke, Callano's left ripped him again and again. Callano could outbox him, make a monkey of him, only that wasn't what Callano wanted. The crowd didn't think much of that first round, but Angelo liked it.

NOTHING much happened in the second either. Murtagh went on hooking with his left, and Callano kept beating him with a straight left hand. Callano put more steam into his left, trying to knock Murtagh off balance and open him up for a right, but the other was solid as a rock. Murtagh threw plenty of rights but Callano was always going away, pivoting clear behind the left that stung and tore and maddened Murtagh.

Angelo said: "You're doing fine, Cally. Make him eat that left hand all night."

Callano shook his wet blond head. "He don't even feel it. I got to start rocking him."

In the third Murtagh got to Callano with a hook that jarred him. The whole right side of his face went numb under the crushing force of the blow. Callano was going back but the right caught him squarely on the nose. The pain blinded him and blood started; fighting mad, Callano waded in to swap punches. An-

other terrific hook shocked the right side of his head and the lights spun sickeningly. Callano tried to hold on but Murtagh pounded him off and punished his body. Callano tried again to clinch but it was like grabbing onto a buzz-saw. Murtagh thought he had him now, but Callano weaved and bobbed away making him miss. Callano stayed in reverse until the bell. For the first time the thought came that he might lose. Murtagh was the toughest guy he'd ever fought. The right side of Callano's head throbbed and ached.

"See, what you get when you mix?" Angelo yelled. "He's a gorilla, that one."

Sammy stopped the blood from his nose, and spirits of ammonia cleaned the hot mist from his head. The side of his face was swollen and his nose felt enormous. Callano thought: *Maybe I was too confident, too cocky. And Elena's back there watching him kick me around...* Elena, who had seen his first fight years ago in the schoolyard and who'd been watching him fight ever since.

Callano was careful in the fourth, stabbing his left into his opponent's face time after time, never letting Murtagh get set. Murtagh was still hungry for the kill and he left himself open. When this happened, Callano fired his right. His left had Murtagh's mouth bleeding and the right laid open a cut on the cheekbone. But Murtagh was still strong and solid as granite. In a clinch Murtagh held Callano close and butted with his thick skull. Callano flared up, broke away and cut loose with both hands. Murtagh gave ground and took a storm of leather on the face and head, but it didn't seem to hurt him. He laughed at Callano as the round ended.

"What's that guy made of?" panted Callano.

"Maxie Baer used to laugh when he was scared the most," Angelo said.

"Hell, this Murtagh don't know enough to get scared," said Callano, spitting water aside.

THE FIFTH went a little better. Callano was still spearing and

hacking away with his left, and Murtagh's right eye was puffing out. Murtagh kept bulling in, his hands too low, and Callano spotted a chance and poured everything into a left. Murtagh's head snapped back and his eye crimsoned. Callano nailed him with a right and Murtagh staggered for the first time, recovered and rushed in swinging wild. Callano raked him with the left and belted another right home. They stood head to head slugging and the roar of the crowd was a steady savage sound. Murtagh broke backwards, his face shiny with blood. Callano went after him and turned loose both hands. The blood splattered them both as the leather smacked in there, and Murtagh was reeling now. But even as Callano measured him Murtagh straightened fast, scored with a left hook that hurt and brought his club-like right over. Callano stumbled under the snashing impact, stunned and surprised. They were fighting even at the bell, both half-groggy.

"He ain't human," Callano said.

"You'll get him, Cal; you almost had him. But you got to be careful."

The referee was in the opposite corner inspecting the cut over Murtagh's eye. Callano wished for a moment that they'd stop it, then cursed himself for a coward. That'd be a hell of a way to win; he had to put Murtagh on the floor.

In the Sixth Callano felt the difference in his opponent. Some of the raw fury had been beaten out of Murtagh, and he was worried about that eye. Callano went to work on it with cold precision. Murtagh was easy to hit, and Callano hit him with a dozen fast lefts. The cut opened and the blood streamed again. Murtagh charged in desperation, half-blinded and raging. Callano backed and circled with his left stabbing away and his right cocked. It was like a bull-fight. Callano knew he had won now; his brain was clear as he planned the finish. He kept getting a little more power behind his left until one of them half-turned Murtagh off balance, and then Callano threw his right and Murtagh was down on the canvas.

From a neutral corner Callano

watched the count. He knew he had it won, but he also knew that it might have been different if that cut hadn't opened over Murtagh's eye. He thought: *Well, that's his bad luck. Now I'll marry Elena and then I'll take the title from poor old Joe Britt...* It was all very neat and set in his mind.

Murtagh got up at nine. The referee looked at his eye and waved Callano on. Callano was business-like efficient as a machine. He drilled away with the left, maneuvered Murtagh into position, feinted him wide open and fired the right again. Murtagh bounced from the ropes and fell forward on hands and knees. The referee didn't count, but pointed at Callano and gestured with spread hands that the fight was over. Callano lifted his reddened glove and walked to his corner. Murtagh climbed upright and wanted to fight some more.

"The guy's game; you got to hand it to him," Sammy mumbled.

"He don't know no better," Callano said. "Come on, let's get out of here."

"The Champ is next, Cally!" exclaimed Angelo.

"That'll be a pushover," said Callano. "Come on, get them dumb cops to clear us a way through this mob."

* * *

THERE WAS unusual interest in the coming championship go between old Joe Britt and young Nick Callano; for once the public wanted to see a champion win and retire undefeated instead of getting knocked off.

Joe Britt said this was positively his last fight, win lose or draw. He said if he had to lose the title, it couldn't go to a finer boy than Nicky Callano. He respected the challenger, but he was determined to make his last fight a great one and Callano would have to be good, better than ever before.

Callano grinned as he read it, but Angelo told him not to be too damn cocky. Joe Britt still had some dynamite left. Callano wasn't training too

hard and Angelo didn't like it.

"You better get to work, boy," Angelo said. "You can carry on a courtship after you get the championship."

"I don't want to waste time," said Callano.

"I wish you'd wait until after the fight before you get married, Cally. It's the worst thing you could do."

"Listen, Angelo, I've waited long enough, and so has Elena. We're getting married like I said."

"All right, Cal, all right, it's your funeral."

"It's my wedding, you ape," laughed Callano. "Cheer up, pal."

But Angelo refused to be cheered. There was an unpleasant air about the Callano camp that had never been there before. Callano wondered if it was because Angelo still loved Elena and wanted her for himself.

Three days before the date set for the wedding Angelo found Callano scowling over headlines.

"Bad news, Cally?"

"Good news for you probably," muttered Callano. "My number's not coming up. The draft is over; I don't have to worry about going into the occupation army."

"Hellfire," mumbled Angelo. "Ain't that something? But what you mean, good news for me? Do I want you to go in the army, you sap?"

"The wedding is off, Angelo; I don't have to rush, now."

"She'll want to go through with it just the same, Cally."

"No, it's out," Callano said shortly.

Elena read about it in the papers before she saw Callano. She did want to go through with it. She pleaded with Callano but he was stubborn and set.

"It wouldn't be fair, kid," he told her. "We better wait awhile now."

Elena went out weeping, and Callano went into the ring and hammered his sparring partners without mercy. After that Callano worked harder, and Angelo brightened up considerably.

A WEEK BEFORE the bout Sol Gooch and a couple of stooges came out to call on Angelo. When

Callano saw them he got up and walked out without a word.

"What's the matter with the kid, Angelo?" asked Sol Gooch.

"He's nervy," Angelo said. "He's keyed up like he always is before a fight."

"Well, call him in here," ordered Gooch. "I got some talking to do and he's going to listen whether he likes it or not. He's not such a big shot."

Angelo went after Callano, and Callano turned on him. "I didn't know you were so palsy with those crooks."

"I'm not," said Angelo. "But Gooch's got plenty of power. Let's hear what he's got to say."

"Hullo, kid," Gooch said with a fat smile. "How you feeling?"

"I feel fine," said Callano. "What's on your mind?"

"I won't waste your valuable time," Gooch said sneeringly. "The story is this. The public wants to see Joe Britt win and retire unbeaten. Us boys have talked it over and we've decided they're right. *We* want to see Joe Britt win, too. And you can make more money losing than winning, Callano. We'll treat you fine."

"Is that all?" snarled Callano. "Then get the hell out."

"You're a pretty cocky kid," said Sol Gooch. "But you're against something too big for you this time. You're just a small-time punk in this league. You'd better get smart and play ball our way."

"I suppose I go for a ride or something if I don't do a dive?"

"Maybe, maybe, or something else not very nice will happen to you. Now look here, Callano, you're going to get married soon; you can start out rich if you string with us, or you start out ruined—if she still wants you after the boys get done with you."

"I never did a dive," Callano said. "I can't go into the tank against Joe. That would hurt him more than being licked."

"What the hell, kid, you don't have to do a dive," Sol Gooch explained. "You can let Joe outpoint you, see? The Champ can still box."

"Is he in on this?" demanded Cal-

lano.

"Of course not. He wouldn't go for any part of it."

"I don't either," Callano said. "It stinks."

"Look, the Champ is a great guy, you know that. The whole country's pulling for him, and he's got his heart set on retiring undefeated. You can give him a break and help yourself out too; what have you got to lose? No one will suspect when you lose on points."

"There's this," said Callano. "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be a champion. Now I've got a crack at it, a crack at a great champ; the only chance I'll ever get. That means something to me. My whole life built up to this, and you want me to toss it away like that."

"Well, we'll give you some time to think it over, kid." Sol Gooch said smoothly. "But I'm telling you there's only one answer. Either you play our way, or else—"

"All right, we'll think it over, Sol." Angelo agreed, and winced under the glance Callano threw at him. "This is too sudden to swallow all at once."

"That's swell, Angelo," Sol Gooch smiled. "I hope you'll be sensible about this thing. It'll mean the biggest cut you ever got, boys."

AFTER THEY had gone Callano sat in stunned silence, closing and opening his brown hands on the table. Angelo sat across from him shaking his curly black head miserably. At last Callano spoke:

"Isn't this a mess?"

"It's worse than that," Angelo said. "Gooch's too damn big to buck. His mob stops at nothing, Cally."

"What?" You want me to throw the fight, too?"

"Don't be a fool, Cally. I don't want you to, but I'm scared. I don't want to see anything happen to you, boy. That outfit don't like to be crossed. You know what happened to Denny Jacks, Cal; vitriol in his eyes, blinded for life. That's the way those guys operate. And Buster Boyle, they crippled him when he crossed them."

Callano swore with soft intensity. "That Gooch. I'd like to smash that

greaseball. I'd kill him with my bare hands."

"Yeah," Angelo said drily. "He's got better protection than Stalin."

"Isn't there something we can do, some way out?"

"Not that I can figure," said Angelo dully. "Nobody ever hung anything on that Gooch."

"What I'd give to be locked into a room with that tub of lard," Callano said through tight-set teeth. "Angelo, I can't do a dive. Even if they shoot me, I can't do it."

"I don't know what to say to you, Cally. I know how you feel, but I can't help you. I don't want you to commit suicide, but I can't tell you to go in the tank..." Then, "Hey, Cally, you could fake an injured hand or something and have the bout put off."

Callano shook his cropped blond head. "Not for me, Angelo."

"Well, I guess we're in for it, Cal."

"I guess we are, all right," agreed Callano hopelessly.

IN THE NEXT few days the sporting pages were filled with Joe Britt, the grand old champion, and Nick Callano, the high-powered young challenger. To Callano's surprise and disgust some of the writers practically advocated that Callano should stay under wraps, take it easy, let Joe Britt exit with his title; they seemed to agree with Sol Gooch.

"What do they know?" said Callano bitterly. "I dreamt of being champ when I was a kid, beating someone like Britt. I worked and slaved and sweated and fought my heart out to get up here. I gave up plenty of things I wanted to make the grade. I put my whole life into it, Angelo."

"I know it, Cally, I know."

Sol Gooch delivered a final ultimatum, indicating slyly that Callano would not suffer alone if he persisted in beating Joe Britt. Elena and Angelo would pay, too, and the payment wouldn't be pleasant.

"We can ask for police protection," Angelo said. "But it won't do any good."

"Not a damn bit," said Callano.

"What are you going to do, Cal-ly?"

"I don't know," Callano said. "I don't know, Angelo."

He still didn't know on the night of the fight. He couldn't make up his mind, there seemed to be no solution to the problem. *Maybe the Champ will take me anyway*, he thought. *Maybe I underrated him. Old Joe Britt is smart, clever, still strong and dangerous. He might stop me even if I shoot with everything.* But even while thinking this Callano did not believe it.

Joe Britt was giving his entire share of the gate to the armed forces, and this made him more than ever the popular favorite, the greatest champ of them all. Callano was donating a good piece of his own split to the same fund, but this was generally overlooked.

In the dressing room Callano sat like a doomed man, and Sammy shook his head over him in dismay.

"Here you are, as good as world's champion already, and you act like a *coward* on his way to the chair," grumbled Sammy. "You ain't feeling sorry for Britt, are you? He's had his day."

"Sammy, you talk too much," Callano muttered.

"Somebody's got to talk, you two guys are struck dumb tonight," said Sammy. "I never saw such unsociable guys as you two."

JOE BRITT was in the ring first and the roar of the crowd was deafening as Callano and his handlers moved almost unnoticed down the aisle. Nobody paid any attention to Callano and he nudged Angelo.

"We might as well be ushers or something, Angel Face."

Joe Britt came across to greet the challenger and Callano returned his friendly smile with a deadpan stare. "Go on, Champ, aren't you popular enough already?"

Joe Britt looked surprised, then his face hardened. "All right, kid, if you want it that way."

The first round started tamely, with both men boxing carefully, feeling one another out. Joe Britt was

clever and quick with his hands, blocking Callano's jabs and countering swiftly. Callano did not slash and rip and tear in his usual manner, but danced and circled. The crowd cheered the Champ and booed Callano, but he had expected that. He was stalling because his mind wasn't made up yet.

The second opened like the first and the fans grew impatient. Old Joe Britt took the offensive and drove Callano back with a flurry of blows. Callano wasn't hurt or shaken but he gave ground and fell into a clinch.

"What's the matter? You aren't fighting your fight, kid," said Joe Britt.

"Do you want me to slaughter you this soon?" snarled Callano.

Surprise and a gleam of anger showed in the Champ's eyes. As they broke he brought up two quick uppercuts that rocked Callano's head back. Before he could recover a long left bashed his mouth and Callano tasted blood. The mob was howling wildly now. But when old Joe Britt moved in Callano cut loose with both gloves, and Joe Britt staggered under the rapid impacts. Callano threw another left and the Champ was on the ropes. Callano slid in and let the Champ tie him up in a clinch.

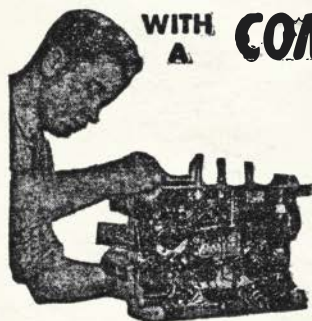
It would be easy, Callano thought. *It would be so easy. Joe's a great old guy, game and tough and square, but he's old, his legs are old. If I turned loose on him I could stop him in four rounds.*

In the third Joe Britt showed flashes of his old form. He was the slugger, the killer again, and he jarred Callano with some solid punches. Old Joe could still hit, but not like he used to. Callano could take all he had now, he decided. Callano was still boxing, staying away from the Champ, tossing long lefts and little else. The crowd booed him constantly.

"I never knew you was a fancy dan," Sammy said in disgust between rounds. "You look like you was waltzing with your grandfather in there. Hit him a couple of times, he won't break."

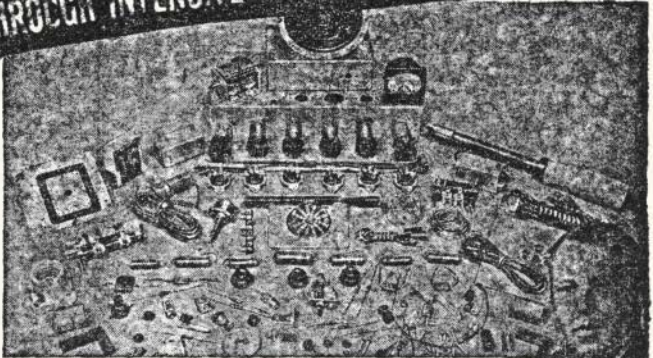
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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 78)

Angelo said nothing but his broad face had a tortured look.

Round Four. Callano got careless and left an opening. Joe Britt saw it, took his shot at it, and landed squarely. The loud smack of wet leather against Callano's jawbone brought the crowd up screaming. Callano's head snapped, his ears buzzed, and his legs almost melted. The Champ still had a knockout wallop left. Callano backed away until his head cleared and his legs steadied. Joe Britt kept after him but couldn't catch up with him. Then Callano tried to retaliate, but Joe Britt covered up and Callano couldn't get to him with any damaging blows. Joe Britt was a master at stopping flying gloves. The spectators applauded his performance and jeered at Callano.

"He hit you pretty hard there." Angelo said in the corner.

"I asked for it," Callano said. "But I'm all right."

"You'd better do a little punching yourself, Cally," advised Angelo.

"I will," promised Callano.

HE WENT out for the fifth like he used to move, fast and smooth and deadly as a panther. The crowd saw the difference and waited tense and silent. Callano stabbed Joe Britt blind and dizzy with lightning lefts, and then started firing his right. Old Joe began to labor and flounder a little under the savage smashes. Callano, full of terrible driving strength now, felt the old wild joy as his man stumbled and swayed before him, reeled back onto the hemp. But he had to be careful, he had to hold back . . . Sick with disgust and baffled rage. Callano dropped the offensive as suddenly as he had started it, coasting the rest of the round while the Champ recovered.

"What you carrying him along for?" yelled Sammy. "Drop him and get it done with, I'm thirsty for beer."

"He don't drop so easy, Sambo."

"Nuts!" said Sammy. "I could flatten him myself. And you too, the way you're fighting tonight."

Callano took it easy in the sixth, mixing it just enough to make it

LOSER TAKE ALL

look good. Joe Britt's face was reddened, welted and swollen, and Joe was getting tired. But his square body was still solid as iron. He tagged Callano with three long whipping punches that really hurt, even when Callano was going away. The old man was still plenty tough and rugged. They clinched and he snarled in Callano's ear:

"Fight, damn you, fight! Quit the stalling."

"Don't worry, I'll get to you quick enough," Callano told him.

The seventh saw the Champ unleash everything. The cold grim fury of the assault surprised Callano. Joe Britt caught him with two body blows that felt like driven sledges. Callano doubled forward, right into a series of shocking concussions that left him draped on the ropes. A whirlpool of blinding light revolved in his skull. Another numbing blast exploded in his face, and Callano went down on his knees, the tremendous sound of the crowd dining upon his brain.

Taking a count he thought: *What the hell, nobody wants me, they want him. They all want him to win. Why not stay down for ten and have it over with?*... But he couldn't do it. He was up at nine, with his left in the Champ's face, and he kept the left there until the bell.

"How's it going, Angelo?" panted Callano on his stool.

"He's got quite a lead on points, Cally."

"The old boy fooled me, I didn't think he had that much stuff left," Callano said. "He's a great old-timer."

THE EIGHTH had the masses on their feet all the way. The Champ stung Callano's nose with a left and cut his eye with a right. The pain fired Callano's blood, and he turned loose both hands and jolted the Champ with everything he had. They swapped head to head, but Joe Britt broke backwards. Callano lashed him into a corner and gave him the works with both gloves. Joe Britt called on every trick he knew, but he couldn't get away. Swinging

(Continued On Page 82)

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SUPER SPORTS

like a madman Callano beat him down to the floor.

Going to a neutral corner Callano felt panic and terror, thinking that Joe Britt might be down for keeps. . . But old Joe clambered up at nine, his face scarlet, his legs shaky. Callano walked into him and they clinched and wrestled around. The referee parted them, and they circled, sparred, and grappled again.

"Don't lay down on me, damn your soul!" Old Joe Britt said. "You don't have to carry me!"

This time on the break he raked Callano with a left and right. Callano backed off. Joe Britt glided after him and sunk two in under his ribs. The old fighting fury flared in Callano, and he knocked Joe Britt off balance with a left and poured everything into a right cross. It landed high on the Champ's head as he ducked, and Callano felt the bones go in a sharp blaze of agony. The pain went way up his arm and turned him sick inside. His right hand was gone, useless now, but he had to cover it up. He was thankful for the clanging of the gong.

Angelo looked at his drawn dripping face. "What is it, Cally?"

"My right hand," Callano said. "Broken."

"Maybe that's the answer, Cally." "Maybe."

"Don't take no chances with it, boy. If it gets too bad we'll stop it."

Callano went out for the ninth with his right held tight to his body. Joe Britt came boring in and Callano kept him off with a left. Joe Britt came back grimly trying to slide under that long left, but Callano ripped it into his face time after time. It hurt to move with that right hand. It felt crushed in a vise of pain, and the slightest contact was like a blow-torch up Callano's forearm. It was making him sick and weak. He thanked the Lord he had a good left and went on hacking and spearing the Champ with it.

"You're still stalling, Callano," the Champ gasped in a clinch.

Callano shook his fair head and set the Champ back with a hard left. "Worry about yourself, Joe."

The tenth was like the preceding

(Continued On Page 84)

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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 82)

round. Joe Britt stalking Callano, boring in and hooking with both mitts, Callano backing up behind his left that stabbed and tore the Champ's bleeding face. Callano could not bring up his right to shield the right side of his head, which was puffed and bruised now from Joe Britt's left hooks. But it was that anguish in his broken right hand that was licking Callano, draining his strength, making his stomach flutter and his legs quiver.

In the eleventh old Joe Britt threw everything into a desperate onslaught and drove Callano round the ring. Still that left hand stayed mad-deningly in the Champ's sore face. In a flame of red rage Joe Britt drove forward, switching his attack from the head to the body, whaling away at Callano's ribs. Blows landed on Callano's crippled right arm and agony roared through him. Callano went in with a left just as Joe Britt swung two more body punches. They caught Callano low, far below the belt, and he folded forward feeling torn in half. On his knees on the canvas he doubled tight upon the new pain, pressing his left glove to the place and setting his teeth.

Joe Britt bent over him. "Sorry, Cal, sorry, kid. I was low, it's your fight."

Callano shook his bowed blond head. "Accident, Champ. It's all right."

The referee chased the Champ away and knelt to examine Callano.

"I'll—be—all—right," panted Callano. "Accident—that's all."

The referee looked across at old Joe Britt, and Joe said: "Give him the fight, or give him all the time he wants."

THE BELL rang. Angelo and Sammy came out to help Callano to his corner. The crowd was pretty quiet. The ref followed them to the corner, bent over Callano again, and then called a doctor up from the ringside.

"Never saw old Joe foul before," said the referee, worried.

"Couldn't—help—it," Callano said. "I walked—into—it." He was feel-

LOSER TAKE ALL

ing a little better now as the pain lessened.

Angelo said: "We ought to stop it, Cally."

"Hell, no," said Callano.

"How is it, doc?" Angelo asked.

"No serious damage, no rupture or anything," the doctor said. "But it's bad enough. He can go on, but I wouldn't advise it."

"If it stops here it's Callano's fight then," the ref said.

"I'm—all right," Callano said. "It's not—bad now—honest."

When Callano answered the gong for the twelfth the crowd came up cheering him for the first time. Callano was still hurt badly, but the worst of it was over. His mind was vastly relieved now. Fate had intervened to decide a question he could not answer. Elena was safe, Angelo was safe, old Joe Britt could take the title with him. For Callano could not win now, no matter what. It was impossible. The matter was settled definitely. Callano felt glad.

"You all right, kid?" the Champ asked anxiously, taking it easy.

"Sure," said Callano. "Shut up and fight."

Old Joe Britt seemed reluctant to hit the challenger, until Callano used the hell of his left glove on the Champ's lacerated face. Then old Joe Britt weaved in hooking and hammering with both hands. Callano couldn't cover the right side of his jaw. Joe Britt fired his left at the opening. Callano's head bobbed and rolled under the clubbing impacts. Joe Britt measured him, synchronized every muscle of his blocky body into a swinging left, and Callano felt the canvas under his sweaty skin.

Callano's jaw and head were numb, his brain fogged. The canvas rasped him as he tried to move, but his legs and arms were gone. He gave up the effort and let his aching head drop into a swirl of darkness shot with vivid lights.

Joe Britt lifted him from the floor. Callano tried to grin but his face was still frozen. Joe Britt was crying like a kid and shaking his battered head. Callano slumped back on

(Continued On Page 86)

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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 85)

his stool very tired and sick, but glad it was over, finished the right way.

"Your fight, Cal," sobbed old Joe Britt. "And your championship."

Callano said carefully, rubbing his numb jaw. "You can still sock, Joe."

"Hell, that was your fight, Cal. You with a busted hand and a busted gut where I fouled you."

"How is that hand, Cally?" asked Angelo, fumbling to get the glove off without hurting.

"It'll be—good enough," said Callano. "Champ, you got—an awful—hard head."

Then Elena was up there, smiling through her tears, and saying: "Don't forget me, Champ, I'm a winner too; I'll make him marry me now."

"You're damn right," Angelo said. "If I have to do the ceremony myself, you two are getting hitched."

Sammy was cutting the bandages from Callano's swollen, discolored right hand. "Guys are sure soft nowadays," growled Sammy. "They can't stand nothing at all like they used to. They're all cream-puffs like this Callano."

THE END



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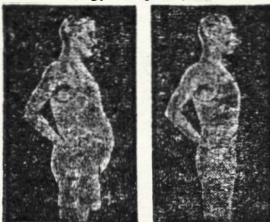
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(Continued On Page 90)

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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 88)

nicer than to talk about your hobby for a living," Barber said recently. "And I agree with them, too. But I'm not sure they realize the backstage work—and plenty of it—that goes into announcing the Dodgers games over WHN. It is not all the lovely bed of roses that fans think they see when they turn their heads and look up at Brother Connie and me in the broadcasting booth."

Barber does considerable homework, boning up on baseball records and keeping a large book of vital statistics. Every night before he goes to sleep, he reads a few pages of the dictionary or thesaurus.

"It is surprising how many words you use talking into a microphone during one ball game," Barber observed. "If I'm not careful, I find myself repeating the same words. And that doesn't go when you're speaking into that little black mike day after day."

Red Barber, WHN star whose baseball broadcasts can be classed as a bit of Americana, stumbled into radio because of a promise of a free meal—and has been dishing out southern-style, delightful-to-digest sportscasts ever since.

Barber was working his way through the University of Florida, waiting on tables for his meals. The boarding-house where he worked as waiter was closed for the vacation period, and Red's chances of eating regularly were seriously threatened.

So, when he was approached to double on the air for a professor who was supposed to read a scientific paper over WRUF, and the fee offered was a free meal, Red accepted with alacrity. He was offered a job as announcer, took it and fell head-over-heels in love with radio.

In 1934, he began announcing games for the Cincinnati Reds, and his career was launched. The story of his rise in sports broadcasting is probably as well known as his southern drawl—which, by the way, is genuine, for he was born in Columbus, Mississippi.

The Redhead has been airing the Brooklyn Dodgers games for seven years, with more than 2,500 of his

(Continued On Page 92)

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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 90)

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Barber arrived in Brooklyn in 1939, and the very next year, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce recognized his civic value by honoring him with their annual award for being "the young man who has made the largest civic contribution to the betterment of Brooklyn." It seems they love the Redhead.

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Goldie Holt, manager of the Yakima Team in the far-away Western Interstate League, was cataloguing a group of kids who had reported for a laboratory going-over.

"And what do you play?" Holt asked one youth.

"The infield," was the answer.

"In what position?" further questioned brother Holt.

"Stooped over, just like the professionals!" was the laconic reply.

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Midtown Vignette: It happened at Lexington Avenue and 42d Street in New York City.

One of those birds was popping off about everything. "Down with Truman!" he shouted, and nobody bothered to turn around.

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"Down with America!" he belated, and nobody touched him.

Finally, he cried—"The Brooklyn Dodgers stink!"—and somebody slugged him!"

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(Continued On Page 94)

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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 92)

ging them to their corner isn't conducive to developing hernias, try this little trick and see for yourself!

Ray, a wit of the first order, in describing his trials and travails after Louis put the snore on his boys, sums it up in this manner—"Louis almost made me a charter member of Hernia College, whose theme song is 'In God We Truss.'"

Running the Louis incident a close second in Ray's fistic book of memories is a conversation that took place in a corner of a boxer he was seconding 15 years ago.

Jackie (Kid) Berg, Arcel's charge, was trading fistfuls of fives with Kid Chocolate in a scheduled 15-rounder at the Polo Grounds. Chocolate had been giving Berg a bad beating from the fifth round on.

In the eleventh round, the copper-colored clouter rained salvo after salvo of fistic bombshells upon Berg without a return. Berg staggered to his corner and barely reached it.

Arcel hurriedly doused him with water, treated a deep gash under his left eye and anxiously asked—"How are you, Jackie?"

Berg, a cool hombre with ice water in his veins, answered—"Splendid, thank you, and you?"

JOE LOUIS TALKING

Although Billy Conn is not liked very much by fans because of his saucy attitude, Joe Louis enjoys his company immeasurably.

In an offside to a reporter one day, The Brown Bomber confided: "I get more kick out of that boy than anyone else in the fight game."

WHAT A MAN

Dan Parker, Sports Editor of the New York Daily Mirror, is one sports writer who fears neither man nor beast. After writing a piece excoriating a boxer or some other character connected with things pugilistic, Dan will often deliberately visit Jacobs Beach, the haunt of the fistic denizens, and walk about with an air suggesting "Well, so I wrote something you didn't like. What about it?"

DOPE FROM THE DUGOUT

Fifty years hence, when some biographer writes about the sports editors of this era, we know that Dan Parker will stand out above his contemporaries like a black panther on an Alaskan snowbank.

UNUSUAL TO SAY THE LEAST

Bill Stern, whose punch-packed sports program is aired daily over the NBC coast-to-coast hookup, goes in for stories that are often bizarre and fantastic.

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(Continued On pPage 96)

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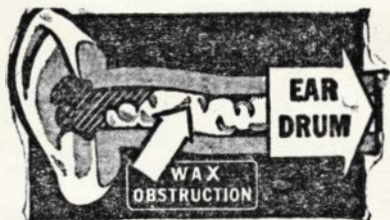


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SUPER SPORTS

(Continued From Page 94)

the natural tenor of his ways, he became a fighter, and good, too. After a string of sensational kayos, he was matched to fight for the welterweight championship of the world. Twenty thousand fans waited for him to show up; but he never did—for a very odd reason. He became a song writer. On that fateful night, he was busy writing the western song that became the Number One hit of America "Old Faithful."

To make the situation more ironic, we see where this lad named Michael Carr, who sacrificed a crack at the world's welterweight tiara because he was busy writing a song which was to become a famous American smash hit—wrote several other western songs which took America by storm—without ever having been in America, much less the Golden West!

SPORTS SAGA

About a decade and a half ago, he was the toast of the continent. Compiled a brilliant ring record in Europe. His fame spread here. With terrific fanfare and flourishing of trumpets, he was brought to America. Got a wonderful press. But alas and alack! He was a flop in the squared battlepit here. Couldn't win a fight. Sports scribes called him yellow.

One wiseacre in fact said he was "yellower than a canary bird suffering from jaundice."

He was heartbroken. Went back to his homeland. Came the war. He was forgotten until one day the press of the English-speaking world carried his picture and the story of his extreme heroism. He had descended into a deep shell crater to remove the detonator of a 500-pound Nazi bomb that failed to explode.

His name? Phil Scott. The sports scribes jestingly referred to him as "Phainting Phil Scott."

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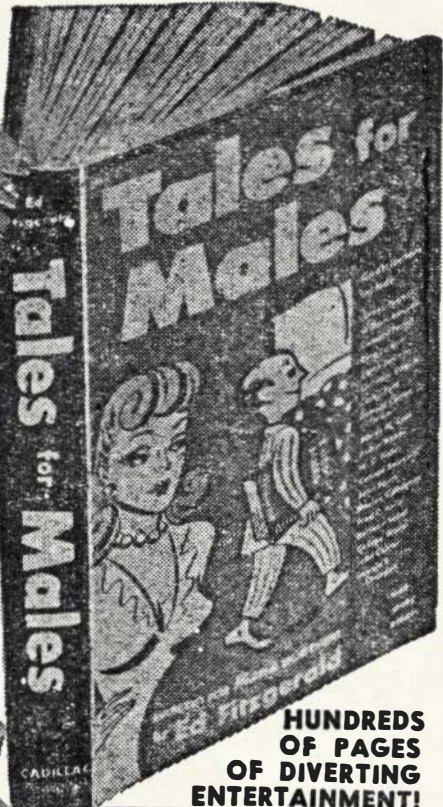
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